

Written Answers to Questions

Official Report (Hansard)

Friday 3 June 2011

Volume 64, No WA2

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to arrive not later than two weeks after publication of this report.

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 3 June 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Protocols and Guidance: OFMDFM

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to publish the protocols and guidance which govern their roles in relation to dealing with correspondence, invitations and meetings with third parties.

(AQW 112/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): There are no written protocols and guidance governing the roles of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in relation to dealing with correspondence, invitations and meetings with third parties. Advice was sought and received in relation to this matter from the Attorney General dated 13 October 2010 which is the subject of legal professional privilege.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr Boylan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the number of planning applications currently being dealt with by the Planning Appeals Commission; (ii) the number of these appeals which will be subject to a public inquiry; and (iii) how long these inquiries are expected to last.

(AQW 183/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its independent tribunal status, the Commission has been asked to provide a response directly to you, and we understand that it has written to you in the following terms:

“Your question was referred to me by the Office of the First and deputy First Minister.

The Planning Appeals Commission has two major but distinct areas of work:

- deciding planning appeals arising from the refusal, deemed refusal or conditional approval of planning applications by the Department of the Environment; and
- making recommendations on case load referred by the Department of the Environment, namely major planning applications (Article 31 proposals) and objections to draft Development Plans and.

The Department or an appellant may choose to have an appeal processed by:

- the exchange of written submissions;
- the exchange of written submissions and a Site Visit conducted by a Commissioner;
- the exchange of written submissions and a Hearing (formal or informal) conducted by a Commissioner.

Public Inquiries are not conducted for planning appeals.

Major planning applications are processed by the exchange of written submissions and comments followed by a Public Inquiry or Hearing, conducted by a Commissioner or Commissioners on behalf of the Commission. The Commission will then report on the Public Inquiry or Hearing to the Department

with a recommendation about the application. The application will then be decided by the Department, taking account of the Commission's report.

Appeals

At 30 April 2011, the Planning Appeals Commission had 291 appeals in hand. None of these appeals will be processed by a Public Inquiry. It is not possible to indicate the process which will be used to determine these appeals as this can change during processing. However, the general pattern of procedures selected is discernible from the appeals decided by method of processing in the year to 31 March 2011 (2010/2011).

In 2010/2011, the Commission decided 681 appeals, 252 (37%) by exchange of written submissions, 187 (27%) by exchange of written submissions and Site Visit conducted by a Commissioner and 238 (35%) by exchange of written submissions and informal Hearing conducted by a Commissioner. In 2010/2011, 4 appeals (1%) were decided following a formal Hearing.

Major Proposals (Article 31)

In early 2011, the Commission has been processing the following major planning applications:

- Retail proposal at Sprucefield (Public Inquiry);
- 2 retail proposals in Newtownards (conjoined Public Inquiries);
- Retail proposal in Antrim (Hearing);
- Retail proposal in Castlereagh Road, Belfast (Hearing);
- Office proposal, Londonderry (Hearing);
- Retail proposal in Strabane (Hearing); and
- Runway extension, George Best Belfast City Airport (Public Inquiry).

The retail proposals in Antrim and Strabane were withdrawn by the applicants when the Commission set out the arrangements for the Hearings and the submission of written evidence. The Commission has conducted hearings for the Castlereagh Road and Derry proposals in April and May 2011. Both hearings lasted 2 days. The Commission reported to the Department on the Castlereagh Road proposal at the end of April 2011 and will report on the Derry proposal shortly.

The Commission is unable to proceed with the Public Inquiries for the Sprucefield, Newtownards and George Best Belfast City Airport proposals because of arguments about the adequacy of the Environmental Information submitted with the planning applications. This is an issue which must be addressed by the Department of the Environment. It is not possible to estimate how long these Public Inquiries will take when they are resumed or commenced. However, the Commission last conducted a Public Inquiry into a major retail proposal in Banbridge in June 2009; the Public Inquiry lasted 3 days and the Commission reported to the Department of the Environment in October 2009. The Commission provides information on the intake and output of appeals on its website. It also provides information on the processing of major planning applications referred by Government Departments. This information is updated regularly. In addition, the Chief Commissioner's Annual Report for 2010/2011 will be published in June 2011 and I will send a copy to you.

If I can be of any further assistance please contact me”.

Victims and Survivors Service

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the funding for the current financial year for the Victims and Survivors Service will be made available to the Community Relations Council. **(AQW 303/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No funding for the Victims and Survivors Service will be administered by the Community Relations Council.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Botulism

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken in the last twelve months to prevent the spread of botulism; and how many animals died from botulism last year, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 119/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Botulism is a severe, often fatal form of food poisoning which can affect most animals. The bacteria that cause botulism are commonly found in the environment and the disease does not spread from animal to animal. I recognise that botulism in cattle can cause significant problems for farmers and treatment is rarely successful. It is therefore better to minimise the risk of the disease occurring, primarily through biosecurity measures and also through use of vaccine.

My Department has worked closely with the Agri-Food Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to develop advice to farmers on how to reduce the risk of botulism. This advice is publicised widely in DARD offices and on my Department's website. My Department's Veterinary Service will also arrange for public health advice to be given to farmers whose cattle are affected. While botulism in cattle is not known to have any human health implications, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) requests a voluntary restriction on milk and meat from affected cattle, sheep and goats entering the food chain.

No vaccine is available under general licence in Britain or the north of Ireland for protection against botulism. However, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate has approved two vaccines, which are available under "special treatment certification", to veterinary surgeons in the north of Ireland for the protection of cattle at risk of botulism.

Botulism is not a notifiable disease under the Diseases of Animals Order (1981) and no statutory action is taken in cases or suspected cases of botulism. Therefore my Department does not hold information about how many animals died from botulism last year.

As part of its testing service to farmers, in 2010 AFBI investigated 109 cases where botulism was suspected in cattle, of which 14 were confirmed positive. The laboratory diagnosis of botulism is difficult as the test used is less sensitive to the botulinum toxin than cattle so these figures may be an under representation of actual cases. There were 4 cases in Co Tyrone, 4 cases in Co Down, 3 cases in Co Antrim and 3 cases in Co Armagh. AFBI does not hold data to break down these cases by constituency. It is impossible to tell from these figures how many animals died from botulism in 2010 as there may have been carcasses with botulism that were not submitted to AFBI for investigation. There also may have been other animals on these farms with similar signs that were not tested or tested negative.

Agri-Food Sector

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken in the last twelve months to support the agri-food sector.

(AQW 120/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I see the agri-food sector as crucial to the future success of the north's economy and over the last 12 months my Department has offered a wide range of support to this important sector.

DARD's main funding instrument for agri-food companies is the Rural Development Programme (RDP). The Processing and Marketing Grant (PMG) Scheme is part of a suite of funding schemes available under the competitiveness axis of the RDP. The funding available goes towards capital investments for the construction of new premises, refurbishment of old premises and/or the purchase of new plant and equipment. Over the past twelve months the Department has committed funding of £2.9m to nine PMG projects and paid out grant of £2.52m.

Skills development is vital to the expansion and sustainability of the agri-food sector and in that regard the Department's campuses at CAFRE and Loughry provide education, training and technical support. In

the 2010/11 academic year approximately 1600 students enrolled on CAFRE's education programmes for the agri-food sector. Practical, technical and business management courses were provided to 2000 businesses in the agri-food sector and 897 farm and commercial horticulture business participated in benchmarking. Loughry Campus provides technical support and innovation services to food companies and facilities include the Food Technology Centre, with dedicated Food Technologists and the Food Business Incubation Centre. I am pleased to be able to inform you that these facilities are well utilised by the industry.

Another important support mechanism is the Regional Food Programme which aims to promote quality regional food. Funding of approximately £250k has been offered in the 2010/11 programme to projects such as the Food Pavilion at Balmoral Show, the Belfast Bred Walking Tours, the Naturally North Coast Menu Competition and Magherafelt Speciality Food Christmas Market.

In the period in question DARD has also funded market intelligence research into consumer buying trends, which has assisted local food companies in developing their marketing strategies.

DARD recognises that innovation is key to the future sustainability of the agri-food sector and funds a range of research projects right across the sector to support the future development of the industry.

In June 2010, my predecessor, along with the DETI Minister Arlene Foster MLA, launched the 'Focus on Food' Strategy, which sets out a shared vision for a successful food industry. This was developed collaboratively with industry representatives and was a positive step forward. I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the commitment shown by the Industry Advisory Panel under our food support structures, whose contribution has been vital. Within the last 12 months an independent review was completed of the delivery structure for this strategy and officials are now working with Invest NI, DEL and the industry to implement its recommendations.

In conclusion, the actions over the last 12 months illustrate that DARD has a wide range of support available to the agri-food sector and that our collaborative approach to working with colleagues in DETI/ Invest NI and DEL, alongside industry, continue to be successful in delivering for a sustainable thriving agri-food sector.

Farm Testing

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many of the farms which were subject to their land and cattle being tested as a result of their proximity to the South Armagh area which was deliberately infected with brucellosis, were subject to more than the statutory two tests; (ii) how many tested clear; and (iii) of these how much this additional testing cost.

(AQW 146/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Brucellosis infection in South Armagh is currently comprised of clusters of breakdowns in Keady in Armagh division and Lislea in Newry division.

- (i) Approximately 380 herds in the areas surrounding these infections have had additional risk testing carried out over and above their routine testing programme. The competent authority is not limited in the number of tests that it can perform on herds, but has the power to take such samples as it considers necessary for the purpose of controlling disease, under the Brucellosis Control Order (NI) 2004. There is no reference in legislation or policy to a limit of two statutory tests.
- (ii) Over the course of the time period of additional testing it is likely that the majority of herds would have had at least one herd test that would not be considered 'clear' in that they would have disclosed one or more animals with inconclusive serological titres that required further testing.

After initial breakdowns were disclosed in each area in early 2010, a further 20 herds have had confirmed infection disclosed through these additional risk tests.

- (iii) It is estimated that the additional testing has cost in the region of £150,000 to £200,000.

Sheep Electronic Identification Tags

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she will take to resolve the issue of the European Commission's decision to adopt a zero tolerance policy on sheep electronic identification tags.

(AQW 237/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My officials discussed this matter with the Commission in Brussels on 11 May, along with officials from Defra and the Devolved Administrations. A proposed verifiable standards matrix was put forward to the Commission and the matrix proposed that no penalty should be applied to a keeper in respect of incomplete Central Points of Recording (CPRs) (Markets, Meat Plants and Export Assembly Centres) standards when a keeper's overall compliance with the Sheep Cross-Compliance standards contributes to a reduced risk to animal health and to disease control. During the meeting it was made clear to the Commission that it is simply not reasonable, due to the inherent limitations of the Electronic Identification (EID) technology, to expect that readings by CPRs of sheep EID tags can be 100 per cent accurate at all times. By implication it is unreasonable to penalise flock keepers, who rely on the data provided by the CPRs, for any associated omissions or errors in their flock records.

The issue of misreads is not as significant an issue for us in the north of Ireland as it is in Britain as we have smaller flock sizes and smaller numbers of sheep per movement. A high percentage of our lambs go for slaughter to the south, through markets, and this requires the read rates in markets to be of a very high standard. It is important to note that our industry has fully embraced EID and has worked very hard to ensure that it is a success here. Since all our sheep are electronically tagged, we have a simpler system for the CPRs to implement compared to Britain. We also have "live" connection to the APHIS database, which enables detection of any errors or omissions at source.

The position now being adopted by the Commission appears contrary to the commitment to the pragmatic and proportionate implementation of the EU Sheep and Goats Regulation 21/2004, agreed by the Commission late last year.

It is also contrary to the outcome of a recent fact finding visit where the EU Food & Veterinary Office officials verbally gave positive feedback on our systems for traceability and identification and commented on the very positive role being played by keepers and the CPRs in the north.

I am disappointed by the Commission's initial response to our proposals and I will continue, together with my Ministerial colleagues in Britain, to press the Commission to revise their approach and agree a reasonable solution. We wish to complete our discussions with the Commission before we can consider the next steps, including going to the European Council if necessary.

My officials are working closely with the local sheep industry and with their counterparts in the south of Ireland to keep them up to date with developments. The south has advised that it will do whatever it can to assist us in our discussions with the Commission and I very much welcome this.

Common Agricultural Policy Reform

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the meetings on Common Agricultural Policy reform that officials from her Department have attended in the last twelve months including a list of people present at these meetings.

(AQW 242/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There have been numerous meetings attended by DARD officials at which CAP reform has been discussed and, hence, it is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of either the meetings or the attendees. These meetings have involved officials from Defra, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly, the EU Commission, the EU Council, the Rural Payments Agency, UKRep, Irish Permanent Representation to the EU, Commission for Rural Communities, the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Members of the European Parliament, local stakeholder organisations (including the UFU, NIAPA, NSA, NBA, RSPB, CNCC, NIRWN, LMC, Dairy UK, UDF, NILGA) and, of course, the ARD Committee.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Gaelic Games Tourism

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will raise the issue of Gaelic games tourism at Executive level in order to generate income for this sector.

(AQW 42/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Raising the issue of tourism at Executive level in order to generate income for any part of that sector is a matter, in the first instance, for the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Industry. However, the issue of sports, including Gaelic games, tourism has already been raised at Executive level in the context of my strategy for sport, Sport Matters. This provided estimates, for example, that activity tourism contributes c.£30 million to the local economy.

I am currently implementing Sport Matters with the support of the Executive and I would expect income will be generated for the sports and Gaelic games tourism sector through its full and successful implementation.

In addition, I understand from the Minister of Enterprise Trade and Industry that the Tourist Board (NITB) welcomes new product information and events and promotes these where appropriate. To do so NITB relies on sporting bodies to provide information so that it may be promoted through its website. The Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA) has been given the key contact details at NITB for information on key fixtures to appear on www.discovernorthernireland.com. The GAA have also been offered a link from www.discovernorthernireland.com to its own website. To date the GAA have not contacted NITB on either of these matters.

Officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment (DETI) and the NITB met with representatives from the GAA on 8th March 2011 to discuss how major cultural events can support tourism.

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the cost to her Department of engaging external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 157/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department incurred the following expenditure on external consultants in the financial years 2007-08 to 2010-11 (inclusive):

Year	Expenditure (£)
2007-08	£3,449,172
2008-09	£172,832
2009-10	£77,529
2010-11	£55,537*

* provisional figure – may be subject to change following finalisation of 2010-11 Resource Accounts

Graduates with a Discipline in Arts and Humanities

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the skills value that graduates with a discipline in arts and humanities bring to the economy.

(AQW 168/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Promoting innovation, R&D and creativity is a key priority for the Executive in efforts to rebuild and rebalance the economy.

Prosperous economies are characterised by a strong creative sector. The creative industries are recognised locally and internationally for their potential for job and wealth creation and for their impact on wider innovation and economic development.

It is widely accepted that Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM subjects) play a key role in growing a dynamic and innovative economy. However, in 2010 the Department for Employment and Learning published a consultation document on the Skills Strategy for the region. This highlighted recent research identifying the future skills need as including traditional STEM subjects and also creative arts and design.

Investment in arts and culture fuels the emergence of creative people and creative enterprises. Graduates from arts and humanities backgrounds can bring a creative and imaginative approach to all business sectors and help local businesses to compete on the world stage.

Yachting

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much (i) resource funding; and (ii) capital funding her Department has allocated to the sport of yachting in each of the last five years.

(AQW 170/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for the development of sport in the North of Ireland including the distribution of funding. In the last five years Sport NI has allocated capital and resource funding to the sport of yachting as follows:

Financial year	Capital	Resource	Total
2006/07		£248,173	£248,173
2007/08	£725,074		£725,074
2008/09		£14,100	£14,100
2009/10	£380,036	£141,728	£521,764
2010/11	£157,919	£155,131	£313,050
Totals	£1,263,029	£559,132	£1,822,161

In addition to the above funding, Sport NI has recently issued a letter of offer to the governing body for the sport, the Royal Yachting Association (NI), for a further £220,832 revenue funding towards the development of yachting. This offer covers the period 2011 to 2013.

Libraries NI

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the amount of money spent in each of the last three financial years. by Libraries NI on (i) promotional activities to increase library usage; and (ii) membership recruitment activities, broken down by each library,

(AQW 216/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI was established on 1 April 2009, thus figures are only recorded for the last 2 financial years.

Libraries NI does not break down the money spent on these activities to individual libraries. It is also not split between promotional activities and membership recruitment activities, but is recorded on a regional basis.

The amount spent on promotional/recruitment activities for 09/10 was £176,834 and for 10/11 was £92,842.

Libraries NI: Closures

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there has been a change in the spending patterns of the ten libraries earmarked for closure in relation to (i) promotional activities; (ii) membership recruitment activities; and (iii) building repair and upkeep, over the last two years.

(AQW 217/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Spending on promotional activities and membership recruitment is not broken down by individual library but is carried out regionally. Therefore Libraries NI cannot describe the change in spending pattern of the ten libraries earmarked for closure in relation to (i) promotional activities and (ii) membership recruitment activities.

The spending pattern for (iii) building repair and upkeep is shown in the attached table.

	2009/10	2009/10	2010/11	2010/11
	Planned Maintenance*	Response Maintenance**	Planned Maintenance	Response Maintenance
Carnlough	97	0	522	580
Draperstown	0	220	771	835
Fintona	46	0	421	1,691
Gilford	12,723	228	2,045	14,242
Greystone	3,131	447	1,173	1,877
Kells & Connor	110	0	320	493
Killyleagh	0	469	524	2,897
Moneymore	831	225	323	394
Moy	219	781	666	289
Richill	2,959	796	254	612
Total	20,116	3,166	7,019	23,910

* Planned maintenance is carried out within the budget available each year in order of priority.

** Response maintenance can change year on year depending on what happens in individual libraries.

The 2010/11 figures are subject to audit and may change.

Libraries NI

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why the Libraries NI consultation on the potential closure of ten libraries was allowed to continue during the recent Assembly and local Council election campaigns; and on whose advice this decision was based.

(AQW 218/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: 'Guidance on Conduct for Civil Servants and Special Advisers' during the pre-election period was sent from the Head of the Civil Service to NI Permanent Secretaries on 14 February 2011. The Guidance states at paragraph 15, that 'If a consultation is ongoing at the time of dissolution it should continue as normal'.

Somme Heritage Association

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, since taking office, what contact she had with the Somme Heritage Association regarding Craigavon House.

(AQW 277/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since taking Office on 16 May 2011 I have had no contact with the Somme Heritage Association regarding Craigavon House.

Sick Leave

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps her Department is taking to reduce the number of staff taking two or more periods of sick leave in a year.

(AQW 337/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department must apply the terms set out in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Inefficiency Sickness Absence policy. This policy includes Review Points i.e. points at which a sickness absence record must be reviewed. The NICS Review Points are 4 occasions or 10 working days in a rolling 12 month period.

In the case of probationers or those appointed on a fixed-term or temporary basis, each absence will prompt a review. An electronic alert is issued to the line manager and to Departmental HR when a member of staff reaches the Review Point and inefficiency action, including Written Warnings and ultimately dismissal, may be initiated at that stage.

Department of Education

New Build for Ballymoney High School

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on a new build for Ballymoney High School.
(AQW 11/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Ballymoney High School is one of the 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. The Economic Appraisal for the project is currently being revised and updated by the North-Eastern Education and Library Board.

Castle Tower Special School is one of the 114 schemes identified as needing a new school but not yet announced in a "new starts" programme.

The Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years, which will have a detrimental effect on the Department's ability to deliver a school building programme.

It will therefore be important to consider how the limited capital funds available should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people.

This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

New Build for Castle Tower Special School, Ballymena

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on a new build for Castle Tower Special School, Ballymena.
(AQW 12/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Ballymoney High School is one of the 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. The Economic Appraisal for the project is currently being revised and updated by the North-Eastern Education and Library Board.

Castle Tower Special School is one of the 114 schemes identified as needing a new school but not yet announced in a "new starts" programme.

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It will therefore be important to consider how the limited capital funds available should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people.

This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

Academic Selection

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the post primary schools that are currently accepting pupils on the basis of academic selection, which have indicated that they will phase out academic selection in the next four years.

(AQW 40/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: One grammar school has so far formally indicated its intention to move away from academic selection. On 29 November 2010 the North Eastern Education and Library Board published a development proposal which proposed discontinuation of the use of academic selection as a criterion for entry to Loreto College, Coleraine, with effect from 1 September 2012, or as soon as possible thereafter. Following the statutory consultation, this development proposal was approved, on 8 March 2011, by the then Minister of Education Caitríona Ruane.

The wider and longer term context for this move by Loreto College is the work of the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE). This commission's "commitment to a non-selective future" is on the record and was most recently stated in these terms in March 2010. The Chair of the Commission has provided as "the clear statement from the Catholic Trustees [that] academic selection at age eleven has no place in a modern education system". This commission has recently consulted on area-plans.

Funding to Preparatory Schools

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) the reasons for the delay; and (ii) the timescale for producing an Equality Impact Assessment on the reduction of funding to preparatory schools.

(AQW 74/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) report on the proposal to withdraw funding from the preparatory departments of grammar schools is in the final stages of completion. Over 400 responses were received in respect of the consultation, therefore, collating and analysing the responses has taken some considerable time. However, my Department will shortly be writing to all those who participated in the consultation to advise of the EQIA's publication, including a quantitative and qualitative analysis of responses, which will be available on the Department's website.

Appeals for Primary School Admission

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the timescale for the completion of appeals for primary school admission for September 2011.

(AQW 78/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Each Education and Library Board is responsible for appeals within its area. Therefore, the timescale for completion of appeals varies from Board to Board and is dependant on the number of cases received. In all cases Boards schedule to complete the process before the beginning of the school year in September. The guide to enrolment to primary schools provides information for parents on how an appeal can be made should they wish to do so. In addition, the letter advising parents about the primary school in which their child has been placed gives information on the appeals procedure.

Support for Children with a Disability

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education to detail the assistance that is provided by mainstream schools to children who were formerly able-bodied but who now have a disability; and whether this support is available on school trips to ensure inclusion for these children.

(AQW 138/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (SENDO) places responsibility for the implementation of its duties with the responsible body. Responsible bodies in the school sector include boards of governors/trustees or the owner of the school and Education and Library Boards. SENDO also places planning duties on education providers in relation to making the whole educational experience more accessible to disabled pupils and prospective disabled pupils.

There is a duty on boards of governors/trustees or the owner of the school to prepare and implement a written accessibility plan for a prescribed period in relation to:

- the physical accessibility of school premises;
- accessibility of the curriculum; and
- provision of information in alternative formats where it is usually provided in writing.

The Department of Education will consider any adaptations required for a child with a disability on receipt of applications with supporting occupational therapy recommendations. Where an access audit identifies necessary adjustments the essential works will also be carried out.

Pupils with a statement of Special educational need receive additional support to meet the specific requirements of their statement.

The Disability Discrimination Code of Practice for Schools 2006 gives an extensive list of examples of the range of activities where it may be unlawful to discriminate against a pupil in education and which includes school trips. The Code of Practice also says schools should plan ahead and implement inclusion policies, procedures and practices.

The Education and Library Boards provide schools with guidance in relation to all matters relevant to educational visits. The Boards have advised that schools are obliged to provide trips that are inclusive. The cost of any additional staffing/transport/resources required to support children with a disability on an outing should therefore be factored in to the overall cost of the trip. In preparing for the trip, mainstream schools are required to undertake a risk assessment of the arrangements to ensure that all potential risks are managed and to ensure that all children benefit from the experience.

Where trips are an essential requirement of the curriculum, e.g., geography field trips, and the pupil has a statement of special educational needs, any additional resources required to enable access to the curriculum are provided and funded by the appropriate funding authority.

Educational Underachievement

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Education to detail any plans he has to address educational underachievement, particularly in relation to early years learning.

(AQW 148/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to working with our stakeholders to address educational underachievement and deliver improvements for all our young people.

I will be continuing to implement Every School a Good School – a policy for school improvement, which sets out our over-arching approach to raising standards and tackling underachievement. It is supported by a range of policies including the new literacy and numeracy strategy, Count, read: succeed, the revised curriculum, the Extended Schools Programme and the Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion.

Building a firm foundation in the early years of a child's education is vitally important. The aim of DE Early Years policy is to ensure that our youngest children get the best start in life by supporting families and strengthening children's development and disposition to be confident learners. DE has expanded the availability of pre-school education from 45% in 1997 to over 90% currently, with over 22,500 places filled in 2010-2011. DE, in partnership with the Health and Social Care Board also provides the Sure Start Programme for families with children from birth to 4, in the most disadvantaged areas. Sure Start offers family support and a range of services to promote health, development and learning.

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost to his Department of engaging external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 163/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of expenditure by the Department on external consultants in each financial year from 2007-08 to 2010-11 are provided in the table below.

Although the request was from May 2007, the total expenditure for 2007-08 includes April 2007 expenditure as departmental records are in financial years.

FIGURES FOR 2010-11 ARE PROVISIONAL AND SUBJECT TO THE AUDIT.

Year	£s
2007-08	1,067,705
2008-09	850,884
2009-10	180,484
2010-11	62,359

Capital Funding for Schools in the North Down Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education for an update on capital funding for schools in the North Down area.

(AQW 175/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Holywood Schools project is one of the 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan to be progressed when funding is available. The scheme includes a new nursery school, a new primary school to replace Redburn and Holywood Primary Schools and a replacement school for Priory College.

The scheme for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School has not yet been announced for capital funding. It is one of a large number of proposed projects at Economic Appraisal (EA) stage.

The Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years, which will have a detrimental effect on the Department's ability to deliver a school building programme.

It will therefore be important to consider how the limited capital funds available should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people.

This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

Schools Estate

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to detail the estimated cost of restructuring the schools estate to accommodate a province-wide system of junior high schools with the transition of pupils at the age of 14 to senior high schools.

(AQW 184/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has not considered the restructuring of the schools estate to accommodate junior high schools and it therefore does not hold any estimated costs.

Summer Schemes for Students with Special Needs

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education if he can offer an assurance that all the necessary arrangements have been made by each Education and Library Board for the provision of summer schemes for students with special needs, including transport provision, to ensure that there is no repeat of the problems that were experienced last summer.

(AQW 189/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Summer schemes are discretionary and are reviewed on an annual basis by the Education and Library Boards. I have been assured by the Chief Executives of the 5 Boards that there will be no adverse impact on summer schemes or transport for students with special educational needs this summer.

Academic Selection

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education for an update on his Department's current legislative position in relation to the use of academic selection for post-primary transfer.

(AQW 206/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under Article 16 of the Education Order, 1997, as amended by Article 28(1) of the Education Order, 2006, it is the statutory responsibility of the Board of Governors of each post-primary school to set the admissions criteria that it will use to make decisions on which children to admit in the event that the school receives more applications than it has places available. My Department issued guidance on transfer and admissions criteria in July 2010. All schools are required by law to "have regard" to this Guidance. This Guidance recommends a number of criteria for use by post-primary schools, and strongly recommends that criteria based on academic selection and rejection is not used.

New Build for Strabane Academy

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education for an update on a new build for Strabane Academy.

(AQW 210/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The merger of Strabane High School and Strabane Grammar School forming Strabane Academy will take effect from 1 September 2011.

An Economic Appraisal for potential major works project for Strabane Academy is currently with the Department and is one of a large number of projects at Feasibility and Economic Appraisal stage. These projects are not on the Department's capital Investment Delivery Plan (IDP) and have not been announced for funding.

Currently 53 projects remain on the Department's capital Investment Delivery Plan (IDP) to be built and as you are aware the Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources to Education over the next 4 years which will have a detrimental effect on the Department's ability to deliver a school building programme.

It will therefore be important to consider how the limited capital funds available should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people. This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

My Department will continue to work with the School Managing Authorities on all aspects of future planning.

Youth Services in the Ballymote Area of Downpatrick

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Education what contractual or legal obligation the South Eastern Education and Library Board has to deliver youth services in the Ballymote area of Downpatrick.
(AQW 250/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Article 37 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 requires each Board to secure provision of adequate facilities for youth service activities in its area.

The Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that the current contractual or legal obligations in place in the Ballymote area relate to the Ballymote Resource Centre which is owned by the South Eastern Education and Library Board and housed within the Ballymote Sports and Well Being Centre. Presently there is only one contractual commitment for use of the Centre until June 2011 which is with St Colmcille's Youth Club.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board has also advised that it has sponsorship agreements with other youth clubs/units operating in the Ballymote area. However while these agreements are the basis of funding grants to the clubs/units, they are currently not deemed as contractual or legal obligations.

Devenish College in Fermanagh

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education whether he will develop a new build campus for Devenish College in Fermanagh.
(AQW 263/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The need for new accommodation for Devenish College has been recognised by the Department of Education however you will be aware that the scope of the project changed significantly as the Western Education and Library Board developed strategic post-primary proposals for Fermanagh which includes Devenish College. The Department of Education is currently assessing the position in the context of the current financial constraints and will be liaising with the relevant education authorities in due course.

Department for Employment and Learning

Institutions Teaching English to Foreign Students

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures are in place to (i) regulate the standard of teaching in institutions which teach English to foreign students; and (ii) monitor the welfare of foreign students studying English.
(AQW 16/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Teaching English to foreign students occurs largely in schools and in Further Education colleges. Information on the former has been provided by the Department of Education.

In Further Education colleges, the teaching of English to foreign students comes under, and is funded by, my Department's English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision. In schools, teaching pupils who do not have a language in common with their teacher comes under the Department of Education's policy "Every School a Good School – Supporting Newcomer Pupils". In both education settings, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) monitors and assesses the standards of teaching, learning and achievement, including in these specific areas. Where provision that is not up to quality standards is identified, the Departments request follow up inspections to ensure that quality improves. In addition, the ETI has carried out a recent survey related to English as an Additional Language (EAL).

In addition, the admissions policies of Northern Ireland's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) require international student applicants to demonstrate a standard of competence in English sufficient to undertake tertiary level academic study in the UK. However, HEIs do offer English language support for international students which is not regulated by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), as part of their comprehensive support services for international students. The University of Ulster also offers a Diploma in Foundation English for Academic Purposes (Dip.FEAP), a foundation programme which is validated by the British Council and which aims to improve English language ability in order to meet University English language entry requirements.

Regarding the welfare of foreign students, in addition to their normal comprehensive pastoral care arrangements schools and colleges have appointed EAL and ESOL co-ordinators to oversee the learning and welfare of the pupils and students concerned. ETI interviews these co-ordinators to ensure that their institutions are engaging rigorously in the monitoring and review of provision, standards and learning and teaching of foreign students. All Northern Ireland's HEIs have comprehensive student support services for international students.

All FE students, including international students and those studying ESOL courses, have access to a wide range of pastoral guidance and support to promote health and wellbeing. Guidance is available from College International Officers and Student Service Officers. Support can include bespoke tutorial programmes and involvement in various clubs and societies within the College.

Educational Underachievement

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail any plans he has to address educational underachievement in working-class communities in the North Down area.

(AQW 27/11-15)

Dr Farry: By aiming to meet the needs of individual learners, my Department's education and training programmes are designed to raise standards of educational achievement across Northern Ireland, including in working class communities in North Down and elsewhere.

Programmes include: Training for Success, which guarantees a training place for 16 and 17 year olds, including those who have disengaged from learning; Essential Skills provision, to raise the levels of literacy, numeracy and ICT competence of young people and adults; a wide range of courses in FE colleges, again for school leavers and adults, delivered on a full-time and part-time basis, and with an access programme designed specifically to encourage and support disengaged adults back into learning (the South Eastern Regional College provides a range of professional and technical courses through school partnerships, community education, school leavers training programmes and mainstream further education, including Essential Skills, employability skills, Level 2 and 3 Diplomas and Extended Diplomas, access to university courses and sub-degree Higher Education courses); the Apprenticeship programme, and programmes designed to raise the skill and qualifications levels of the existing workforce; projects to promote higher education among working class young people (for example "Discovering Queens" and Ulster University's "Step Up Programme", both designed to encourage aspiration towards university education particularly in disadvantaged areas), a key priority that will be strengthened through the Department's widening participation strategy which will aim to raise the aspiration of young people to progress to higher education; and the Steps to Work programme, which provides a range of assistance to unemployed and economically inactive people, including access to Essential Skills provision and to short accredited training courses.

The Department is also leading on the development of a cross-Departmental strategy to address the issue of those not in education, employment or training, the so called NEETs group. Working in partnership with others, this strategy will aim to reduce the number of young people who are most at risk of remaining outside education, employment or training. Closely linked to this work, is collaboration between Further Education colleges and post primary schools in delivering a stimulating and relevant educational experience for 14 to 19 year olds in school, through the Entitlement Framework. A key aim is to raise the educational achievement of young people before they leave school.

Entry to, and participation on, these programmes is accompanied by relevant advice and guidance, either from the Department's staff, or from education and training providers. A high priority of all of these programmes, and the advice given, is to widen participation in learning that leads to recognised qualifications, and this will continue to be a priority for me and for my Department.

Proposed Merger of Stranmillis College and Queen's University, Belfast

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his Department's position on the proposed merger of Stranmillis College and Queen's University, Belfast.
(AQW 88/11-15)

Dr Farry: The former Minister for Employment and Learning, Danny Kennedy MLA, made an Oral Statement in the Assembly on 15 March this year outlining the reasons behind the proposed merger. He also launched a public consultation on the proposal on the same day. The consultation closes on 10 June. The outcome of the consultation must be awaited as that is a critical element in determining whether or not the proposed merger will be progressed.

Tuition Fees

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his Department's position on the increase in tuition fees.
(AQW 167/11-15)

Dr Farry: In March of this year, my Department published a consultation paper seeking views on five options in relation to higher education tuition fees and a range of other student funding issues.

The consultation on the policy options and on the associated Equality Impact Assessment is running until 10 June. No decisions will be taken until after the consultation closes and I have had an opportunity to analyse the responses received.

My officials are aiming to provide the Assembly's Employment and Learning Committee with a high level summary of the responses before the start of summer recess, although this will depend on the volume and complexity of responses received.

North West Regional College

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the recent investment in the North West Regional College, if he can offer an assurance that the college will provide performing arts courses.
(AQW 173/11-15)

Dr Farry: While the Department sets the strategic direction for the Further Education Sector, each College is responsible for its own curriculum offer. Colleges offer a wide range of provision, tailored to meet local needs. Decisions on whether a specific course runs are driven by the level of demand locally and it is the responsibility of individual colleges to meet the needs of learners and employers in their areas in a cost effective way that ensures best use of public money.

The North West College have confirmed that within the new £18m project there is modern accommodation for performing arts.

The North West Regional College also advises that they are currently advertising in their course prospectus for September 2011 the following courses in Performing Arts; Level 2 in Performing Arts, Level 3 Diploma/extended Diploma in Performing Arts (Performance and Production) and Higher National Diploma in Performing Arts.

It is intended that these courses will use the new facilities in the 'Foyle Building'

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI: CEO

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what actions were taken on the approval of a bonus payment for the CEO of Invest NI; (ii) what advice her Department received from the Department of Finance and Personnel in relation to this payment; and (iii) whether her Department complied with this advice and the Executive policy on bonuses in the public sector.

(AQW 3/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The Executive's and DFPs policy on bonus payments/performance pay for senior officials in the public sector in Northern Ireland is that they should not be awarded unless there is a clear contractual entitlement to such an award.

The actions taken on the approval of a bonus payment for the CEO of Invest NI for the 2009/10 financial year were compliant with the contractual terms and conditions of appointment, namely that the Board of Invest NI made a recommendation through the Department to the Minister who has final approval of the bonus award. In making the recommendation the Invest NI Board sought legal advice that confirmed the contractual entitlement, and which was made available to the Department and Minister.

Hotel Group Investment in Ballycastle

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to attract hotel group investment in Ballycastle.

(AQW 34/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has commissioned a review of the Northern Ireland tourism accommodation market with a view to identifying future accommodation demand. This will help plan the accommodation need across Northern Ireland if strategic tourism targets are to be achieved.

NITB through the Causeway Coast & Glens Tourism Masterplan and Tourism Development Scheme are currently improving Ballycastle as a key visitor resort along the Causeway Coastal Route. This has been manifested through infrastructural and interpretation enhancements at key sites such as Ballycastle Seafront, Ballycastle harbour and ferry terminal.

Underpinning these activities, Invest NI is available to engage with promoters seeking to develop new hotel projects, and can offer advice and guidance and/or financial assistance to help with export focused capital/capability projects. Invest NI will continue to engage with any interested parties in the development of hotel projects.

Comhaltas and Gaelic Games

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the progress made by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in promoting Comhaltas and gaelic games in the last year.

(AQW 36/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has met with Comhaltas and identified areas where they can add to the visitor experience in line with Northern Ireland's tourism objectives.

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann was informed that a new round of funding for 2012/13 will be launched in the autumn through the NITB Events Fund for which they may apply. The ten key criteria of the funding model were explained along with the importance of scoring well in each criteria in order to be successful.

Northern Ireland has developed a strong reputation for its music product and Comhaltas can provide valuable support in terms of the traditional music product through its networks.

NITB highlighted the importance for all bodies interested in developing their tourism offering and working with the NITB to attend the wide range of industry events that are organised throughout the year, in order to develop relationships and establish networks with other tourism providers and to be kept informed of market trends.

Gaelic Games

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) welcomes new product information and events and promotes these where appropriate. To do so NITB relies on sporting bodies to provide information so that it may be promoted through its website. The Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA) has been given the key contact details at NITB for information on key fixtures to appear on www.discovernorthernireland.com. The GAA have also been offered a link from www.discovernorthernireland.com to its own website. To date the GAA have not contacted NITB on either of these matters.

Officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment (DETI) and The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) met with representatives from the Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA) on 8th March 2011 to discuss how major cultural events can support tourism.

Geothermal Energy Products

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to ensure that work on the sourcing of geothermal energy products can commence in the next four years. **(AQW 37/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: My Department is currently developing proposals aimed at supporting the increase in Northern Ireland's share of renewable heat to 10% by 2020. Currently the Northern Ireland heat market is heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels, by increasing the levels of renewable heat from 1.7% to 10% by 2020, there is potential to increase fuel security, reduce carbon emissions and realise opportunities for 'green jobs'.

DETI has been provided with £25m of funding from Her Majesty's Treasury specifically for the development of the renewable heat market. My Department is assessing how this funding can be most effectively utilised with consideration being given to a Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive similar to proposals set out for the Department of Energy and Climate Change in Great Britain.

It is expected that a future incentive scheme would support a range of renewable heat technologies, including geothermal energy.

Further to this, the Department's Minerals & Petroleum Branch and Geological Survey of Northern Ireland is considering the regulatory and technical issues which have a bearing on the identification and development of deep geothermal energy resources in Northern Ireland.

Credit Unions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the Treasury Select Committee's recommendations on its investigation into the Presbyterian Mutual Society (i) what progress has been made in transferring the regulation of Credit Unions to the Financial Services Authority (FSA); (ii) whether registration functions will be transferred to the FSA to ensure that no future regulatory gaps arise; and (iii) if not, what measures she intends to put in place to prevent such gaps. **(AQW 52/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: H M Treasury agreed last September with my proposal that responsibility for both the registration and regulation of Northern Ireland Credit Unions should transfer to the Financial Services Authority / its successor at the earliest opportunity. This will enable local credit unions to apply to undertake additional financial services and to benefit from having access to both the Financial Services Compensation Scheme and the Financial Ombudsman Service.

My Department will also bring forward legislation which will update the current N Ireland framework in line with Great Britain during the mandate of the current Assembly.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the Northern Ireland Tourist Board provides details of GAA related events on its website.

(AQW 67/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) relies on sporting bodies to provide information so that it may be promoted through its website. The Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA) has been given the key contact details at NITB for information on key fixtures to appear on www.discovernorthernireland.com. The GAA have also been offered a link from www.discovernorthernireland.com to its own website. To date the GAA have not contacted NITB on either of these matters.

EU Legislation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the practical impact the findings of the Davidson Review on the 'gold -plating' of EU legislation have made on her Department's approach to the implementation of EU legislation; and to provide examples of any improvements.

(AQW 121/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Lord Davidson's report recommended specific simplification proposals in ten areas of legislation, none of which fell within my Department's legislative remit. He also made a number of generic recommendations designed to promote best practice in the implementation of EU legislation and these are reflected in the new rules for the transposition of EU law, introduced by the Coalition Government in December 2010.

My Department has copied the guidance for Whitehall departments in relation to these rules to Northern Ireland departments to ensure that they are taken into account in relation to transferred matters. (Most Northern Ireland implementing legislation is closely modelled on GB equivalents in any event.) Northern Ireland businesses will therefore benefit from any improvements flowing from the Davidson report. Like all Northern Ireland departments, DETI is committed to avoiding unnecessary 'gold plating' of EU legislation and this is overseen by the ETI Committee through the scrutiny procedure for Statutory Rules.

Promoting Banbridge and Craigavon as Tourist Destinations

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the progress that has been made by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in promoting (i) Banbridge; and (ii) Craigavon as tourist destinations.

(AQW 149/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has a remit to promote Northern Ireland as a destination to residents of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It does this through an intensive programme of marketing campaigns in both markets. Whilst the campaigns focus on Northern Ireland in its entirety they also include features on the various regions of Northern Ireland. One of the key regions from a promotional and tourism perspective is the area around the Saint Patrick's Trail which includes both Banbridge and Craigavon and this area features within each campaign that NITB delivers. Lough Neagh is also promoted as a destination within each campaign and within this attractions and events within Craigavon are promoted.

NITB has taken the lead in developing the Saint Patrick's Signature Project and through this NITB works in partnership with both Craigavon and Banbridge Council on the Saint Patrick's Signature Project Working Group on a monthly basis to take the project forward.

In addition, Craigavon Borough Council received an Offer under the Tourism Innovation Fund of £105,000 to undertake 2 technical studies and 2 research projects as part of the Craigavon Integrated Tourism Experience initiative. Claims under the offer are currently being processed.

Farm Accidents

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many farm accidents caused by the misuse of spooler levers on tractors have been reported in the last five years.

(AQW 153/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) is not aware of any reported farm accidents involving spooler levers. HSENI however was notified by the PSNI of two fatal farm incidents in this period where a spool valve was a contributory factor in the death.

Department of the Environment

Single Use Carrier Bags

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to make regulations about charges for single use carrier bags.

(AQW 41/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The detailed framework for the introduction of a carrier bag charge – including both the amount and the scope of the charge – will be contained in subordinate legislation made under the Climate Change Act 2008, as amended by the Single Use Carrier Bags Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. This will allow for full consultation on the detailed policy proposals, discussion by the Executive and subsequent debate in the Assembly.

At present I am being advised that charging may be in place by April 2013. I consider this timeframe unreasonable. I am looking at how this can be accelerated at present my Department is currently exploring various options for the future introduction of the charge with a view to identifying the most effective and efficient approach. I can reassure you that I will be closely monitoring the implementation programme as it moves forward, and it will be accelerated where I identify opportunities to do so.

Rose Energy's Incinerator at Glenavy

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the opposition and concerns expressed by residents and environmentalists in relation to the proposed incineration plant at Glenavy (i) whether he will initiate a public inquiry; (ii) how he intends to ensure that the inquiry will facilitate an open and transparent consideration of the key issues; and (iii) whether an independent review of the evidence, both for and against the application, will be provided.

(AQW 45/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) and (ii)

Following adjournment of the Judicial Review proceedings in respect of the two current Rose Energy planning applications on 2 March 2011, Rose Energy made a voluntary submission of further environmental information to the Department on 11 March 2011. The information received includes a revised ecology chapter to replace the chapter contained within their earlier Environmental Statement (ES). This revised chapter is supplemented and supported by a number of surveys: report on winter bat survey; smooth newt survey; final baseline assessment of aquatic ecology and appropriate assessment information. Clarification on the issue of the grid connection had also been provided.

As required by the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 1999 the receipt of the further environmental information was advertised in the press on 31 March and 1 April 2011. In addition, neighbours within a 1km radius of both application sites were re-notified by letter on 24 March 2011. There was a 4 week period for public comment on the further environmental information and that period has now ended. In addition, a re-consultation exercise was also carried out with a number of consultees on 24 March 2011. That re-consultation exercise in respect of both applications is currently ongoing. A number of detailed third party

objection submissions have also recently been received by the Department and planning officials are currently in the process of carrying out a further re-consultation exercise with a number of the consultees on the specific matters contained in those objections.

Given that the consultation process on the two applications is ongoing, planning officials are not yet in a position to make a recommendation to me on the way forward. Careful consideration of the planning applications and associated environmental information, and all representations made in relation to them, is necessary before I would be in a position to decide whether to proceed by way of a public inquiry as the most appropriate action. It would not be appropriate therefore at this stage to indicate whether I would call a public inquiry.

- (iii) In determining both planning applications the Department continue to seek the advice of their expert consultees on the information submitted by both the applicant and by third parties. That process of consultation with the expert consultees is ongoing in respect of the most recent submission of further environmental information and third party submissions. Following receipt of the expert advice from the consultees on the submissions by the applicant and third parties, it is then for planning officials to make a recommendation to me on the way forward, taking account of all material planning matters.

Tax Discs Processed by Telephone

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how many tax discs were processed by telephone on 18 May 2011, while the recorded phone message stated 'we are experiencing a high volume of calls to our system for taxing your vehicle by phone and are unable to transfer you to this service'.

(AQW 77/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Vehicle licensing is an excepted matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport. It is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency under a formal agreement between the Department of the Environment and the Department for Transport. Under this agreement all funding for the vehicle licensing service here is provided from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea.

On 18 May 2011, 731 calls were made to the telephone relicensing service of which 254 calls were answered. Of the 254 calls answered, 184 tax discs were issued to customers. The remaining 70 calls could not be completed for a number of reasons including the customer having no current insurance cover, no valid MOT or because a debit card payment could not be completed.

The telephone relicensing facility is only funded by DVLA so as to provide a token service. On any given day the Agency is only resourced to answer a maximum of 500 calls to this service. On 18 May 2011, staffing issues meant the full quota of staff were not available to answer the maximum number of incoming calls.

My Department is continuing to seek early commitments from the DVLA to deliver improvements in the quality of service provided to vehicle tax payers here, including online renewal services.

Fly-Posting

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment if he has any plans to introduce sanctions against organisations that fly-post and when will these sanctions be available to councils.

(AQW 102/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Sanctions are already available to district councils to deal with fly-posting. However, the existing provisions are being strengthened by those contained in Part 4 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the 2011 Act). Details of the sanctions that councils can take against organisations that publicise their businesses by fly-posting are outlined below.

Anyone benefitting from displaying an advertisement illegally is already guilty of an offence under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 and can be fined up to a maximum of £2,500. At present however, there is a defence for such a person, namely where he/she proves that the advertisement was displayed without his/her knowledge or consent. This makes it very difficult to secure a conviction.

The 2011 Act therefore amends the statutory defence so that a person has to prove that the advertisement was displayed without his/her knowledge; or that he/she either took all reasonable steps to prevent the display, or subsequently to secure its removal. This change will make it much less easy for beneficiaries of fly-posting to escape conviction, as they will need to prove that they did everything reasonably possible to ensure that any advertisement they benefit from is not displayed illegally.

Article 18 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, provides a district council with the power to remove or obliterate any placard or poster which is displayed illegally. It also enables a council, in certain circumstances, to recover the costs it incurs in doing so. The 2011 Act substitutes a new Article 18 into the 1985 Order to strengthen these provisions further and in particular to ensure that the cost of removal is borne, where possible, by the person who committed the act of fly-posting or the person whose goods, services or concerns are publicised by it.

I intend to undertake a public consultation exercise on graffiti and fly-posting later this year. The consultation document will include draft guidance on the taking of prosecutions for graffiti and fly-posting offences which will assist district councils and others to understand, and when required, to make the best and most appropriate use of the powers available to them. I have asked officials to provide a full timeline, to have powers in operation in the earliest feasible period.

Safety for Motorcyclists

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department has taken in the last year to enhance safety for motorcyclists.

(AQW 123/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has introduced a number of measures in the last year to enhance safety for motorcyclists.

In November 2010 the Department's Driver and Vehicle Agency introduced an approved motorcycle instructor (AMI) register. The register and qualifying process are designed to ensure a satisfactory and consistent standard of instruction for all learner motorcyclists. This brings a level of professionalism to the motorcycle instruction industry and aligns the processes for motorcycle instructors with those which already exist for car driving instructors.

The AMI register paved the way for the introduction of compulsory basic training (CBT) in February 2011. CBT is designed to improve learners' riding skills by giving them training in a safe environment before they proceed to ride on public roads. Evidence from Great Britain demonstrates that the scheme has improved safety for both motorcyclists and other road users.

The introduction of CBT has fundamentally changed training requirements for learner riders. Moped and motorcycle riders are now not permitted to ride unaccompanied on public roads without valid CBT certificates. Riders with provisional moped or motorcycle entitlement on their licences prior to the introduction of CBT have until 21 February 2012 to either obtain full motorcycle entitlement or pass a CBT course. CBT can be delivered only by a registered AMI.

By making riders more aware of the dangers involved in riding mopeds or motorcycles on public roads, and making them better prepared to deal with them effectively, CBT should help to reduce the numbers of deaths and injuries on our roads.

Furthermore, the Department's Road Safety Strategy to 2020, which was published in March 2011, includes 12 measures developed specifically to improve the safety of motorcyclists. The Department will be working with road safety partners to implement these measures.

Local Council Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of full-time staff and part-time staff currently employed by each local council, and of these how many have a disability.

(AQW 136/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The most recent figures relating to the number of full-time and part-time staff employed by each local council, based on their certified accounts are set out in the attached below.

The department does not hold information centrally regarding the number of council employees with a disability. This information may be available from any individual council in which you have an interest.

2009/2010 DISTRICT COUNCIL STAFF FIGURES

Council	Full time staff	Part time staff
Antrim	246	60
Ards	304	165
Armagh	278	221
Ballymena	225	53
Ballymoney	101	58
Banbridge	164	88
Belfast	2,268	316
Carrickfergus	159	50
Castlereagh	247	214
Coleraine	296	89
Cookstown	200	71
Craigavon	460	88
Derry	553	169
Down	299	76
Dungannon & S Tyrone	222	73
Fermanagh	260	59
Larne	169	58
Limavady	130	51
Lisburn	421	99
Magherafelt	163	43
Moyle	115	8
Newry & Mourne	400	69
Newtownabbey	340	316
North Down	349	131
Omagh	220	132
Strabane	152	54
Total	8,741	2,811

Reform of Local Government

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the checks, balances and equality safeguards that will be part of the decision-making processes of the bodies established as part of the Reform of Local Government.

(AQW 145/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The proposed checks, balances and equality safeguards that will be part of the decision-making processes for the new councils will allow councils to select, from a limited number of specified models, the method it wishes to use to allocate positions within the council and on external bodies. It is intended that the application of each of the models will be specified in legislation.

It is also proposed that a system of checks and balances should be put in place in relation to the decision-making process. This would include the use of a call-in procedure where a number of councillors, who have an issue with a specific decision, would be able to join together to request that that decision is reviewed. It is proposed that the call-in procedure would be used where an issue has been raised in relation to the procedures followed in making a decision and/or where there is an issue in relation to the protection of political minorities in the local government district. It is proposed that the trigger to initiate the call-in procedure should be 15% of the total council membership. For example, in a council with 40 members, a call-in would require the support of 6 councillors.

The introduction of qualified majority voting for specified strategic decisions and as part of the call-in procedure will also provide a further check and balance in relation to council decision making. It is proposed that a straightforward threshold of 80% of council members present and voting will apply.

Further to the above safeguards, it is also proposed that the new councils establish an effective internal scrutiny process. This will be a requirement where the council operates a devolved decision-making structure.

These proposals have been developed mindful of the need to ensure effective and inclusive local democracy, to protect the rights of minorities, to prevent any direct or indirect discrimination, and to promote equality of opportunity. The recent consultation on the local government reform proposals generated a number of responses in relation to the above issues which I will consider over the next few weeks and quickly to determine the way forward. I will make a further assessment of all of these issues, in the light of the actions of some in councils since the elections of 5 May 2011.

Review of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) when the review of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency is due to commence; and (ii) if the need for an independent environmental protection agency will be considered as part of the review.

(AQW 226/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am committed to reviewing the present role and functions of the Environment Agency and I will wish to look at the case for an independent environment protection agency as part of the review. I have asked officials to initiate a programme of work within my Department with a view to bringing forward options for my consideration. The establishment of an independent environment protection agency would be an exercise with significant implications. It may require the introduction of new primary legislation in this Assembly, but the proposal has clear attractions.

A full consultation exercise on proposals emerging from my review will be required along with a detailed analysis of the potential costs and benefits. I have asked for proposals to be with me before the July holidays.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Invest NI: CEO

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) whether a business case was presented to his Department in relation to a proposed pay increase or bonus for the CEO of Invest NI; (ii) when this business case was presented; (iii) who presented the case; and (iv) what was the outcome of the case. **(AQW 1/11-15)**

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I received a case on the 14th April 2011 relating to a proposal to remove the bonus component and to restructure the remuneration package of the Invest NI Chief Executive. The submission was sent by the DETI Permanent Secretary and had been cleared by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

I responded by advising the DETI Minister that, given the current economic climate and the Executive's current policy on bonuses and public sector pay, I was unable to agree with the proposal.

Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide an estimate of the costs of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland's challenge to the validity of the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill.

(AQW 23/11-15)

Mr Wilson: On 25 May 2011 we received notification that the Attorney General was withdrawing his reference in respect of the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill. It has been proposed that each party to the reference should bear its own costs. The estimated cost of the work undertaken by my Department in defending the reference is currently £30,000. However, that is just an estimate and the figure may fall to be revised.

Registering a New Born Child

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in each of the last five years, how many times parents have been found to have provided false information when registering a new born child.

(AQW 80/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There have been no occasions, in each of the last five years, where parents have been found to have provided false information when registering a new born child.

Registering a New Born Child

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he would consider making the presentation of a valid form of ID compulsory for people registering the birth of a child.

(AQW 82/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There is no legislative requirement for the presentation of a valid form of ID when registering the birth of a child. There are no current plans to place such a requirement on qualified informants.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Transferring Orthopaedic Consultants and Nurses

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of transferring orthopaedic consultants and nurses, including administration staff, Friday to Sunday of

each week, from Liverpool to Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast, in order to address the back log of outpatient appointments.

(AQW 25/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The HSC Board has contracted, using a competitive tendering process, with the independent sector to deliver a range of orthopaedic services. The use of the independent sector is employed only when the demands of the service exceed the current capacity and people in pain or in need of urgent treatment, would be forced to wait for an unacceptably long period.

The cost of this contract was approximately £4million for 2010/11. This contract contributed significantly to the reduction of waiting times as it provided for the treatment of 755 inpatients/daycases, 3615 new outpatient appointments and 1644 review outpatients appointments.

Orthopaedic Consultant at Musgrave Park Hospital

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the average time it would take a patient who has been referred to an orthopaedic consultant at Musgrave Park Hospital (a) to get an appointment with the consultant; (b) to have the recommended surgery; (c) to receive follow-up appointments with a physiotherapist; and (d) to have orthotics fitted; and (ii) the location at which each of the necessary procedures and appointments are likely to take place.

(AQW 48/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Belfast HSC Trust have advised me that the current average waiting times for services provided to patients referred to a Trauma and Orthopaedic consultant at Musgrave Park Hospital are as follows:
 - (a) 6.7 weeks for a first outpatient appointment in the Trauma and Orthopaedic specialty;
 - (b) 12.9 weeks for inpatient surgery in the Trauma and Orthopaedic specialty;
 - (c) Two weeks for a follow up appointment with a physiotherapist if the appointment is classified as urgent and six weeks if it is classified as routine;
 - (d) Four to five weeks to process an orthotic request, followed by six weeks for a fitting assessment, and a further six weeks to fit the orthotic following its supply to Musgrave Park Hospital.
- (ii) The locations at which each of these services are provided are detailed below:
 - (a) A first outpatient appointment is provided at either Musgrave Park Hospital or the North West Clinic;
 - (b) Inpatient surgery is performed at either Musgrave Park Hospital, the North West Clinic or in England if the surgery is performed by certain independent healthcare providers;
 - (c) Appointments with physiotherapists are predominantly provided in Musgrave Park Hospital, but can be anywhere else within the Belfast HSC Trust depending on the waiting time position. Patients residing outside of the Belfast HSC Trust may be referred onwards to their local physiotherapy clinic;
 - (d) If the patient is being supplied with an orthotic from the Musgrave Park Hospital appliance service, it is normally fitted at a clinic near to them, or at Musgrave Park Hospital if that appointment falls first.

Orthopaedic Patients

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the average time it would take for a patient who has been referred for surgery by an orthopaedic surgeon who

practises outside Northern Ireland, to have the surgery carried out; (ii) the location at which the surgery is likely to be performed; and (iii) the total estimated cost to his Department, including flights and accommodation for the patient and any accompanying delegated family member or friend.

(AQW 49/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast HSC Trust is the only HSC Trust in Northern Ireland that is currently referring patients requiring Trauma and Orthopaedic surgery to providers from outside Northern Ireland.

They have advised me that:

- (i) The current average waiting time for patients awaiting Trauma and Orthopaedic surgery with health care providers outside of Northern Ireland is 14.9 weeks.
- (ii) The locations at which this surgery is currently being performed are Guy and St. Thomas' Hospital, London, Sheffield Hospital, and the Sports Injury Clinic, Dublin. Patients are also being referred to the independent sector provider Spire, who have facilities in Liverpool, Elland, Cheshire, Blackpool or Wrexham.
- (iii) The total estimated cost to the Department, for Trauma and Orthopaedic services at all providers outside Northern Ireland for the financial year 2010/11, and the associated patient travel and subsistence costs, was circa £4,588,000.

Republic of Ireland Residents Receiving Hospital Care in Northern Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Republic of Ireland residents have received planned hospital care in Northern Ireland through (i) private funding arrangements; and (ii) contract arrangements in each of the last five years; and what affect this has had on the availability and speed of the provision of care to residents of Northern Ireland.

(AQW 69/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information is not available in the requested format however the number of attendances, where the patient gave an address from the Republic of Ireland, are as follows;

(I) PRIVATE FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Year	Attendances
2006/07	156
2007/08	1523
2008/09	1779
2009/10	1831
2010/11	1547

(II) CONTRACT ARRANGEMENTS

Year	Attendances
2006/07	178
2007/08	481
2008/09	643
2009/10	672
2010/11	1108

The number of Republic of Ireland residents receiving hospital care in Northern Ireland by private funding and contract arrangements is minimal compared to the total inpatient/outpatient attendances

in any year. I have been advised that the treatment of these patients has had no effect on the availability and speed of treatment for residents of NI.

Patients may attend on more than one occasion in a year or over a number of years, therefore the actual number of residents from the Republic of Ireland receiving planned hospital care will be less than the figures above.

Dental Practices

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the concerns expressed by dentists regarding the costs involved, the absence of a tiered fee structure, and the requirement for every dental practice to register as if it were an independent hospital, whether he intends to review the obligations to which general dental practices are now subjected as a consequence of their compulsory registration with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, **(AQW 93/11-15)**

Mr Poots: From 1 April 2011 regulation has been extended to all dental establishments providing private dental care, including orthodontics. The legislation will provide assurance to the public, through regular inspection and monitoring by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) that private dental treatment is delivered to a minimum standard.

The registration of private dental practices within the classification of “independent hospital” is a legislative mechanism to facilitate regulation of the sector, but does not mean that they are treated, in terms of regulation and inspection, as hospitals

The initial registration fee of £952, which was indicated in the consultation prior to making the Regulations, is a one-off fee. Thereafter an annual fee of £46 per dental chair will be charged.

I do not propose to review these arrangements, which are still in the early stages of implementation.

Mental Health Provision in the North Down Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the mental health provision available in the North Down area. **(AQW 104/11-15)**

Mr Poots: A wide range of community mental health services are provided by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in the North Down and Ards areas as well as providing an emergency response to the Ulster Hospital. The teams/services include:

- Assessment Centre and Crisis Response & Home Treatment
- Community Mental Health Team – Ards and Peninsula
- Community Mental Health Team – Bangor/Hollywood
- Home Treatment House
- Psychological Therapies
- Day Hospital/Resource Centre
- Psychology Department

Mental health outpatient clinics are located on the Ards Hospital site and inpatient care is currently delivered through a 24 bedded Mental Health Inpatient Unit at the Ulster Hospital.

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if, and how, he intends to address the concerns of dentists in relation to (i) the updated obligation of the Regulation and Quality

Improvement Authority which classifies general dental practices as independent hospitals; and (ii) the increase in the fee for registering with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority from £263 to £952.
(AQW 105/11-15)

Mr Poots: Regulation has been extended to all dental establishments providing private dental care, including orthodontics, from 1 April 2011. This legislation will provide assurance to the public, through regular inspection and monitoring by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA), that private dental treatment is delivered to a minimum standard.

The registration of private dental practices within the classification of “independent hospital” is a legislative mechanism to facilitate regulation of the sector, but does not mean that they are treated, in terms of regulation and inspection, as hospitals.

The initial registration fee of £952, which has been consistently presented during consultation prior to making the Regulations, is a once-off fee. Thereafter an annual fee of £46 per dental chair will be charged.

The registration application process is being handled by the RQIA, who will respond to any queries raised with them. Concerns about the policy have already been brought to my attention.

George Sloan Adult Centre, Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for his assessment of the results of the inspection of the George Sloan Adult Centre, Ballymena which was carried out by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority; and (ii) what steps the Northern Health and Social Care Trust has taken to address concerns raised during the inspection.

(AQW 106/11-15)

Mr Poots: As a consequence of an Unannounced Inspection of the George Sloan Centre on 13 May 2011, the RQIA carried out a comprehensive Announced Inspection on 24 May 2011. That inspection identified 8 issues which required to be met to allow the centre to conform to Regulations.

A Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) has been developed by the Trust and the Registered Manager of the Centre, which will be fully operational as soon as that plan is agreed by the RQIA.

It is my view that the actions taken by the RQIA, the Trust and the Registered Manager demonstrate the effectiveness and strength of the inspection and reporting arrangements which the RQIA has in place.

Local Enhanced Hospital in Omagh

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the business case for the local enhanced hospital in Omagh has been approved, whether the business case will be issued for public consultation.

(AQW 107/11-15)

Mr Poots: The business case for the Omagh Local Hospital has not yet been approved.

Children with Chronic Orthopaedic Problems

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children with chronic orthopaedic problems have been seen by a Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 111/11-15)

Mr Poots: Patients can be seen by a Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon as either an outpatient or an inpatient.

The Western HSC Trust has advised me that the number of (i) new and review outpatient attendances and (ii) inpatient admissions with a Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon in the Western Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years are as follows:

- (i) The number of new and review outpatient attendances with a Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon at the Western HSC Trust: 2008/09 to 2010/11¹

Year	No. of new outpatient attendances	No. of review outpatient attendances	Total no. of outpatient attendances
2008/09	1,274	930	2,204
2009/10	1,436	882	2,318
2010/11	1,398	1,069	2,467

Source: Western HSC Trust

- 1 Data relate to the number of outpatient attendances. The number of outpatient attendances will not equate to the number of individuals attending an outpatient appointment during the period as individuals may attend more than once.
- (ii) The number of inpatient admissions with a Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon at the Western HSC Trust: 2008/09 to 2010/11

Year	Total number of inpatient admissions
2008/09	123
2009/10	138
2010/11	117

Source: Western HSC Trust

- 1 Data relate to the number of inpatient admissions. The number of inpatient admissions will not equate to the number of individuals admitted for inpatient surgery during the period as individuals may be admitted more than once.

Accident and Emergency Department of the Antrim Area Hospital

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each of the last two years, (i) the number of patients who attended the Accident and Emergency Department of the Antrim Area Hospital; (ii) the average waiting times; (iii) the number of patients who had to wait for over (a) 6 hours; and (b) 12 hours to be seen.

(AQW 118/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on Emergency Care attendances and waiting times is collected and published quarterly and is available from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-activity_stats-2/emergency_care-3.htm

It is not currently possible to provide information for (ii) average waiting times and (iii) (a) the number of patients waiting over 6 hours in A&E, as emergency care waiting times information is collected according to specified time bands (0 to 4 hours, 4 to 12 hours and greater than 12 hours).

Accident and Emergency Department: Trolley Waits

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the number of patients who have attended an accident and emergency department in the last 30 days and have had to spend the night on a trolley following admittance; (ii) what were the reasons for these trolley waits; and (iii) what action he is taking to address this problem.

(AQW 130/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information for parts (i) and (ii) is not readily available at a regional level.

To address waiting times at emergency care departments, my Department has set out the following Priorities for Action target, that:

'From April 2010 the HSC Board and Trusts should ensure 95% of patients attending any A&E department are either treated and discharged home, or admitted within four hours of their arrival in the department. No patient should wait longer than 12 hours'.

Each HSC Trust should determine how best to manage their resources to ensure that the standard is adhered to. However, there are occasions when there is a high volume of attendances at emergency care departments and HSC Trusts have plans in place to deal with such eventualities.

Mid-Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the plans for additional beds at Antrim Area Hospital to meet the demand resulting from the changes to services at the Mid-Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt.

(AQW 137/11-15)

Mr Poots: I fully understand the concerns expressed by people regarding the timely access to services in the Northern Trust. I intend to look at these issues in more detail soon. In the interests of patients, I want to expedite a wider reform agenda where I want to promote a modern service which is underpinned by sound evidence of effectiveness, delivered by skilled staff with access to up-to-date technologies and modern buildings.

The Northern Trust has advised me that the final phase of the transfer of acute inpatient services from Mid Ulster commenced on 17 May 2011 and will be completed by 8 June 2011. A range of service improvements is also underway to reduce the pressure on access to the current beds in Antrim Area Hospital.

To complement these service improvements, the Trust in collaboration with my Department, is putting in place a range of measures to increase future capacity within Antrim Hospital. This includes a new Accident and Emergency Department and a new 24 bedded ward area. But these will not be ready before 2012/13

In the meantime, and in order to provide additional capacity this year, the Trust plans to create 14 additional beds by December 2011.

New Hospital in Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that a receiver has been appointed to the parent company of one of the firms involved in the construction of the new hospital in Enniskillen, what action he is taking to ensure that there is no delay in the completion of the hospital.

(AQW 172/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am fully confident that, as a result of the structures and contractual arrangements which have been put in place, there will be no detrimental effect on the satisfactory and timely completion of this project. Despite the recent reports of financial difficulties for P Elliott, there are no concerns as to the financial status of the project's main contractor - FCC Elliott.

Furthermore, my Department has received assurances from Northern Ireland Health Group, who have contracted with the Western Trust for the overall delivery of the project, that the project will continue to be developed to meet the originally agreed contractual completion date.

New Hospital in Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that a receiver has been appointed to the parent company of one of the firms involved in the construction of the new

hospital in Enniskillen, what action he is taking to ensure that there is no financial detriment to the other contractors working at the hospital.

(AQW 195/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am fully confident that, as a result of the structures and contractual arrangements which have been put in place, there will be no detrimental effect on the satisfactory and timely completion of this project. Despite the recent reports of financial difficulties for P Elliott, there are no concerns as to the financial status of the project's main contractor - FCC Elliott.

Furthermore, my Department has received assurances from Northern Ireland Health Group, who have contracted with the Western Trust for the overall delivery of the project, that the project will continue to be developed to meet the originally agreed contractual completion date.

S2 Certificate Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to answer parts (i), (ii) and (iii) of AQW 46/11-15.

(AQW 293/11-15)

Mr Poots: As indicated in the response to AQW 46/11-15 the information related to parts (i), (ii) and (iii) is held at a UK central level and is not broken down by each UK country.

Department of Justice

Prisoner Assessment Unit, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail any issues of concern in relation to the Prisoner Assessment Unit, Belfast, prior to its closure, including the nature of such issues and when each became apparent.

(AQW 19/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): A number of incidents relating to breaches of regulations occurred between 7 and 18 April 2011 which raised concerns about the operation of the Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) in Belfast.

The incidents involved a small number of life sentenced prisoners who were either accommodated in the PAU or who were in regular attendance at the Unit. As these incidents are currently the subject of an investigation it would be inappropriate to detail the nature of the incidents at this time.

As a result of the concerns raised NIPS management took the decision to close the PAU on a temporary basis and return the prisoners to Maghaberry.

Solicitors Protest Against Fees

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of cases, broken down by court division, which have been through a preliminary enquiry at the Magistrates Court but have been stalled as a result of solicitors coming off record as part of their protest against fees.

(AQW 98/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the number of cases by County Court Division which have been through a preliminary inquiry at the Magistrates' Courts where the solicitors have come off record.

It is not the court practice to record the reason given by a solicitor for coming off record so it is not possible to state categorically that all of these cases represent the outcome of a protest against the introduction of the new legal aid fees.

**CASES RETURNED FOR TRIAL WHERE SOLICITOR HAS COME OFF RECORD
13 APRIL 2011 – 27 MAY 2011**

Belfast	53
Londonderry	12
Antrim	6
Fermanagh and Tyrone	12
Armagh and South Down	13
Ards	23
Craigavon	15
Total	134

Sex Offender

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the case of a sex offender who provided an address of 'a park bench' to detail (i) the category of the offender; (ii) for his assessment of the implications of providing such an address; (iii) how routine monitoring can be carried out when such an address is given; (iv) whether each sex offence and subsequent conviction relating to the offender occurred (a) outside of Northern Ireland; or (b) in Northern Ireland; and (v) the date of each conviction. **(AQW 99/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The sex offender notification requirements in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 provide that, where there is no fixed residence for a person, he may notify the address or location of a place where he can regularly be found. In cases where an individual is homeless and has no place of residence, it is in the best interests of public protection to require him to provide details of an alternative location where he can be found.

Police will visit the area notified and if it is discovered that the information is incorrect, the offender can be proceeded against for breach of the notification requirements, which is a criminal offence with a maximum sentence of five years imprisonment.

The police can also apply to the court for a sexual offences prevention order to place conditions on residence if it is considered necessary to protect the public from serious sexual harm.

I cannot provide details of individual cases.

The Columbia Three

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice if he intends to investigate the whereabouts, in Northern Ireland or in the Republic of Ireland, of those individuals known as 'the Columbia three'; and what steps his Department intends to take to ensure that they are brought back to lawful custody. **(AQW 132/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The processing of non-European Union extradition requests involving Northern Ireland is not a devolved matter and rests with the Home Office.

As a matter of policy and practice the Home Office will neither confirm nor deny the existence of any extradition request ahead of a person's arrest.

It is not for me to comment on the arrangements between the Colombian and Irish authorities on extradition matters.

Convictions for Trespassing and Illegal Entry to a Quarry

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for (i) trespassing in a quarry; and (ii) illegal entry to a quarry in each of the last two years.

(AQW 161/11-15)

Mr Ford: I regret the information requested is not available. Court conviction data do not contain background information in relation to offences committed, and it is therefore not possible to separate out the number of convictions for trespassing in a quarry from other trespassing offences.

Department for Regional Development

New Footpath Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any new footpath schemes planned for the Holywood area.

(AQW 59/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's Roads Service has no plans for new footway schemes in the Holywood area. However, it has advised that there is footway resurfacing programmed for the Holywood area this financial year, which includes the footways at Demesne Road and Brook Street.

Traffic Calming Measures for the Ballymacconnell Road South in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the traffic calming measures for the Ballymacconnell Road South in Bangor.

(AQW 60/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it plans to construct traffic calming measures in Ballymacconnell Road South in conjunction with maintenance work which commenced on 16 May 2011. It is anticipated that this work will be completed before the end of June 2011.

Old Footpaths in the Ashfield Area of Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on proposals to replace old footpaths in the Ashfield area of Donaghadee.

(AQW 61/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has confirmed that it is still its intention to make a start on carrying out footway improvements in the Ashfield Estate, Donaghadee during this financial year.

A26 Between Glarryford and the Frosses/Drones Road Junction

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to prioritise the upgrading of the A26 between Glarryford and the Frosses/Drones Road junction.

(AQW 66/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As Minister for Regional Development, I would like to see improvements across the Strategic Road Network which will enhance safety, reduce journey times and provide value for money.

While funding levels within the current budget do not allow for construction to start before 2014/15 at the earliest, I intend to consider proposed investment across my Department, including the impact of Budget 2010 on the strategic roads programme and explore opportunities to bring forward schemes such as the A26 scheme.

In the meantime, Roads Service will continue to develop the scheme through the normal statutory processes.

A5 Project

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development if he intends to review the priority commitment to proceed with the A5 project, in light of the current budgetary constraints, the absence of a business case and the need for the upgrade of more heavily used roads, such as the A26 and the A2.

(AQW 70/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that the A5 dual carriageway project is being brought forward as part of an agreement between the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, to build a dual carriageway between the border at Aughnacloy and Londonderry and on a section of the A8 between Belfast and Larne. The Irish Government has committed to make a £400 million contribution towards both projects.

I would like to see improvements across the Strategic Road Network which will enhance safety, reduce journey times and provide value for money. Therefore, I intend to consider proposed investment across my Department, including the impact of Budget 2010 on the strategic roads programme. This work will include consideration of the A5 and A8 schemes.

However, the A5 scheme is currently the subject of a public inquiry and I consider it appropriate to wait for the Independent Inspector's report before concluding my deliberations.

With regard to the business case for the A5, in common with the procedure for all major road projects, the business case evolves as the scheme is developed. The economic assessment for the A5 is contained within the scheme development reports which are available on the projects web site: <http://www.a5wtc.com/>. The final business case will be compiled when the scheme has been defined following the public inquiry.

NI Water

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) if he intends to investigate the recent error made by NI Water which led to approximately 1,300 customers being billed incorrectly; and (ii) what measures can be put in place to prevent this happening in the future.

(AQW 73/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Under the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 customer billing is the operational responsibility of Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and is regulated by the Utility Regulator. Indeed the current issue was revealed through a programme of action NIW has been undertaking to improve its data as a result of formal enforcement action by the Utility Regulator following an investigation in 2008. While regrettable, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the errors were discovered through efforts to improve data reliability – something we should all support. The priority is for NIW to implement the necessary improvements.

I have been advised by NIW that, in order to prevent a reoccurrence, they have implemented a number of actions. These include (a) initiation of a comprehensive check of metered supply pipes (b) plans to check all non-domestic customer pipe sizes as part of the normal meter reading schedule (c) plans to revise procedures to ensure the accurate recording and cross checking of both pipe and meter size at all new connections and (d) plans to introduce improvements for recording meter and pipe size in the billing system.

NI Water: Customers

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many NI Water customers who were recently billed incorrectly were overcharged.

(AQW 83/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that metered water customers pay a standing charge based on the internal diameter of the supply pipe to premises and a variable charge based on the volume recorded by the meter. An on-going programme to improve data quality discovered that the supply pipe diameter has been recorded inaccurately for around two percent of metered water

customers, resulting in some customers being overcharged and some undercharged for the standing charge element of the bill.

NIW is currently surveying the premises of customers who may be affected by the inaccurate standing charge, but will not be in a position to determine precisely how many have been overcharged until the exercise is completed around Autumn 2011.

Lough Cowey, Portaferry

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) under what terms NI water, or the Water Service, acquired Lough Cowey, Portaferry from Ards Borough Council, (ii) whether the acquisition was free of charge, requiring its return to the Council when NI Water no longer had a use for it; and (iii) if not free of charge, what price did NI Water pay for this public asset.

(AQW 84/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that (i) Lough Cowey reservoir was transferred to its predecessor Water Service when it became the sole water and sewerage authority in Northern Ireland following the reorganisation of Local Government on 1 October 1973. Prior to 1973, water and sewerage services were provided by 79 local authorities. The reservoir transferred to NIW following the establishment of the company on 1 April 2007. (ii) There was no charge for the transfer and no requirement that the reservoir be returned to the Council when no longer in use.

Cannyreagh Road in Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if there are plans to resurface the Cannyreagh Road in Donaghadee.

(AQW 87/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it currently has no plans to resurface Cannyreagh Road, Donaghadee.

Footpath Resurfacing Scheme in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the timescale for the completion of the footpath resurfacing scheme in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 89/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the scheme involving the reconstruction of the footway and replacement of the steps, undertaken in Kearney Mews, Carrickmannin, Balligan and Kilciffe Gardens, within Kilcooley Estate, was completed on 31 May 2011.

Loughview Village, Carrickfergus

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he intends, under the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980, to adopt the streets in Loughview Village, Carrickfergus so that salt boxes can be provided for next winter.

(AQW 90/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a preliminary certificate of completion for the roads within Loughview Village was issued in January 2007, which included a list of defects that required attention by the developer before a final adoption certificate can be issued. However, to date, the developer has not requested the issue of the final certificate of adoption.

Roads Service recently inspected the roads within the development and identified some defects that would need to be repaired prior to adoption. Unfortunately, it appears that the developer is not prepared to carry out these repairs, therefore, Roads Service will issue an Article 11 enforcement, under the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980, to have the roads completed to adoption standard.

With regard to requests for salt boxes in adopted streets, I am advised that a comprehensive process is used to assess all requests for salt boxes, this takes into account the road layout, gradient and residential/community welfare issues. Salt boxes are not provided on streets where the gradient is less than 5% and as the topography in Loughview Village is generally flat, this minimum criterion would not be met.

A2 Upgrade

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to reverse the decision not to progress with the A2 upgrade.

(AQW 91/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would like to see improvements across the Strategic Road Network which will enhance safety, reduce journey times and provide value for money.

Therefore, I intend to consider proposed investment across my Department, including the impact of Budget 2010 on the strategic roads programme, and explore opportunities for bringing forward schemes such as the A2 Shore Road, Greenisland project.

Access for People with Disabilities at Bus and Railway Stations

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any additional provision planned to increase access for people with disabilities at bus and railway stations.

(AQW 100/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has recently upgraded stations and halts across the railways network to make them compliant with Disability Discrimination legislation. My Department provided the funding of £18m for the project, which also included work to upgrade the stations and halts in accordance with Translink's New Rail Vision.

In addition, the Department has given approval to Translink to proceed with the redevelopment of Antrim Integrated Bus and Rail station. This will increase access for people with disabilities. Translink are preparing a Business Case to address ongoing accessibility issues at Portadown Railway station. The Business Case will be subject to approval by my Department. It is expected that work will start on this project in this financial year.

Translink are currently undertaking a programme of work at bus stations to improve access for people with disabilities. This work is due to be completed this summer.

Access for People with Disabilities at Bridge End Railway Station, Belfast

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any plans his Department has to improve access for people with disabilities at Bridge End Railway Station, Belfast.

(AQW 101/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As part of the New Trains Two platform extension project, Translink are developing proposals to have ramped access to both platforms at Bridge End halt. The works are planned to be carried out within the next 18 months.

Wastewater Treatment Works in Ballynahinch

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the upgrade of the wastewater treatment works in Ballynahinch, including the expected date of completion.

(AQW 108/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it is progressing an appraisal study for the upgrade of Ballynahinch Wastewater Treatment Works which is expected to be completed by the end of June 2011. The current target date for commencement of construction work is January 2012 with an expected completion date of June 2013, subject to the satisfactory completion of all statutory processes.

Annual Maintenance Cost of a Dual Carriageway Elevated Crossing

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average annual maintenance cost of a dual carriageway elevated crossing, including the maintenance cost of (i) the bridge structure; and (ii) the associated approach roads.

(AQW 128/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that each dual carriageway elevated crossing and its associated approach roads is unique, in that the annual maintenance costs will vary depending on numerous factors, such as the length and nature of the approach roads. For this reason, it is not possible to determine the average annual maintenance cost of such structures, or in respect of the associated approach roads.

I should advise that all roads have annual routine maintenance costs, such as grass cutting and gully emptying. The annual cost of these operations will again depend on numerous factors, for example, the tendered contract rates in a given area at any particular time.

In addition, even with regular care and attention, a road will eventually begin to wear and will require varying levels of maintenance throughout its lifespan from reactive patching, resurfacing to the possibility of eventual reconstruction.

Other factors affecting maintenance costs will include weather and ground conditions, durability of materials, number of road openings by utilities and traffic volume and mix, such as Heavy Goods Vehicles.

Door-to-Door Transport Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) which user groups were consulted on the renewal of the provision for of the Door-to-Door Transport service; and (ii) whether a decision has been made about the future of the service.

(AQW 141/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

- (i) A customer satisfaction survey was carried out amongst 3000 Door-to-Door Transport scheme members in autumn 2009 to identify any issues with current services and to suggest improvements in advance of re-tendering the service.

My Department also consulted the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC), a body established to advise government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people, about the future of Door-to-Door Transport in February 2010.

A social evaluation to assess Door-to-Door Transport was also conducted in 2010. This included a survey of some members and a final report was provided to the Department in August 2010. The report made recommendations to enhance the benefits of the scheme and to address poor uptake.

- (ii) The Department sought to tender services in 28 of the 29 urban centres in which Door-to-Door transport is currently available. Eight bids were received in February 2011 and Intention to Award Letters were issued in April 2011 to two organisations. However one of the unsuccessful bidders has brought a legal challenge which has prevented the Department from awarding the contracts. Whilst the legal issues are being resolved, arrangements have been made with existing service providers to ensure services continue with no disruption to members.

Door-to-Door Transport Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether a contract has been signed for the provision of the Door-to-Door Transport service, and on what date; and (ii) whether he intends to make an announcement in relation to the new contract.

(AQW 143/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

- (i) My Department recently undertook a procurement exercise to deliver Door-to-Door transport services in 28 urban areas across Northern Ireland. The contract which was in place expired on 24 May 2011.

Two preferred bidders were identified and Intention to Award letters issued in April 2011. However a legal challenge was brought by one of the unsuccessful bidders which has prevented the Department from awarding the contracts as planned.

Interim arrangements have been made with the previous service providers to ensure services continue on the same basis as previous arrangements.

- (ii) I have recently written to all Door-to-Door members to advise them of the current position regarding services. I may make a further public announcement if this is necessary but taking account of the legal process underway.

Salt and Grit Stock

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the measures that are in place to ensure that there will be adequate salt and grit available during the winter months in the North Down area.

(AQW 152/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that salt stock levels in the existing storage barns at Balloo Depot, Bangor, will be maximised during the summer months. Roads Service is also currently arranging to secure additional storage within each of its Divisions as a resilience measure for the forthcoming winter season.

Sewage Overflow Problems at Oakfield Drive in the Glenfield Estate, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any plans he has to resolve the ongoing sewage overflow problems at Oakfield Drive in the Glenfield Estate, Carrickfergus.

(AQW 182/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it responded to an out-of-sewer flooding incident in April 2011 at Sullatober Square, off Oakfield Drive, when a number of inappropriate items including bottles and wood were removed from the sewer serving the area. The items, which appear to have been intentionally deposited into the sewer via a displaced manhole cover, were removed and the sewer was desilted. A subsequent CCTV survey found the sewer to be operating normally.

Department for Social Development

Dunclug area of Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what plans he has for the Dunclug area of Ballymena over the next four years.

(AQW 43/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Dunclug Dedicated Community Fund will continue for the next three financial years. £117,700 of the money allocated to this Fund remains to be spent over that period. I would encourage the Dunclug Partnership to bring forward proposals which meet the funding criteria and which will make best use of this funding. In addition, there are plans through the NIHE to refurbish the Dunclug Neighbourhood Centre within the current financial year.

Ballyree Drive Area in Bloomfield Estate, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development when the new safety wall for the Ballyree Drive area in Bloomfield Estate, Bangor will be built.

(AQW 85/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The building of a retaining wall at Ballyree Drive commenced on 11 May 2011 and is expected to last for 12 weeks.

Flats at Rathgill Park, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans his Department has to refurbish the flats at Rathgill Park, Bangor.

(AQW 86/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are 16 flats in total in Rathgill Park, 12 Housing Executive and 4 owner occupier properties.

The Housing Executive flats had initially been programmed for a Multi Element Improvement scheme that would have seen significant work undertaken to upgrade homes in the area. However due to pressures across the housing budget, this scheme, along with all other Multi Element Improvement schemes, are now being reviewed.

Part of this review will include looking at what improvements may be possible as part of the Housing Executives ongoing revenue improvement work. I will also want to evaluate the recent pilot undertaken in Rinmore that may also provide an alternative method of delivering these sort of improvements that are long overdue for residents.

Fair Rents Officer

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to make provision for a Fair Rents Officer to adjudicate in the private rental sector, as is currently available in Great Britain.

(AQW 126/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have no plans to make provision for a Fair Rents Officer in Northern Ireland.

The Rent Officer for Northern Ireland is responsible for administering the rent control system introduced by the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

Rent Control applies to:

- (i) All protected and statutory tenancies; and
- (ii) All tenancies commencing after 1 April 2007 where the property was built before 1945 and it does not meet the fitness standard.

Extreme Weather Conditions

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the Housing Executive's capability to deal with any extreme weather conditions in the forthcoming winter in order to avoid a repeat of the difficulties experienced in the winter of 2010/11.

(AQW 133/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am very aware of the difficulties experienced by tenants following the extreme weather conditions during the winter of 2010/11. Housing Executive staff and contractors dealt with an unprecedented volume of calls with 41,546 repair orders raised for 25,462 properties across the province.

Following this period of adverse weather, a review of performance has been carried out and in light of the lessons learned, the Housing Executive revised its Emergency and Business Continuity Plans, as well as those prepared by its maintenance contractors. The plans address the response required to

increased telephony requirements and the contractors' response to increased workload both within and outside of working hours during periods of high service demand. In addition the plans consider other types of emergency which may occur and the nature of responses required. The Housing Executive has also completed a review of lessons learned which highlighted a number of areas where additional physical works, including insulation and heating related matters, could be undertaken to mitigate the risk of reoccurrence in the event of further bouts of adverse weather. Over the next few months they will conduct a formal test of the emergency plans and response procedures to refine and assist in preparations for future emergency events such as adverse weather conditions.

Kilcooley Estate in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development which areas of the Kilcooley Estate in Bangor are still undergoing work as part of Neighbourhood Renewal.

(AQW 140/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has been carrying out a significant programme of works in the Kilcooley estate representing an investment of approximately £2 million. This comprises a multi element improvement and external cyclical maintenance scheme involving 85 homes, which was completed in November 2010; a kitchen upgrade scheme involving 45 homes in Fern Grove, which has just been completed; and a heating improvement scheme involving 59 properties, which is due to be completed at the end of May.

DSD, through the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund, continues to fund projects in the Kilcooley Neighbourhood Renewal Area. Projects which are currently being financed are the Kilcooley Community Forum salaries and running costs, Kilcooley Primary School nurturing unit, Kilcooley Women's Centre adult education programme, Bangor Alternatives (Community Restorative Justice) part salaries and running costs for non protocol work and the Technical Assistance support to the Neighbourhood Partnership Board.

Bangor Social Security Office

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his plans for the future provision of services at Bangor Social Security Office.

(AQW 169/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Bangor is one of 8 remaining offices still to be converted to a Jobs & Benefits office. Although the Social Security Agency bid for £37.3 million to complete the remaining 8 Jobs & Benefits offices, including Bangor, we have been unsuccessful in securing capital funding. It will, therefore, not be possible to deliver a new Jobs & Benefits office in Bangor during the current spending review period.

In anticipation of a capital funding shortfall it was agreed that contingency options should be explored for the delivery of key elements of the Jobs & Benefits service from existing Social Security offices and Jobcentres. It has emerged, however, that contingency options while lower cost, would also require significant capital investment and cannot be progressed.

While it is not possible to deliver bespoke Jobs & Benefits offices in each of the remaining 8 locations, it is instead proposed that potential for delivering Jobs & Benefits services in these locations will be progressed on a case by case basis as opportunities arise. In the meantime staff in the Social Security Agency will continue to deliver a high quality service from their current location at 110 Hamilton Road.

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Published by Authority of the Northern Ireland Assembly,
Belfast: The Stationery Office

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ISSN 1463-7162

Daily Editions: Single copies £5, Annual subscriptions £325

Bound Volumes of Debates are issued periodically during the session: Single copies: £90

Printed in Northern Ireland by The Stationery Office Limited

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ISBN 978-0-339-70210-3



9 780339 702103