

Written Answers to Questions

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 13 January 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Social Protection Fund

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much of the £20 million Social Protection Fund will be allocated in advance of the January 2012 Monitoring Round.

(AQW 3846/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Executive proposed a Social Protection Fund (SPF) to mitigate the impact of the financial cuts on the most vulnerable in our society.

Acknowledging that exceptional circumstances existed in relation to vulnerable individuals as a result of the impact of increased household energy costs, including on those who are already likely to experience high levels of fuel poverty, the Executive subsequently identified the delivery of a Winter Poverty Payment Scheme as the key priority this year for the Social Protection Fund.

On 8 December the Executive further agreed that the full £20 million SPF budget would be used to contribute towards the Winter Poverty Payment Scheme which will be distributed through DSD and DHSSPS. It is expected that payments will be made in early February 2012.

Capital Investment

Ms S Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a breakdown of the gross capital investment of £1.4 billion in 2007-08 as outlined in the draft Programme for Government.

(AQW 5575/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The £1.4 billion gross capital investment for 2007-08 referred to in the draft Programme for Government relates to the final outturn for that year. This is detailed by department in the table below:

Department/ Office	2007-08 £m
Assembly Ombudsman and NI Commissioner for Complaints	24
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	56,341
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	28,069
Department of Education	165,464
Department for Employment and Learning	54,301
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	46,795
Department of Finance and Personnel	51,099
Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety	192,500

Department/ Office	2007-08 £m
Department of the Environment	10,280
Department for Rural Development	377,641
Department for Social Development	402,700
Food Standards Agency	21
NI Assembly	1,817
NI Audit Office	325
NI Authority for Utility Regulation	80
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	2,711
Total	1,390,168

Tackling Child Poverty

Mr Gardiner asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how successfully the previous Programme for Government targets were met in relation to tackling child poverty.

(AQO 984/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A Monitoring Framework for Lifetime Opportunities, the broad architecture and principles of which the previous Executive adopted as its anti poverty and social inclusion strategy, was published on the 14th October 2010.

Detailed within the Monitoring Framework was an assessment of progress against the Programme for Government commitment to reduce by half child relative income poverty by 2010/11.

We measure poverty in three different ways – relative, mixed and absolute. The assessment contained within the Monitoring Framework was that, whilst child relative income poverty rates had fallen in comparison to the 1998/99 baseline, on the basis of current trends, it is unlikely that the rate of child relative income poverty would be halved by 2010/11. However, the table below shows the decrease in absolute child poverty:

Year	Absolute poverty %
1998/99	29
2002/03	19
2003/04	16
2004/05	17
2005/06	17
2006/07	12
2007/08	16
2008/09	17
2009/10	18

The most up to date levels of child poverty here are outlined within the latest Family Resources Survey (2009/10) which was published on 30 November 2011 and we will take full account of this information when finalising our Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 requires us to lay annual reports before the Assembly. We will publish our first Annual Report in March 2012, and this will set out the progress we have made towards eradicating child poverty by 2020.

Decade of Commemorations

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what preparations are being made to mark the upcoming decade of commemorations in a shared manner; and whether they are examining the proposed approaches of other institutions such as Belfast City Council.

(AQW 5988/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This year will be the start of a decade of centenary anniversaries of seminal events and significant milestones in the shared history of the UK and Ireland.

The manner in which these historic events are marked publicly will be very important in preserving the current stability and in building a peaceful, stable and shared future. The Assembly, working together with the British and Irish Governments, along with local councils and other interested groups can ensure that the events are marked in appropriate and sensitive ways.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has established a Project Steering Group to commemorate the 400th and 100th anniversaries that occur in the period 2012-2022. It will be focusing on key themes including: Plantation; Titanic; and 1912-1922.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Funding for Community Groups to Celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding opportunities her Department provides to community groups who wish to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

(AQW 5939/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I am supportive of an inclusive approach to commemorations. I endorse the principles developed by the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund to remember the past in the context of an inclusive and accepting society.

My officials explored the potential of the Community Festival Fund being used by local councils to support community-led commemorative activities. Some councils were supportive while others expressed concern this would impact on their ability to assist the diverse range of community events already supported by the Fund. Therefore individual councils can decide whether to support commemorative activity but they should engage with the Community Relations Council and Heritage Lottery Fund to ensure an inclusive approach.

International Commitments and the EU Habitats Directive

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given the concerns about Northern Ireland's breach of international commitments and the EU Habitats Directive, whether she intends to issue licences this year for the netting of salmon off the coast.

(AQW 6226/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Departmental officials have written to all DCAL licensed commercial fishermen operating coastal fishing engines asking that they do not apply for renewal of their licences in 2012. If they agree to do so this would result in a temporary voluntary cessation of commercial coastal salmon fishing.

The Department awaits the responses of the operators and will consider the way forward in light of those responses.

Department of Education

Pre-school Places

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, given that the Executive has pledged to provide pre-school places for all children and that Orchard County Primary School, Portadown, has received a total of 34 applicants to avail of nursery provision in September 2012 but is unable to provide sufficient places, why he has rejected the school's application for increased facilities.

(AQW 4774/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Draft Programme for Government includes a commitment to provide one year of funded pre-school education for every child whose parent wants to avail of it. This is consistent with the aim of the Department's Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP), which was launched in 1998.

In the 2011/2012 school year there are over 23,000 children in funded pre-school education provision and DE is currently working with Education and Library Boards to ensure an adequate number of funded pre-school places are available in future years. If necessary, additional capacity in the pre-school education sector may be achieved through several options such as the creation of new/additional statutory nursery units or by the allocation of additional funded places in voluntary and private pre-school settings participating in the PSEEP.

I had initially turned down a proposal to establish a new nursery unit at Orchard County PS as the original analysis of the development proposal suggested that the existing provision in the area was sufficient. Subsequently, an error was discovered in the information originally presented to me in the statistical data used to calculate the existing level of provision in the area.

Having reviewed the information, I announced on 21 December 2011, that I had approved the establishment of a 26 place part-time nursery unit at Orchard County PS. No other development proposals are affected by this error.

Pre-school Places

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education, in light of the commitment in the draft Programme for Government, (i) when there will be enough pre-school places to meet demand; and (ii) whether he will remove the criteria that gives preference to those children with birthdays in July and August and those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, so that the entrance criteria is similar to that for entrance into P1.

(AQW 5930/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Draft Programme for Government includes a commitment to provide one year of funded pre-school education for every child whose parent wants to avail of it. This is consistent with the aim of the Department's Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP) which was launched in 1998.

The pre-school year is a non-compulsory phase of education. In the 2011/2012 school year there are over 23,000 children in funded pre-school education provision. However, it is not always possible to make a place available in the setting expressed by a parent as the first preference.

DE is currently working with Education and Library Boards to ensure an adequate number of funded pre-school places are available in future years. If necessary, additional capacity in the pre-school education sector may be achieved through several options such as the creation of new/additional statutory nursery units or by the allocation of additional funded places in voluntary and private pre-school settings participating in the PSEEP.

The review of pre-school which I announced in the Assembly in June has looked at the arrangements for admission to pre-school, including the operation of the two priority criteria referred to in the question. I am currently considering the report and plan to make an announcement on this review shortly.

Education in the Irish-Medium Sector

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of how the quality of children's education in the Irish-medium sector would be affected if the responsibility of translating the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment documents for the Irish-medium sector were to be transferred to teachers in the Irish-medium sector.

(AQW 6113/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While the IM sector will continue to develop materials to support the education of pupils, it is important that the demands of this do not take up too large a proportion of teachers' time. Therefore, in line with the recommendations of the Review of Irish Medium Education, my Department commissioned the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) to increase the availability of curriculum support materials for the IM sector.

This programme supports all IM primary and post primary schools/units. Since 2009 a wide range and substantial volume of curricular resources have been developed and CCEA has engaged with representative groups and practitioners to identify priorities and work programmes and outcomes have reflected this.

Placing responsibility for this and CCEA's other work in support of the IM sector on examinations and statutory assessment for example, directly on to schools would represent an unacceptable burden and would risk having a significant negative impact on pupils' education.

Irish-Medium Pre-Schools

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage increase from 2001 to 2011 in the number of pupils attending Irish-medium (i) pre-schools; (ii) naiscoilleana ; (iii) bunscoilleana ; (iv) meanscoilleana; and (v) units in English-medium post-primary schools.

(AQW 6114/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

ENROLMENTS IN IRISH MEDIUM EDUCATION IN 2001/02 AND 2011/12

Year	Voluntary and private pre-school centres ¹	Nursery units in primary schools ²	Primary ³		Post primary	
			Schools	Units	Schools	Units
2001/02	338	n/a	1,421	n/a	342	n/a
2011/12	473	284	2,191	682	550	212
Increase in numbers	135	n/a	770	n/a	208	n/a
% increase	39.9	n/a	54.2	n/a	60.8	n/a

Source: School census

Note:

- Figures for voluntary and private pre-school centres relate to funded pupils only.
- Figures for nursery classes in primary schools include 26 pupils who are enrolled in an Irish medium unit at an English Medium school.
- Figures for primary schools include children in reception and Year 1 – Year 7 classes.
- Figures for enrolments in Irish medium units were not collected in 2001/02.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the schools which have availed of the Primary Languages Programme in each of the last three years, including the languages chosen by each school.
(AQW 6115/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have arranged for the Information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Area-Based Planning Process

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education whether the terms of reference for the area-based planning process will include investigating creative, shared education models.

(AQW 6151/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have commissioned the Education and Library Boards, working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and engaging extensively with other school sectors, to develop collective strategic plans on an area basis. The terms of reference for the area planning were issued to the Boards and CCMS on 15 December 2011 and can be accessed on my Department's website.

One of the aims/objectives under the Terms of Reference is to identify realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross sectoral basis. However, the degrees of sharing may be different to reflect local circumstances.

I have also given a commitment in the draft Programme for Government to establish a Ministerial advisory group to explore and bring forward recommendations before the end of 2012/13 to advance shared education. I aim to establish this group by 1 April 2012.

Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the role of the Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team (ESAIT) in the transition to the Education and Skills Authority (ESA); (ii) the cost of ESAIT to date; and (iii) the projected cost of ESAIT in the period up to ESA becoming (a) operational and (b) fully functioning.

(AQW 6170/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The ESA Implementation Team was created to support the design of, and transition to, the Education and Skills Authority (ESA).

This work includes the design of a single new regional authority to replace the current organisations, modernising a range of existing services and upgrading ICT in a number of areas including Finance and HR.

The original implementation date for ESA was 1 April 2008. Subsequent implementation dates were 1 April 2009 and 1 January 2010. Despite delays, the Department still required to plan for the implementation of ESA

The cost of ESAIT to date is shown in the table below, as provided in response to AQW 972/11

	05-06 £'000	06-07 £'000	07-08 £'000	08-09 £000	09-10 £'000	10-11* £'000	Totals £'000
ESA Implementation Team	-	258	1,032	1,909	2,697	2,314	8,210

* Figures for 2010-11 are as at 31 March 2011 and are unaudited.

ESAIT's budget for the current financial year is £1.736m.

The budget exercise for the 2012-13 financial year has not yet started.

When ESA is operational, ESAIT will cease to exist.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to detail the role of Education and Library Board senior management in the transition to the Education and Skills Authority.

(AQW 6172/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The transition to ESA is a major reform programme which affects the whole of the education sector. The leaders of the current organisations have an important role to ensure that their organisations continue to operate effectively during the transition period, delivering services in line with the Department's policies and ensuring staff are well prepared for transition.

The ESA Chair and CEO Designate will engage regularly with the Senior Management Teams in the affected organisations to seek their views on the way forward.

ESAIT will also require the support and participation of senior management and their staff in the organisations as project teams are created to develop the regional services for ESA.

It is important that the organisations work together with the ESA Implementation Team.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to outline the difference between the Education and Skills Authority being operational and fully functioning.

(AQW 6173/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There is no substantive difference between the meaning of the terms 'operational' and 'fully functioning' in relation to the Education and Skills Authority. Their use in the draft Programme for Governance indicates that the ESA will be established by 1st April 2013, and will be fully functioning from that point on.

Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Policy

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on progress made against the five key actions outlined in his Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy.

(AQW 6178/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since the policy was launched in March 2011 good progress has been made and implementation of the new policy commenced in September 2011. The focus has been on progressing enabling actions, including development of guidance and an indicator framework which can be used to baseline and assess progress. The guidance and indicator framework have now been agreed and are expected to launch imminently.

A dedicated website (www.CREDNI.org) has been launched to support implementation of the policy and disseminate good practice. Education & Library Boards (ELBs) are leading on the development of a regional training strategy to ensure educators have the skills and experience to deliver curricular requirements relating to community relations, equality and diversity (CRED) and skills training is expected to get underway in 2012/13. In addition, ELBs are currently undertaking awareness sessions on the policy with schools and youth organisations.

ELBs have completed the application and award stages of CRED Enhancement Scheme, which provides funding to assist in delivery of relevant programmes within schools and youth organisations. Projects involving meaningful contact between young people, from a diverse range of backgrounds, including on a cross community basis, have commenced.

A joint Youth and Schools Interboard Panel, which reports to the Senior Education Officers Group, has been established by the Education and Library Boards to oversee implementation of the policy.

Transfer Tests

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to outline the legal implications for a school if it prepares P7 pupils for transfer tests, whilst neglecting the educational needs of other P7 pupils who are not taking transfer tests.

(AQW 6203/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education's guidance on post-primary transfer, published on 5 July 2010, was issued under Article 16B of the 1997 Education Order as amended by Article 30 of the 2006 Education Order. This legislation places a statutory duty on schools to "have regard to" guidance issued under it. The guidance on post-primary transfer recommends "that primary schools do not prepare their children for unregulated entrance tests". The first legal implication for a school which does not follow the guidance is that it is required to be able to demonstrate how it has had regard to the guidance.

Secondly, schools have statutory obligations to deliver the primary curriculum as defined in Articles 4-9 of the 2006 Education Order. Measures exist to enforce these obligations including Curriculum Complaints Tribunals which can require schools to take steps to fulfil their obligations.

Department for Employment and Learning

Catholic Certificate of Religious Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 5393/11-15, why students from Stranmillis University College, Belfast, who wish to sit the Catholic Certificate of Religious Education cannot avail of this at St Mary's University College, Belfast, instead of distance learning from Glasgow University.

(AQW 6104/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I understand that the Certificate of Religious Education is taught as an integral part of the Bachelor of Education and Post Graduate Certificate of Education courses at St. Mary's University College. As such it is not currently possible to accommodate students from other institutions although delivery of the Certificate of Religious Education will be examined as part of the forthcoming review of the teacher training landscape which I announced in November 2011.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Assistance to Establish Luxury Bed and Breakfast and Guest House Accommodation

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance is available for anyone seeking to establish luxury bed and breakfast and guest house accommodation, particularly in tourist areas.

(AQW 5677/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Financial support for guesthouses is targeted at developments on brown field sites in traditional seaside towns and for high quality "country house type" accommodation in existing habitable properties.

Useful information packs providing start up guidance for new B&B and guesthouses are available on www.nitb.com. The site also provides a wealth of other information including market intelligence, publications, master classes and seminars.

Potential accommodation providers will also find much useful business information on the Invest NI sponsored www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk site.

While support may be available for the establishment of a guesthouse, Invest NI does not provide financial support for new start B&B businesses.

Invest NI support policy reflects Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) view of market trends and visitor preferences.

NITB has commissioned Oxford Economics to model future need for tourist accommodation, aligned to future demand and the Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020. This work is underway and may potentially lead to a change in intervention policy.

In addition, under the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Rural Development Programme funding cannot be offered to create new bed and breakfast guesthouse establishments or additional bed spaces within an existing bed and breakfast guesthouse facility. Assistance can be offered to help the bed and breakfast provider improve the guesthouse facilities, for example adding en suite facilities to existing bedrooms, adding a separate dining area and in some areas depending on the type of visitor utilising the facility storage and drying area for outdoor pursuits and wet weather equipment.

The Axis 3 measures, of the NI Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, are delivered by seven Joint Council Committees working in partnership with their appointed Local Action Group. The Londonderry East area covers the operational area of two Joint Council Committees. North East (NER) Joint Council Committee is responsible for implementing the Axis 3 measures in the Coleraine area. Andrew McAlister, NER rural development manager can be contacted at Ecos Centre, Millinium Environmental Centre, Kernohan's Lane, Broughshane Road, Ballymena, BT43 7QA; telephone 028 2563 8263; or email northeast.rdp@ballymena.gov.uk. ARC North West Joint Council Committee is responsible for implementing the Axis 3 measures in the Limavady area. Claudine McGuigan, ARC rural development manager can be contacted at the Omagh District Council Offices, The Grange, Mountjoy Road, Omagh, BT79 7BL; telephone 028 8225 0202 or email claudine.mcguigan@omagh.gov.uk.

Bankruptcy Cases

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of bankruptcy cases in each year since 2005, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 6158/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below shows the number of people declared bankrupt broken down by constituency and financial year since 14 October 2006 to the present (10 January 2012)

Constituency	Financial Year					
	06/07(1)	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12(2)
Belfast East	23	43	60	69	76	43
Belfast North	40	42	56	65	49	53
Belfast South	41	52	74	64	74	65
Belfast West	29	70	63	59	68	61
East Antrim	46	39	50	56	71	36
East Londonderry	23	50	49	71	73	75
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	35	40	55	70	83	78
Foyle	56	46	89	84	107	71
Lagan Valley	45	46	54	69	82	71

Constituency	Financial Year					
	06/07(1)	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12(2)
Mid Ulster	47	49	74	63	62	59
Newry & Armagh	45	56	53	74	86	75
North Antrim	35	50	56	70	82	47
North Down	51	60	62	74	91	75
South Antrim	31	37	47	43	58	63
South Down	42	73	78	69	94	87
Strangford	44	33	62	59	77	53
Upper Bann	39	58	55	66	69	48
West Tyrone	37	33	62	64	88	62
Unknown(3)	40	29	56	61	66	42
Total Number of Bankruptcies	749	906	1155	1250	1456	1164
Percentage of available data	95%	97%	95%	95%	95%	96%

- (1) The constituency breakdown of bankruptcies is only available from 14 October 2006. To obtain this information prior to 14 October 2006, would necessitate examination of each individual case file, the cost of which would be disproportionate.
- (2) 2011/2012 bankruptcies up to 10 January 2012.
- (3) The number of bankruptcies where postcode data was unavailable

Department of the Environment

Fly-Posting

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's programme to introduce regulations to implement the new provisions on fly-posting included in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(AQW 103/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (NI) 2011 is a detailed and complex Act covering a wide range of local environmental quality issues. A significant body of subordinate legislation, guidance and Code of Practice documents is necessary to support the implementation of the Act and to help district councils to get the most out of the new powers they will have under the Act.

In accordance with a commitment given to the Environment Committee by the Department during the Committee Stage of the Bill, a series of public consultation exercises is being carried out on the various measures in the Act. A consultation exercise on draft statutory guidance on Defacement Removal Notices to help combat graffiti and fly-posting is currently underway and is due to end on 16 February 2012.

In response to a request made by a number of councils during the consultation exercise on the draft Bill, it is proposed, as was the case in England and Wales with the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, to provide for a one year lead in time to April 2012. This timeline reflects the heavy workload necessary for full implementation of the Act but more importantly, however, will allow councils sufficient time to consider the implications of the new powers, make the necessary changes to working practices and arrange staff training.

To take account of the concerns expressed by councils that they would be overwhelmed by all of the consultation exercises being carried out concurrently, the issuing of the consultation documents has been staggered throughout 2011. This has enabled the substantial volume of work involved to be managed effectively and allowed councils and the Environment Committee adequate time to consider the content of each consultation document.

Ministerial Interventions in Relation to Planning Applications

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of Ministerial interventions in relation to planning applications in each of the last 12 months.

(AQW 362/11-15)

Mr Attwood: While the majority of planning decisions are delegated to officials, the Minister can intervene in individual cases if he considers it appropriate. While the Department's electronic data storage and retrieval system for planning applications can provide data on a number of topics (for example applications refused per council district), I have to advise that the Department did not have a system to record separately the number of times a Minister intervened in individual planning applications over the period referred to before.

I have instructed the Permanent Secretary to put in place a system whereby a record is kept of the number of items of correspondence on planning issues received, the number of requests for meetings, the number of meetings, the date/time/place/attendees of meetings, the taking of and retention of a note of the meeting, details of any Ministerial decisions/follow up action etc. This should constitute good process and accountability.

Ministerial interventions in planning issues are most frequently prompted by issues raised by elected representatives, applicants or objectors to particular applications, or by members of the public. The number of such cases raised with the Minister through correspondence or requests for meetings on planning issues therefore provides some indication of the overall numbers of interventions (although the receipt of a letter or meeting request will not always prompt an intervention). The figures below provide this information for the twelve month period prior to the date of the Question.

Month	Number of items of correspondence on planning issues	Number of meeting requests / invitations received on planning issues
June 2010	21	15
July 2010	21	19
August 2010	28	15
September 2010	51	25
October 2010	26	11
November 2010	26	29
December 2010	26	16
January 2011	21	14
February 2011	29	15

Month	Number of items of correspondence on planning issues	Number of meeting requests / invitations received on planning issues
March 2011	37	12
April 2011	16	6
May 2011	37	27
Total	339	204

Therefore for the period June 2010 to May 2011 the Minister's office received 339 pieces of correspondence and 204 meeting / invitation requests in respect of planning matters. Finally I would point out that the above data would not include any case where an intervention was initiated by the Minister of the Environment without a prior letter/invitation.

Proposed Changes to MOT Tests

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the financial impact of the proposed changes to MOT tests on small automobile repair shops.

(AQW 4551/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The proposed changes to MOT tests should have a negligible impact on small automobile repair shops. While the MOT test changes include checks of malfunction indicator lights, many repair shops already have the diagnostic equipment and systems required to ensure that they can deal with auto-electronic system failures or already have access to such equipment at other locations. Many of the other tests are developments and the wider application of a number of existing tests which should cause limited new expense or demands on existing mechanics.

Protecting Protected Species

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on protecting (i) bats; (ii) otters; and (iii) other protected species in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4591/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is not possible to separate out the total resources allocated to protected species from all natural heritage activities carried out within the Department. The following activities all contribute to the conservation of protected species:

- (i) responding to planning consultations;
- (ii) monitoring and managing designated sites;
- (iii) undertaking research and surveys;
- (iv) grant aiding the activities of NGOs;
- (v) controlling pollution in rivers, lakes and seas; and
- (vi) development of new legislation and policy.

However, the table below provides details of the funding that can be identified as attributable to specific projects associated with the protection of species.

Financial Year	Projects Funded by NIEA on Bats	Projects Funded by NIEA on Otters	Projects Funded by NIEA on Other Protected Species
2006-07	£15,000	-	£392,000
2007-08	£25,350	-	£559,500
2008-09	£15,000	-	£515,500
2009-10	£37,000	-	£494,400
2010-11	£23,600	£37,900	£404,950
Total	£115,950	£37,900	£2,366,350

The following table provides a breakdown of the £2.3m for projects funded by NIEA on protected species other than bats and otters.

Financial Year	Funding provided to Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR)	Funding provided under the Natural Heritage Research Partnership Contract (NHRP)	Other Projects	Total Estimated Resource Funding by NIEA on "Other" Protected Species
2006-07	£112,000	£245,000	£35,000	£392,000
2007-08	£119,000	£196,000	£244,500	£559,500
2008-09	£119,000	£175,000	£221,500	£515,500
2009-10	£112,000	£245,000	£137,400	£494,400
2010-11	£112,000	£175,000	£117,950	£404,950
Total	£574,000	£1,036,000	£756,350	£2,366,350

"Other projects" represents NIEA's expenditure on a range of other projects in relation to protected species.

The above figures exclude staff costs but represent an estimate of actual contract costs on protecting protected species in each of the last five years. The range of projects is large and can include, for example, inventory and basic survey work, monitoring of species abundance and research into conservation requirements for particular species.

I have asked for more information into the costs of work undertaken and its necessity.

Planning Process for the Gas Storage Facility in Antrim

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the planning process for the gas storage facility in Antrim.

(AQW 4886/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Further environmental information was requested by the Department on 26 August 2011. The requested further information relates to: water management issues and pollution prevention, archaeology and the results of a marine geophysical survey, detail on the chemical and mechanical properties of the salt bed, bird survey information, assessment of trees and vegetation to be removed, effect of wave action on above ground facilities, roads details, noise and dust information and fisheries information.

The date for submission of the information is 25 November 2011; however, an extension of time has been agreed following a request from the agent, until Friday 4 May 2012. The extension of time was necessary to allow winter bird survey information to be gathered.

I believe that his application requires rigorous assessment against economic potential, environmental need and other criteria.

EU targets for Good Ecological Status

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made on meeting the EU targets for Good Ecological Status for all freshwater bodies; and whether the targets will be met by 2015. **(AQW 5027/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) for Northern Ireland were published in December 2009 to meet one of the key requirements of the Water Framework Directive.

The RBMPs state that around 20% of the 575 river water bodies and 27% of 22 lake water bodies at 50 hectares or greater) are at good status and through the measures in the plans the aim is to reach around 56% of rivers and 32 % of lakes at good status by 2015.

The implementation of the RBMPs to meet the targets to achieve good ecological status is being taken forward through the development and implementation of 26 Local Management Area (LMA) action plans over a three year rolling programme from 2010/11 to 2012/13.

The first 9 of the 26 local action plans were produced in March 2011 and these are currently being implemented. The next set of nine are due to be completed by March 2012. Implementation actions include additional targeted biological monitoring, awareness raising, targeted river walks to identify individual pollution hotspots and inspections of premises with the potential to cause water pollution.

There is a key reporting milestone at the end of 2012, when the Department must report to the EU Commission on progress in taking forward the implementation of the measures set out in the RBMPs. This will provide a further indication on the position regarding the achievement of the 2015 targets. I have to say that a funding bid of £8.9 million has not succeeded to date. I am looking at funding for this work as part of the business planning process.

Specification for Septic Tanks

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the specification for septic tanks; and the change in these specifications since 1908. **(AQW 5405/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: The underground septic tank system is believed to have originated in France on or around the year 1860. By the mid 1880's, two-chamber, automatic siphoning septic tank systems, similar in concept to those used today, were being installed in the United States of America before being used in English properties in the late 1800's.

A British Standard for septic tanks did not appear until 1956 in the form of Code of Practice CP 302.100 Small Domestic Sewage Treatment Works. A septic tank was regarded as a "cesspool" within the definitions of the Public Health Act 1936, which was in force at that time.

In the early 1970's, the 1956 Code of Practice was revised to become CP 302:1972. In 1983 the British Standard BS 6297:1983 Design and Installation of Small Sewage Treatment Works and Cesspools was adopted.

BS 6297 was revised in 2007, and amended in 2008. This document, along with the European Standard EN 12566- Small Wastewater Treatment Systems contains the most current detailed specification on the design of septic tank systems.

As the content of this is too detailed to include in this response, I have asked my officials in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to send you a copy of BS 6297 for your information. This includes detail on the physical design of both the tank and sub-surface irrigation system, the hydraulic capacity and structural integrity of the tank, access requirements for maintenance and inspection, and quality of construction materials.

Article 31 Determinations

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many Article 31 Determinations are currently awaiting a decision from his Department.

(AQW 5426/11-15)

Mr Attwood: 54 Article 31 applications are currently awaiting decision from the Department. This figure includes 3 applications awaiting an appeal hearing against Notice of Opinions to refuse, 5 applications awaiting a public inquiry and 2 applications are the subject of judicial review.

Planning officials in the Strategic Planning Division are currently progressing a number of Article 31 applications on which a report and recommendation will be made to me in the near future. I meet with senior officials once a month to review Article 31 and to help ensure decisions are made when good evidence and process prevails. In addition, with a new leadership team in the Planning Service, Article 31 applications are subject to more rigorous assessment with the intention of bringing recommendations forward more expeditiously.

Article 31 Planning Determination

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average length of time taken to process an Article 31 Planning Determination I (i) 2008, (ii) 2009, (iii) 2010.

(AQW 5427/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The average length of time taken to process an Article 31 application is available on a financial year basis and detailed below:

- 26 decisions issued for the period 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009. The average processing time was 69 months.
- 10 decisions issued for the period 1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010. The average processing time was 21 months.
- 27 decisions issued for the period 1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011. The average processing time was 34 months.

It is worth noting that when the 2 Strategic Project teams which process the majority of Article 31 applications were established in late 2007 they were required to complete the processing of a number of Article 31 applications already in the system. A number were longstanding due to outstanding environmental information despite repeated requests by Planning to obtain the necessary information on order to properly assess the application. In early 2008 the then Minister of the Environment directed that all such applications should be refused.

Article 31 Planning Determination

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average length of time taken to process an Article 31 Planning Determination since May 2011.

(AQW 5429/11-15)

Mr Attwood: 3 Article 31 applications have been processed to a decision since May 2011. The average length of time was 60 months. Due to a variety of reasons such as, a lack of sufficient information, delays with agents, the need for surveys and additional environmental information and at times issues within DOE Planning and NIEA, the applications took some time to process to a decision.

As outlined in AQ 5426/11-15, there is a more robust approach in place and being developed over the last six months, which will see the creation of better planning and greater confidence in the planning system.

Department's Office Relocation

Mr Kinahan asked Minister of the Environment whether his Department's office will be moving from Clarence Court; and if so, to detail (i) the rationale behind such a move; (ii) the proposed timescale and cost; and (iii) the options considered for the relocation.

(AQW 5510/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The DOE Private Office, Office of Permanent Secretary and DOE Press Office moved to join other DOE Staff in Goodwood House on 9 December 2011. Goodwood House conforms to Workplace NI objectives and standards, forms part of NICS Reform Proposals, creates a more modern, flexible, friendly work environment, helping to maximise performance of the Department and to do so with greater financial and wider efficiency. These were strong grounds for the move and the Minister fully agreed. I have been active in addressing internal Departmental costs. As one example, on appointment as DOE Minister, I suppressed one of three Deputy Permanent Secretary posts with a saving of over £100k.

In agreeing to move to Goodwood House, I insisted that costs were kept to a minimum. I refused to approve initial budget indications and insisted the move was carried at a low cost, such as no purchase of new furniture and any costs were for essential health and safety and IT/communication reasons. Consequently, these costs are estimated at around £2,500, the details of which are:

Detail	Total £
Electrical work for AV installation	1800
Builders Work in Connection to M&E	180
Telephone connection charges	446
Fax Machines connection charge	90
Total	2516

The move occurred also on a working day to reduce portage charges (around £750), and there are some internal, interdepartmental charges (i.e. where no external contracts involved) which shall be confirmed shortly.

This information confirms that at a low cost, the interests of staff have been improved with a more favourable working environment to assist DOE delivery across its sustainability, renewable, planning and other functions.

Salmon Rivers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment to list the salmon rivers that lie within Special Areas of Conservation.

(AQW 5610/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are three rivers in Northern Ireland that have been designated as Special Areas of Conservation for their salmon populations:

- River Foyle and Tributaries
- River Roe and Tributaries
- River Faughan and Tributaries

Salmon Rivers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment for her assessment of the benefit of "Special Areas of Conservation" to salmon rivers, in protecting salmon and increasing the salmon population.

(AQW 5613/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Three salmon rivers in Northern Ireland have been designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the EC Habitats Directive. This Directive requires Member States to maintain or restore habitats and species to favourable conservation status.

SACs are afforded particular protection under the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations (NI) 1995. It is incumbent on Government Departments and Agencies in Northern Ireland to ensure the continued long term protection of the three salmon SACs in order to maintain the population at favourable conservation status as required by the Habitats Directive.

The management of salmon river SACs is a component of the wider management of salmon populations through the UK-NI Implementation Plan of the North Atlantic Salmon Convention. This requires proactive management in such areas as site protection and enhancement and the control of fishing. Management responsibilities lie with several Departments and Agencies, including DOE, DARD, DCAL and the Loughs Agency, but with DCAL having overall policy lead.

Salmon are listed in the Habitats Directive as a freshwater species and therefore cannot be protected when occupying a marine environment. The biggest threats to salmon populations are believed to be when they are at sea. NIEA are not aware of any specific local threats to the three river systems which would cause a deterioration in their salmon populations.

Through the Water Framework Directive, the SACs attract an additional level of protection delivered through River Basin Management Plans.

In conclusion, it is my assessment that the SAC designation contributes to the protection of salmon in the three river systems through a well co-ordinated management process.

Ballymena Area Plan

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the European court case on Area Plans, when the new Ballymena Area Plan will recommence, given that the current plan is out of date.
(AQW 5615/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I can confirm that the European Court has been considering the legality of certain elements of the transposition into Northern Ireland law of the European Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. In its judgement delivered on 20 October 2011 it found in favour of the Department's position in principle. The Department is now awaiting the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal to verify the European Court ruling in the specific circumstances of the original challenge to the Draft Northern and Magherafelt Area Plans. Accordingly, the Department is now seeking to expedite this matter, following which it will consider the implications with legal advisors.

If the outcome is as anticipated, the Department will review its Development Plan Programme throughout the Province and therefore is not currently in a position to advise when work will commence on the Area Plan for Ballymena Borough Council district.

Future Reform of Local Government

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment what action will be taken to ensure that the work that has already been undertaken by the Transition Committees will be utilised in the future Reform of Local Government.
(AQW 5631/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The work generally was important and a number of Transition Committees in particular were impressive. This is valuable work and experience to be utilised in the future.

In moving forward, the Department will be reviewing with Transition Committees, the work undertaken by them so far to ensure that it can feed into the revised implementation structures. It is my intention to restart their work in an appropriate format.

Textile Recycling Bins

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment what measures govern the placement of textile recycling bins and the distribution of the items collected.

(AQW 5633/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Only used textiles that have not been donated for reuse are subject to waste management licensing requirements.

The placement of a textile recycling bank for used textiles defined as waste requires a waste management authorisation, issued by the Waste Management Licensing Section, NIEA. Under the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 (as amended) there are some waste activities which are exempted from the requirement to have a licence.

Paragraph 18, Schedule 2, Part I of the Regulations may provide for an exemption, if the operator can meet all of the required criteria and limitations.

The distribution of the collected items is at the collectors discretion, however if the textiles are still deemed to be waste, all movements must comply with Duty of Care requirements and must be sent to an appropriately authorised site. Trans-frontier Shipment legislation will also apply in relation to the exportation of waste textiles.

With regards planning, while there is no specific legislation which deals with this issue, the placement of textile recycling bins may be addressed through Part 12 of Schedule 1 to the Planning (General Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 1993. Part 12 provides for permitted development rights for certain development undertaken by District Councils.

In the event that development is not permitted by virtue of Part 12 a planning application can be submitted for consideration. Any application regarding textile waste must be in compliance with Policy WM 1 'Environmental Impact of a Waste Management Facility' and Policy WM 2 'Waste Collection and Treatment Facilities' in Planning Policy Statement 11: Planning and Waste Management.

Shale Gas Extraction

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of (i) the findings of the University of Manchester Tyndall Centre report 'Shale gas: an updated assessment of environmental and climate change impacts'; and (ii) whether shale gas extraction is compatible with greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.

(AQW 5643/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My officials have considered the University of Manchester Tyndall Centre 'Shale gas: an updated assessment of environmental and climate change impacts' report. The Tyndall Centre is an acknowledged authority on climate change and related environmental issues and hence this research is to be welcomed since it adds to the body of knowledge on this contentious issue. However, it should be noted that the authors themselves stress that one of the main findings of the report is that there is a paucity of information on which to base an analysis of what the environmental and health impacts of shale gas extraction might be and what the impact could be on greenhouse gas emissions.

That said the report does confirm significant concerns that have been in the public domain particularly in relation to the effects of extraction techniques on groundwater, water consumption, noise pollution and other environmental matters. The evidence presented in the report on greenhouse gas emissions is complex but I would be concerned that the report considers that shale gas has the potential to undermine efforts to decarbonise the economy through the development of renewable technologies. Another key concern is that the global extraction of shale gas, in the absence of legally binding cap on greenhouse gas emissions, could make dangerous climate change more likely.

Because of the public concerns being raised by reports like this I have already tasked my officials across the planning, environmental policy and regulatory fields to ensure that all environmental requirements that are appropriate and necessary for the extraction of shale gas are fulfilled.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is currently supplementing its knowledge of the fracking process with emerging research, by studying case studies from other parts of the world and by liaising with counterparts in other Environment Agencies in countries where fracking is currently proposed or taking place. Publication of the Tyndall Centre report broadens the information available on the process and will aid effective decision making should an application for planning permission or the required environmental permissions be received.

Overall publication of the report is timely and reinforces the need for everyone to remain vigilant in relation to the fracking and shale gas issue. Due to the issues emerging on this development, I am to ask for a meeting with the DETI Minister to convey DOE/NIEA views on the issue of fracking.

Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (NI) 2003

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what plans there are to change the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (NI) 2003.

(AQW 5664/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has no plans to amend the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (NI) 2003 in the near future. Officials are, however, developing a new Statutory Rule which, although not directly linked to the 2003 Regulations, will effectively complement them. The new Regulations will place a duty on drivers of scheduled bus services to assist disabled people and wheelchair users, if required, whilst boarding and alighting from the bus. The new Regulations are expected to become operative in mid-2012.

Green Belt Area Behind the Towerview Area of Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment whether the green belt area behind the Towerview area of Bangor will remain as such under the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan proposals.

(AQW 5674/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 21 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside', published on 1 June 2010 sets out planning policies for development in the countryside. Countryside is defined as land lying outside of settlement limits as defined in development plans.

The area of countryside adjacent to the Towerview area of Bangor was proposed as green belt under Designation COU 1 of the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP). However, the policy provisions of PPS21 now take precedence over any green belt designations contained in existing and published draft development plans, and as a consequence the Department has withdrawn the proposed BMA Green Belt contained in Draft BMAP. The countryside adjacent to Towerview in Bangor is therefore no longer designated as green belt and is subject to the policies contained in PPS21.

Draft BMAP was published in November 2004, and it covers 6 District Council areas including North Down. Nearly 4,000 objections were received in respect of the Draft Plan and a public inquiry was convened by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to consider these objections. This inquiry commenced in April 2007 and finished in May 2008.

A number of representations were received that related to the settlement limit for Bangor, including the part of the limit adjacent to the Towerview area. These objections relate to the non-inclusion of land within the settlement limit.

The Department received the PAC Report into objections relating to North Down Borough in September 2011 but is still awaiting the PAC Report on two remaining district council areas. The Department is currently considering the PAC recommendations and preparing the Plan for adoption. I am therefore unable to confirm the future status of land in the countryside adjacent to Towerview, Bangor until BMAP is adopted.

Fines Imposed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the total revenue generated from fines imposed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5687/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) undertakes a range of regulatory and enforcement activities which can in certain cases result in prosecutions being taken by the Department against offenders. Successful prosecutions initiated by NIEA against polluters may result in punitive fines but these are determined and retained by the courts.

The table below provides details of the fines levied by and retained by the courts in each of the last five years.

Fines Imposed by Courts	£
2006	379,750
2007	324,750
2008	276,250
2009	254,050
2010	104,450
Total	1,339,250

A37 Broad Road Human Waste Sludge Site

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of his recent announcement of a strategic partnership between the PSNI and the Environment Agency to tackle environmental and heritage crime, how his Department will ensure that the A37 Broad Road human waste sludge site complies with the site specific working plan when it re-opens after the compulsory closure period.

(AQW 5727/11-15)

Mr Attwood: NIEA is the regulating authority for waste management licences, including mobile treatment licences. The Agency would routinely monitor the site at Broad Road, Limavady, to ensure compliance with licensing conditions and the Site Specific Working Plan.

The site still has an extant waste licence, however it has not been operational since 13 October 2011, as sludge is being taken to Belfast for incineration.

NIEA has become aware upon receipt of site operator returns that the company has, on a number of occasions, received and treated more than the permitted 250 tonnes of sludge per day. The Agency had previously warned the company about breaching this condition and advised them that further breaches could result in the suspension or revocation of their licence. NIEA has decided to revoke the mobile treatment licence for the site. The Revocation Notice issued on 7 December 2011 and will come into effect on 4 January 2012.

After this date there will be no waste licence or Site Specific Working Plan for this waste facility and any waste activities undertaken would be considered as illegal and liable to enforcement action. I have asked for a two-weekly report on any developments.

This operator or another business may wish to submit an application to operate a waste facility at this site after the 4 January 2012, in which case NIEA will process the submission taking into account all documentation and information received. However, I wish to make it fully clear that I will be robust in ensuring that decisions on licences are proper, taking into account all factors.

The strategic partnership between the PSNI and NIEA which was launched last week is designed to look at new and emerging crime trends and not individual regulatory cases. The Environmental Crime Unit in

NIEA will review each potential referral on a case by case basis against a number of parameters, but I am determined that, where appropriate, action will be taken.

Local Economic and Urban Regeneration

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the extent to which community planning legislation could be used by councils to improve local economic and urban regeneration.
(AQW 5858/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Reform of local government will give councils a major responsibility for the future economic and social development of their areas. Councils will engage their local communities (including business people and investors) to draw up Community Plans and spatial Development Plans showing how their areas should change in the future and they will be responsible for the implementation of those plans.

The proposed legislative framework to support community planning will not be highly prescriptive about how it should be carried out within individual council areas, recognising that the appropriate approach and balance of individual partnerships will depend on local circumstances. However, DOE will seek how best to influence, inform and require Councils to work positively on this issue.

The proposed community planning legislative framework and community planning process will provide an opportunity to identify issues such as economic development and regeneration as priorities within agreed Community Plans to be taken forward within the Strategic Community Planning Partnerships.

Evidence from other jurisdictions prove this is a very important power, one that need to be used wisely as plan-led development is good development.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Servants from the Foyle Constituency who Work in Greater Belfast

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total number of civil servants who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area; and the total cost to his Department for subsidising the travel.

(AQW 5621/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The total number of civil servants in the NICS who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area is 98. During the period January – 30 November 2011 the total cost for subsidising travel in my Department was £9,170.00

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Promoting Foster Care

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to 4207/11-15, what publications the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust used to promote foster care in (i) 2010; and (ii) 2011 to date.

(AQW 5557/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): My reply to AQW 4207/11-15 refers.

I am aware that an individual used the Trust logo without permission to advertise a Trust fostering information session. Action has now been taken to ensure this will not happen again.

Sensory Support Team in the Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of staff in the Sensory Support Team in the Western Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) the total budget for Sensory Support Services in the Trust in each of the last three years; and (iii) whether the Trust has informed the Department that any staff within the Sensory Support Team will (a) be offered voluntary redundancy; (b) be made redundant; or (c) have their contracted hours reduced and, if so, to give the reason for the reduction.

(AQW 5912/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are currently 14 (13.2 Whole Time Equivalent) staff employed by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to directly deliver Sensory Support services, divided between two teams:

- (i) one based in Londonderry, the other based in Enniskillen. This includes one current vacancy.
- (ii) The WHSCT Salaries and Wages budget for the Sensory Support Service over the last three years was as follows:

Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Salaries and Wages Budget	507,000	465,000	459,000

The WHSCT also provides sensory equipment at costs in excess of £80,000 per annum. Voluntary sector contract values in total exceed £120,000 per annum whilst sign language interpreting costs are around £40,000 per annum. In addition, activity in housing support and respite services totals around £40,000 and specialist residential care for service users with sensory needs costs around £100,000 per annum.

- (iii) The WHSCT currently has no plans to offer voluntary or compulsory redundancy to any staff in the Sensory Support Team, nor are there plans to reduce their hours.

Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 1943/11-15, for an update on when the Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy will be published.

(AQW 5978/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have directed my Department to reconsider the revised Guidance.

It is not possible to confirm when guidance will be issued.

Integrated Services for Children and Young People

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what work his Department has carried out, in conjunction with the Department of Education, in relation to the provision of integrated services for children and young people.

(AQW 5981/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has worked closely and collaboratively with the Department of Education (DE) on a range of projects to either develop services provided directly to children and young people or services aimed at providing greater protections for them. Both departments have worked jointly to develop services in schools to: improve access to dental services either by providing them directly on school site or on a mobile basis; increase accessibility to the services of doctors, nurses (including nurses specialising in diabetes, behaviour support, epilepsy and child and adolescent mental health), counsellors, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, health visitors and community paediatricians. Both departments have worked collaboratively to improve the health and educational outcomes of specific groups of children, for example: children with a range of conditions and complex care needs, including children with a physical and learning disability, children with asthma, children with autism, those with challenging behaviours and pupils with specific medication needs. Under the auspices of the Care Matters Strategy, both departments have worked together to seek

to improve the educational outcomes of children in the care system with a new system of personal education planning introduced with the support of both departments in December 2011. Finally, my department has received the full cooperation of DE to establish new vetting and barring arrangements aimed at strengthening safeguards for children in a wide range of workplace situations.

South Tyrone Hospital's Major Injuries Unit

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of (i) the proposed reduction in the opening hours of South Tyrone Hospital's Major Injuries Unit; and (ii) the distance to the nearest Unit during closed hours.

(AQW 6009/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The provision of the minor injuries service at South Tyrone Hospital is an operational matter for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. The Southern Trust is currently consulting on proposals for all the minor injuries units (MIUs) in its area, including South Tyrone MIU, and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the Trust's proposals while that process is ongoing.
- (ii) When the South Tyrone Hospital MIU is closed, the nearest available MIU is Mullinure MIU in Armagh, 13 miles away. Other options for patients requiring urgent medical assistance outside the South Tyrone MIU opening hours include contacting the GP Out of Hours service located at South Tyrone Hospital or attending the emergency department at Craigavon Area Hospital, 19 miles from South Tyrone Hospital.

Meetings with Health and Social Care Trusts

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the number of meetings he has held in the last 12 months with the (i) Northern Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) the Western Health and Social Care Trust; and (iii) Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 6011/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since coming to office in May 2011, I have made multiple visits and met with representatives of all Trust's. I have also met collectively with the Chairs and Chief Executives of all Trusts on two separate occasions. I have also attended the Western Trust Special Recognition Awards Ceremony and the Southern Trust Excellence Awards Ceremony.

Cold Weather Payment for People Receiving Treatment for Cancer

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the criteria used to determine eligibility for the £100 one-off cold weather payment for people receiving treatment for cancer; and (ii) how people with cancer can apply for this payment; and (iii) how much money has been allocated for these payments.

(AQW 6021/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The eligibility criteria for the £100 one-off fuel allowance payment are patients who have received surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy or palliative care for cancer within six months prior to and including the qualifying week, which is 12th to 18th December 2011. Also, patients for whom a decision to treat has been made but treatment in the form of surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy or palliative care has not yet commenced during the qualifying week.
- (ii) No application is necessary. All cancer patients who are eligible to receive the Fuel Allowance Initiative will be identified and contacted on an individual basis. My officials are currently liaising with Health and Social Care Board and the Business Services Organisation on the arrangements necessary to enable this payment to be made to eligible patients by 29 February 2012.

- (iii) In accordance with the guidance for Departments to access the Social Protection Fund (from which these payments are being made), my Department registered its funding requirement in the January Monitoring Round amounting to £800,000.

Fast Food Restaurants Beside Schools

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of (i) whether the development of fast food restaurants beside schools is compatible with the aim of the Compton Review to promote health; and (ii) whether he would support a change to planning legislation which would ban such developments.

(AQW 6093/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) To help empower children to make healthier choices within the school environment my Department has been working closely with the Department of Education on the development of a Food in Schools Policy, which ensures that healthy food options are available in all schools.

The Framework for Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022: A Fitter Future for All has recently been agreed by the Executive for implementation. This Framework includes a number of outcomes for both food and nutrition and for physical activity that aim to improve the health and wellbeing of the population across the life-course.

In particular the Framework includes an outcome that any reviews of planning policies take account of the impact of planning on health including opportunities for sustainable physical activity. My Department will continue to promote the benefits of implementing Health Impact Assessments on all new or developing planning policies.

- (ii) I would be broadly supportive of any change to planning legislation if it would have a positive impact on the health of the population of Northern Ireland. I have also been advised that the Department of Education has recently raised the issue of fast food outlets near schools with the Department of the Environment and will be following up on this in more detail.

IVF Treatment

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to enable couples in need of IVF treatment to access two complete cycles of treatment through the Health Service.

(AQW 6135/11-15)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland aspires to provide the full three cycles of fertility treatment as recommended by NICE however financial constraints currently make this unachievable. I am aware that in some areas of the UK the number of cycles available is increasing. It is however worth noting that in many of these areas the NHS criteria for treatment are much more restrictive than we apply in Northern Ireland and therefore fewer couples have the opportunity to receive any publicly funded treatment.

Currently in Northern Ireland, we provide one fresh cycle of fertility treatment to those who meet the criteria. It is hoped that once the waiting list is stabilised, we will be able to progress to the provision of Frozen Embryo Transfer (FET). To provide three full cycles of treatment to each patient on the current resource level would reduce the number of women who can avail of the treatment.

Any expansion of the service will be dependent on future recurrent funding availability and would need to be on a planned basis to ensure waiting lists are maintained at current levels.

PIP Breast Implants

Mr Agnew asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many women currently have PIP breast implants; and whether the Health Service will facilitate women who wish to have them removed.

(AQW 6141/11-15)

Mr Poots: Investigations here to date indicate that no woman who has had her surgery in Northern Ireland either in the HSC or in the private sector has received PIP implants.

We are working closely with the independent sector to identify local women who may have received these implants outside Northern Ireland. While this work is ongoing at the moment, we understand this number to be very small.

When responses have been received from the independent sector we will examine the implications locally, including the potential impact on the HSC.

Quangos

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many quangos are currently operating under his Department.

(AQW 6236/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has 17 Arms Length Bodies which are:

- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust;
- Southern Health and Social Care Trust;
- South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust;
- Western Health and Social Care Trust;
- Northern Health and Social Care Trust;
- NI Ambulance Service Trust;
- The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) ;
- The Public Health Agency (PHA);
- The Business Services Organization (BSO);
- The Patient and Client Council (PCC);
- NI Blood Transfusion Service (NIBTS);
- NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency (NIGALA);
- NI Medical & Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA);
- NI Social Care Council (NISCC);
- NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery (NIPEC);
- Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA); and,
- NI Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS)

Department of Justice**Bangor Courthouse**

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many staff currently work at Bangor Courthouse.

(AQW 6118/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): No members of Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service staff are permanently based in Bangor Courthouse. Newtownards Courthouse staff provide administrative services at Bangor Courthouse on court hearing days.

A total of 24 staff currently work at Newtownards Courthouse.

In relation to the numbers of court cases heard, I would refer the Member to the reply I gave Mr Peter Weir on 30 December 2011 (AQW5782/11-15) detailing the number of cases processed.

Newtownards Courthouse

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many staff currently work at Newtownards Courthouse.
(AQW 6119/11-15)

Mr Ford: No members of Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service staff are permanently based in Bangor Courthouse. Newtownards Courthouse staff provide administrative services at Bangor Courthouse on court hearing days.

A total of 24 staff currently work at Newtownards Courthouse.

In relation to the numbers of court cases heard, I would refer the Member to the reply I gave Mr Peter Weir on 30 December 2011 (AQW5782/11-15) detailing the number of cases processed.

Bangor Courthouse

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many court cases have been heard at Bangor Courthouse in each of the last two years.
(AQW 6120/11-15)

Mr Ford: No members of Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service staff are permanently based in Bangor Courthouse. Newtownards Courthouse staff provide administrative services at Bangor Courthouse on court hearing days.

A total of 24 staff currently work at Newtownards Courthouse.

In relation to the numbers of court cases heard, I would refer the Member to the reply I gave Mr Peter Weir on 30 December 2011 (AQW5782/11-15) detailing the number of cases processed.

Newtownards Courthouse

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many court cases have been heard at Newtownards Courthouse in each of the last two years.
(AQW 6121/11-15)

Mr Ford: No members of Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service staff are permanently based in Bangor Courthouse. Newtownards Courthouse staff provide administrative services at Bangor Courthouse on court hearing days.

A total of 24 staff currently work at Newtownards Courthouse.

In relation to the numbers of court cases heard, I would refer the Member to the reply I gave Mr Peter Weir on 30 December 2011 (AQW5782/11-15) detailing the number of cases processed.

Procedures to Account for any Miscommunication of Information

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Justice what procedures are in place to hold his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, to account for any miscommunication of information in any form.
(AQW 6168/11-15)

Mr Ford: In line with other NICS Departments, there are documented procedures in place to ensure the Department is held to account should miscommunication of information take place.

If it becomes evident that any information issued by the Department or ALBs is incorrect, a correction is issued as a matter of urgency. The Department and its Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) have formal

complaints procedures which can be used by anyone who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the Department's service.

In addition, the Department is subject to oversight and scrutiny by the Assembly and Justice Committee.

Robert Black

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3975/11-15, whether the figure provided for the cost of chartering the plane was for a one-way journey.

(AQW 6184/11-15)

Mr Ford: The figure provided in AQW/3975/11 was for a one-way journey.

Department for Social Development

Social Housing with Economy 7 Heating

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the percentage of social housing with Economy 7 heating in each of the last ten years, broken down by council area.

(AQW 5718/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive cannot provide the information in the format requested as it does not routinely collate this information. However, the Housing Executive has reduced the number of homes with electrical heating systems from a peak of 26,000 to the current level of 9,390. Table 1 below details the current percentage of stock by their District Office area. The percentage of social housing stock as detailed by Housing Associations with Economy 7 heating broken down by council area is shown in Table 2 below.

TABLE 1: HOUSING EXECUTIVE STOCK WITH ELECTRICAL HEATING SYSTEMS

District	% of stock
East Belfast	13.3
North Belfast	13.2
Shankill	7.5
South Belfast	8.7
West Belfast	9.0
Antrim	5.7
Ballycastle	1.2
Ballymena	15.6
Ballymoney	5.5
Carrickfergus	6.1
Coleraine	16.6
Larne	16.7
Newtownabbey 1	18.4
Newtownabbey 2	9.2
Armagh	9.2

District	% of stock
Banbridge	4.7
Dungannon	4.3
Fermanagh	5.0
Lurgan	18.6
Newry	7.3
Portadown	13.8
Bangor	16.0
Castlereagh	26.4
Downpatrick	13.3
Lisburn Antrim	12.4
Lisburn Dairyfarm	0.9
Newtownards	9.3
Collon Terrace	10.9
Cookstown	3.4
Limavady	7.1
Magherafelt	3.5
Omagh	4.0
Strabane	0.8
Waterloo Place	5.4
Waterside	5.7

TABLE 2: PERCENTAGE OF HOUSING ASSOCIATION STOCK WITH ECONOMY 7 HEATING

District Council	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Antrim	46%	46%	41%	35%	41%	39%	34%	30%	30%	23%
Ards	64%	64%	65%	65%	50%	56%	48%	46%	40%	36%
Armagh	44%	37%	36%	33%	33%	33%	31%	31%	28%	29%
Ballymena	25%	25%	24%	24%	24%	22%	22%	24%	24%	25%
Ballymoney	35%	33%	30%	35%	30%	35%	29%	29%	27%	26%
Banbridge	24%	24%	24%	24%	24%	21%	17%	17%	12%	13%
Belfast	39%	37%	35%	31%	27%	24%	21%	20%	17%	15%
Carrickfergus	34%	34%	31%	30%	28%	21%	19%	19%	19%	17%
Castlereagh	60%	55%	54%	49%	49%	34%	26%	21%	19%	19%
Coleraine	32%	32%	31%	29%	21%	19%	19%	20%	19%	18%
Cookstown	32%	32%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	0%
Craigavon	31%	31%	31%	30%	30%	29%	26%	23%	22%	20%
Derry City	21%	20%	19%	19%	19%	18%	18%	17%	15%	13%
Down	36%	31%	33%	31%	30%	31%	29%	26%	26%	25%
Dungannon & South Tyrone	78%	78%	77%	53%	69%	69%	64%	40%	32%	26%
Fermanagh	21%	20%	20%	19%	19%	18%	12%	11%	11%	10%
Larne	65%	65%	64%	60%	56%	60%	60%	51%	42%	36%
Limavady	19%	10%	10%	10%	9%	9%	9%	9%	9%	1%
Lisburn	20%	20%	19%	22%	17%	16%	13%	12%	12%	11%

District Council	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Magherafelt	50%	50%	49%	44%	39%	45%	45%	45%	43%	22%
Moyle	33%	37%	35%	25%	20%	25%	24%	23%	25%	23%
Newry & Mourne	38%	34%	33%	32%	28%	26%	24%	22%	20%	18%
Newtownabbey	55%	55%	52%	52%	49%	49%	44%	39%	37%	29%
North Down	37%	35%	35%	34%	27%	20%	19%	18%	17%	8%
Omagh	3%	3%	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Strabane	17%	16%	11%	13%	12%	13%	12%	11%	11%	11%

Social Housing with Economy 7 Heating

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what action he is taking to reduce the use of Economy 7 heating in social housing.

(AQW 5719/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has already reduced the number of homes with an electrical heating system from 26,000 to the current level of 9,390. The Housing Executive has also advised that approximately 2,500 of their electrically heated Housing Executive properties are included in heating replacement schemes in 2011/12. The Housing Executive's heating policy is that gas heating remains the only option offered in areas where it is available. Where gas is not available other options such as oil or wood pellet boilers are considered. In properties where these options are not technically feasible, for example certain multi-storey blocks, tenants are offered a more energy efficient electrical heating system.

With regard to Housing Associations, their plans to replace Economy 7 heating vary, for example one Association has replaced all of its stock with alternative heating through the Cosy Homes Scheme while others plan to replace their existing heating systems over the next five to seven years with gas where it is available.

Northern Ireland Pensions Bill

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for an update on the introduction of the Northern Ireland Pensions Bill; (ii) whether it will be possible to maintain exact parity of timing; and (iii) for his assessment of the delay in enacting legislation.

(AQW 5874/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- (i) Subject to Executive agreement, I propose to introduce a Pensions Bill in January 2012.
- (ii) The corresponding Westminster enactment, the Pensions Act 2011, received Royal Assent on 3 November 2011. Some provisions of that Act came into force on Royal Assent; others come into force two months after Royal Assent. It will not, therefore, be possible to maintain exact parity of timing.
- (iii) Section 1 of the Pensions Act 2011, which comes into force two months after Royal Assent, provides for changes to State Pension age and parity of timing is of particular concern. Although the changes will not commence until 2016, I believe that the period of notice is, in retirement planning terms, extremely short. Until the Northern Ireland Bill receives Royal Assent, women here cannot plan with certainty for their future retirement date and may consider themselves disadvantaged in comparison to women in Great Britain. The longer the delay in enacting this legislation, the greater the disadvantage women here will face. I believe we should do everything we can to avoid adding to the challenges the women affected by the change in pension age will face in adapting their retirement plans.

Pensions Bill

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of clause one of the Pensions Bill, which provides for changes to the state pension age, and the affect this will have on people.

(AQW 5876/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Westminster Pensions Bill received Royal Assent on 3rd November 2011. Section 1 of the Westminster Pensions Act 2011 accelerates the process of equalising pension age for men and women, and increases pension age to 66 by October 2020. This will have a knock-on effect on the age of entitlement to pension benefits such as State Pension Credit and the Winter Fuel Payment and various working age benefits. An analysis of the impact of these changes can be found at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/pensions-reform/pensions-bill-2011/>.

Subject to Executive approval, it is anticipated that a corresponding Northern Ireland Bill will be introduced in the Assembly in January 2012. My Department's assessment of the likely effects of the proposed Northern Ireland Pensions Bill was detailed in the Equality Impact Assessment issued for consultation between 3 August 2011 and 30 September 2011. The Completed Equality Impact Assessment is available at <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/consultations/archived-consultations>

Migration of Incapacity Benefit to Employment Support Allowance

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for an update of the migration of Incapacity Benefit to Employment Support Allowance.

(AQW 5878/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The reassessment of approximately 76,000 existing Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Income Support (paid on the grounds of incapacity) customers started in February 2011. As of 30 November less than 20% of those customers had commenced reassessment.

The Incapacity Benefit/Income Support reassessment team continues to make steady progress in meeting the needs of customers through the transition. Regular contact, by telephone, at key stages with customers going through reassessment is a feature of the arrangements that have been put in place to provide support and advice. This is proving to be very successful with a significant number of customers receiving ongoing support and advice following the initial notification.

To date Agency staff have dealt with 11,486 enquiries from customers who are being reassessed. They have contacted 8,658 customers by telephone to explain the process and the Customer Advice and Support team have assisted 1,190 customers following a disallowance decision.

My Department is also considering the second year Work Capability Assessment Review by Professor Harrington which makes a number of recommendations to further support customers.

Work Capability Assessment

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the work ATOS Healthcare has carried out in relation to the Work Capability Assessment.

(AQW 5880/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Atos Healthcare has been delivering the Medical Support Service on behalf of my Department since 20 June 2011. The commencement of this contract coincided with the ramp up of healthcare assessments relating to the Incapacity Benefit reassessment project as well as the delivery of assessments for Disability Living Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance. Atos Healthcare are committed to the contract with my Department and there are robust contractual mechanisms in place to monitor performance. During the first six months of the contract they have had to overcome a number of challenges, in particular the availability of suitably trained healthcare professionals and variations in the number of assessments to be undertaken. I have arrangements in place to ensure I am kept informed of the performance of Atos Healthcare and I will be receiving a six month briefing in January 2012.

Work Capability Assessment

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to detail the number of people who have completed a Work Capability Assessment; and (ii) for his assessment of the findings to date.

(AQW 5881/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- (i) The Work Capability Assessment was introduced in October 2008 to determine eligibility to Employment and Support Allowance. To date, 49,899 Work Capability Assessments have been completed.
- (ii) The Work Capability Assessment was designed to be an evidence based process to review an individual's capacity for work, building on previous assessments of a similar nature. In the past

we have allowed many of those with health conditions to be considered unable to work and have not given them the assistance they require to fulfil their potential and contribute to society. I now recognise the need to give people the support required to get them into, or return to employment. The Work Capability Assessment enables us to decide who can work and who needs support. As it is a new procedure, the relevant legislation specified the need for an independent review of its fairness and effectiveness in the first five years of its operation. Professor Malcolm Harrington was commissioned by the Department of Work and Pensions to undertake the first review of the Work Capability Assessment in Great Britain. Following this he agreed to carry out a similar review in Northern Ireland. I am encouraged by Professor Harrington's assessment that the Work Capability Assessment is improving, and will continue to make improvements and implement reforms to assist those who can work to achieve their potential.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many Disability Living Allowance decisions were appealed; and (ii) how many awards were increased after appeal, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5959/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as Disability Living Allowance appeals are not recorded by the different category types but on an overall basis. Appeals are received both from applicants who were unsuccessful (nil award) and also from those awarded one of the eleven different rates of Disability Living Allowance but were not satisfied with the particular rate awarded. The table below details the total number of Disability Living Allowance appeals processed by the Appeals Service where the decision was more advantageous to appellant. The main reason for more advantageous decisions is the provision of additional information at the tribunal hearing.

Year	Number of Appeals received in the Appeals Service	Number of Appeal Determinations which were more advantageous to appellant.
2008/09	7,016	1,942
2009/10	5,636	1,836
2010/11	5,580	1,557

Integrated Services for Children and Young People

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development what work his Department has carried out, in conjunction with the Department of Education, in relation to the provision of integrated services for children and young people.

(AQW 5982/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Significant interdependencies exist between the Department of Education priorities in tackling educational under achievement in disadvantaged areas and my Department's goals in relation to addressing social and economic deprivation.

My officials have worked in partnership with DE, and the Education and Library Boards on developing and delivering programmes in relation to integrated services for children and young people, including Raising Achievement Levels Programme in Londonderry and Enjoying Learning and Achieving Programme in Limavady, as well as jointly funding the Integrated Services for Children and Young People Programme in Belfast.

In addition, officials are in preliminary discussions with DE on the development of a new initiative designed to prepare young people for the financial responsibilities that accompanies parenthood.

Housing Waiting List

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently on the housing waiting list, broken down by Housing Executive district office area.

(AQW 6060/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the number of applicants registered on the Waiting List at 30 June 2011. These are the most up to date figures available.

District Office	Total
Antrim	988
Armagh	810
Ballycastle	325
Ballymena	1510
Ballymoney	474
Banbridge	659
Bangor	1879
Carrickfergus	1008
Castlereagh	1434
Coleraine	1298
Cookstown	415
Londonderry 1	1020
Londonderry 2	972
Londonderry 3	1011
Downpatrick	1335
Dungannon	1021
East Belfast	1821
Fermanagh	868
Larne	541
Limavady	463
Lisburn Antrim St.	2047
Poleglass	592
Lurgan	1188
Magherafelt	514
Newry	1857
Newtownabbey 1	850
Newtownabbey 2	914
Newtownards	1738
North Belfast	2403

District Office	Total
Omagh	598
Outside NI	14
Portadown	762
Shankill	884
South Belfast	2439
Strabane	652
West Belfast	2689
Total	39993

Demolition of the Remaining Housing in the Village Urban Renewal Area

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development for his Department's assessment of whether an environmental impact assessment is required prior to the demolition of the remaining housing in the Village urban renewal area (redevelopment zone); and if so, why.

(AQW 6097/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is ultimately a matter for Planning Service whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required prior to demolition taking place.

In relation to the Village, Planning Service has already indicated that future demolitions will be subject in the first instance to an EIA screening option and that work is underway. That screening will then inform the need for any further assessment of the environmental impact of proposed demolitions.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Tablet Computers in the Assembly Chamber

Mr Lunn asked the Assembly Commission what plans there are to put facilities in place to enable Members to use a tablet computer in the Assembly chamber.

(AQW 5082/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Until such time as the matter is considered the current Speakers Ruling – at paragraph 5.9b of “Speakers Rulings and Conventions” entitled “Mobile Phones” (page 38/39) will continue to apply. However, at its meeting of 13 December 2011, the Committee on Procedures will consider its forward work programme for the January to July 2012 session. One item of interest to the Committee is the use of Hand Held Electronic Devices and it is envisaged that a date for consideration of this matter will be published in the Committee's agreed forward work programme shortly after the December meeting.

There are currently no technical impediments restricting the use of tablet computers in the Assembly chamber. However the use of a '3G' enabled device has the potential to interfere with the audio system used in the Assembly chamber. As a result the preferred mode of real time connectivity of tablet computers to the internet in the Assembly chamber will be wireless.

Visitors to Parliament Buildings

Mr Kinahan asked the Assembly Commission how it monitors the feedback from visitors to Parliament Buildings.

(AQO 969/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): A Visitor Feedback Form is available in the Great Hall for all visitors to the building. Members of the public who take a tour of the building are specifically encouraged to complete the form.

Since it was introduced in May 2010, 164 people have completed the form. The information is compiled by the Communications Office and circulated to all relevant departments. 88% of visitors to the building stated that their visit met or exceeded their expectations, with 87% stating they would recommend a visit to Parliament Buildings.

The Northern Ireland Assembly Events Office also receives a large amount of informal feedback from visitors via letters and emails. All correspondence is registered in a central feedback database and hard copies are kept in a registered file. Recently the Events Office launched an online feedback form which will be sent to all organisers of events hosted in Parliament Buildings to ensure the team is providing the best possible service.

The Education Service also has a policy to gather visitor feedback. Evaluation forms are completed by the group leaders at the end of each visit and are comprised of very specific questions which indicate visitor satisfaction and inform further development.

This academic year, 100% of respondents to the Education Questionnaire indicated that pupils have a greater understanding of how to engage with the Assembly after an Education Service visit. 100% of respondents also indicated that the activities were pitched at an appropriate level for the audience. The average score for the quality of information delivery was 3.91 out of a maximum score of 4.

Guided Tours of Parliament Buildings

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission why the plaques naming those murdered by the IRA are not mentioned during the guided tours of Parliament Buildings.

(AQO 970/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The aim of the tour of Parliament Buildings is to provide an insight into the day to day procedural work of the Northern Ireland Assembly. In addition, the tour aims to highlight the building's architecture and usage. As the duration of the tour is only 45 minutes, it is not possible to cover every aspect of the procedural work, architecture and history of usage.

However, if a Member or a group wishes a tour to incorporate a particular feature in more detail, then this request is normally accommodated. The request should be made to the Events Office in advance of the tour.

Tour of Parliament Buildings

Mr McNarry asked the Assembly Commission whether it will consider extending the official tour of Parliament Buildings to include a visit to Lord Craigavon's tomb.

(AQO 971/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The aim of the tour of Parliament Buildings is to provide an insight into the day to day procedural work of the Northern Ireland Assembly. In addition the tour aims to highlight the building's architecture and usage. As the duration of the tour is only 45 minutes, it is not possible to cover every aspect of the procedural work, architecture and history of usage. However, if a Member or a group wishes a tour to incorporate a particular feature in more detail, then this request is normally accommodated. The request should be made to the Events Office in advance of the tour.

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International Commitments and the EU Habitats Directive	WA 657	Newtownards Courthouse	WA 680
		Newtownards Courthouse	WA 680
Department of Education	WA 658	Procedures to Account for any Miscommunication of Information	WA 680
Area-Based Planning Process	WA 660	Robert Black	WA 681
Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Policy	WA 661	Department of the Environment	WA 664
Education and Skills Authority	WA 661	A37 Broad Road Human Waste Sludge Site	WA 674
Education and Skills Authority	WA 661	Article 31 Determinations	WA 669
Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team	WA 660	Article 31 Planning Determination	WA 669
Education in the Irish-Medium Sector	WA 659	Article 31 Planning Determination	WA 669
Irish-Medium Pre-Schools	WA 659	Ballymena Area Plan	WA 671
Pre-school Places	WA 658	Department's Office Relocation	WA 670
Pre-school Places	WA 658	EU targets for Good Ecological Status	WA 668
Primary Languages Programme	WA 660	Fines Imposed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency	WA 674
Transfer Tests	WA 662	Fly-Posting	WA 664
		Future Reform of Local Government	WA 671
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 662	Green Belt Area Behind the Towerview Area of Bangor	WA 673
Assistance to Establish Luxury Bed and Breakfast and Guest House Accommodation	WA 662	Local Economic and Urban Regeneration	WA 675
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Ministerial Interventions in Relation to Planning Applications	WA 665
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Decade of Commemorations	WA 657
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Tackling Child Poverty	WA 656

Revised Written Answers

Friday 13 January 2012

(AQW 4927/11-15)

Sport NI is the lead development agency for sport in the north of Ireland with responsibility for the distribution of exchequer funding. Sport NI has earmarked £11,232,303 in the 2011-15 budgetary period for sporting projects in the North Down area. A breakdown of this figure is provided below:

Programme	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Totals
50m Pool	£7,000,000	£3,843,834	£385,137	-	£11,228,971
Awards for Sport	£3,332	-	-	-	£3,332
Totals	£7,003,332	£3,843,834	£385,137	-	£11,232,303

Furthermore, Sport NI has allocated a budget of £10.25m for its Community Capital Programme during the current CSR period. A total of 141 applications for funding were received under this programme, three of which are from the North Down area. Applications under this programme are currently being considered by Sport NI.

(AQW 2741/11-15)

Information on the number of people registered as blind or partially sighted is not collected centrally, but is recorded by each Health & Social Care (HSC) Trust. The information provided by the five HSC Trusts is detailed in the table below.

NUMBER OF ADULTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE REGISTERED BLIND OR PARTIALLY SIGHTED IN EACH HSC TRUST AT 3 OCTOBER 2011 ¹

HSC Trust	Persons Registered Blind or Partially Sighted	
	(i) Adults (Aged 19+)	(ii) Young People (Aged 0-18)
Belfast	1,939	19
Northern	1,387	63
South Eastern	1,075	21
Southern	1,440	111
Western	753	51
Northern Ireland	6,594	265

1 The information recorded by HSC Trusts is not a register of all blind or partially sighted people as some may refuse to have their names added to relevant HSC Trust records.

(AQW 3557/11-15)

An estimated 76,000 Incapacity Benefit customers will go through the reassessment process and be required to undertake a work capability assessment during the 3 year period to 5 April 2014. This figure does not include an estimated 10,5401 Incapacity Benefit customers who are due to reach State Pension Age before 6 April 2014, and are therefore exempt from the reassessment process.

The other information you requested is set out in the table below:

	Number of customers
Failed the Work Capability Assessment	4382
Placed in the Work Related Activity Group	6683
Placed in the Support Group	5343

1. Sourced from Incapacity Benefit MIDAS scan February 2011. Please note this figure may differ from forthcoming published National Statistics.
2. Sourced from the Business Objects data as at 30 September 2011.
3. Sourced from the Jobseekers Allowance Payment System data as at 30 September 2011.

(AQW 5384/11-15)

All Employment and Support Allowance customers are subject to the Work Capability Assessment process which includes completing a limited capability for work medical questionnaire and in most cases attending a medical examination. The Work Capability Assessment was developed in consultation with medical experts and a range of other customer representative groups to ensure that it is an accurate assessment of an individual's capability for work. The assessment looks at the functional effects of an individual's condition, rather than the condition itself. It is worth noting that Employment and Support Allowance has 7 mental health descriptors and 10 physical descriptors.

The role of the examining healthcare professional is to prepare a report for Employment and Support Allowance based on their independent and impartial medical assessment of the customer's ability to perform activities within each of the functional areas, by identifying the descriptors that they consider appropriate. This is based on their clinical assessment of the customer, which may include a relevant physical examination, interview and observation. The approved healthcare professional will also consider the effects of the condition on the claimant for the majority of the time, so that the opinion will not be based on a snapshot of their condition on the day of the medical assessment. A Social Security Agency Decision Maker will consider any evidence provided by the healthcare professional as well as the information provided in the limited capability for work medical questionnaire to determine if the Work Capability Assessment has been satisfied.

The approved healthcare professional's task of considering the effects of a condition is different from that of a GP needing to make a diagnosis and plan treatment. The interview and assessment may therefore be different from that which a claimant might expect from their GP. Any evidence provided by a customer's GP or consultant is very important and fully considered, and processes are in place to ensure it can be requested when it will help provide advice on benefit entitlement. However, although the claimant's health condition or the GP/Consultant's diagnosis is not being disputed, GPs are unlikely to have the knowledge of the benefit system or disability analysis to provide the decision-maker with comprehensive information about the functional effects in relation to work capability.

My Department will continue to review the Work Capability Assessment and to make changes where necessary to ensure that our high standards of support continue.



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