

Written Answers to Questions

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Contents

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister WA 1

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development WA 2

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure WA 9

Department of Education WA 12

Department for Employment and Learning..... WA 13

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment WA 17

Department of the Environment..... WA 19

Department of Finance and Personnel WA 22

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety..... WA 28

Department of Justice WA 31

Department for Regional Development..... WA 34

Department for Social Development WA 37

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 20 April 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Strategic Investment Board

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the Strategic Investment Board has not appointed advisers to projects in Derry, particularly the Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 and the One Plan.

(AQW 7587/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) has committed significant resources to projects associated with both the Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 and the One Plan.

SIB provides support through a number of channels, including the Interim Chief Executive of SIB advising the Board of the Culture Company. Advisers also provide recruitment and communications advice to the Culture Company, and a range of advice services to Ilex in relation to the One Plan and support to Derry City Council.

In addition, SIB has recently appointed a project manager who is working on the Apprentice Boys of Derry Heritage Project.

By using specialist resources flexibly, SIB can provide a greater range of support to the UK City of Culture 2013 and The One Plan than could be possible through the appointment of specific advisers.

Older People's Strategy

Mr Brady asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of the Older People's Strategy.

(AQO 1531/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Older People's Strategy has been developed following consultation with the then Older Peoples' Advocate, the Older Peoples' Advisory Panel and the Commissioner for Older People. Its further development will be taken forward within our Delivering Social Change framework.

The Department has been developing the Strategy following comments from the key stakeholders mentioned above and will be consulting further with the Advisory Panel before submitting the Strategy to Ministers and the OFMDFM Committee.

Subject to the agreement of our Executive colleagues, we intend to launch the Strategy for three months' public consultation in May. This will include consultation events in June for older people, older people's representatives, people who care for older people and anyone who wishes to take part.

The final Strategy will be published by the end of the year.

Suicide Among Young People

Mr Moutray asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action their Department is taking to tackle the issue of suicide among young people.

(AQW 9951/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: One of the aims of our 10 Year Children and Young People's Strategy is to improve children's health, and reduction in the suicide rate is a key performance indicator.

Junior Ministers also attend the Ministerial Sub Group on Suicide Prevention which is chaired by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. We understand that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety intends to hold the next meeting of this Sub-Group shortly.

Last year we welcomed the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's decision to extend the Protect Life Suicide Prevention Strategy until the end of 2013.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Designation of Waterways

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the process and the criteria used to determine the designation of waterways.

(AQW 9102/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Designation is required to enable my department to undertake maintenance and schemes for drainage and flood defence purposes at public expense. Applications to designate a watercourse should be submitted to the Drainage Council for NI which operates as an independent advisory Non Departmental Public Body. Criteria for the designation of watercourses are used objectively by the Drainage Council to ensure uniform treatment throughout the north. There are two key overriding conditions. Firstly, that the proposed works offer value for money with benefits outweighing costs. Secondly, that the works have sufficient priority to be included in my Rivers Agency's programme. Viable works are programmed and this second condition has not resulted in designation being refused due to availability of funding. There are five additional criteria beneath the two overriding conditions, with an application for designation needing to satisfy one or more of these. Firstly that there is sufficient area of disadvantaged agricultural land which is subject to poor drainage or flooding. Secondly, that works to reduce existing or potential flooding are outside the capability of the riparians to organise and carry out at their own expense. Thirdly, where works are required but it is not possible to identify the occupier/riparian. Fourthly, where the watercourse requires works but it does not perform any function connected with the drainage of riparian land. Lastly, that works are required to provide an outfall for increased run-off from new housing and commercial development. The Drainage Council has recently been reconstituted and at its first meeting on 15 March members were asked to assess the current criteria to satisfy themselves that they remain fit for purpose. It is proposed to review the criteria after receiving comments from the Drainage Council members at the next meeting in June. My officials will recommend to the Drainage Council that the criteria for designation ensure that designation is determined on need and is not dependent on the availability of funding. A broader review, including full consultation, of the whole designation process will be undertaken in the future as part of planned review of the current legislation and potential drafting of replacement legislation to be led by my Rivers Agency.

Funding Spent on Irish Language and Cultural Projects

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the funding from her Equality Budget that has been spent on Irish language and cultural projects since May 2011, broken down by project; and what is the estimated spend in this area over the next twelve months.

(AQW 9641/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Equality Unit within DARD has incurred the following costs since May 2011. These costs have solely involved the translation of documents into Irish. No funding has been spent by the Equality Unit on any other Irish language or cultural projects since that date.

Date	Cost	Translation
July 2011	361.20	Equality Scheme Summary
September 2011	48.00	Equality Scheme Forward
Total	409.20	

The Council of Europe Charter on Regional or Minority Languages is designed to protect and promote regional or minority languages.

As part of the commitment given by the Executive to the European Charter, all public bodies here are required to encourage and promote the use of Irish and Ulster-Scots.

The DARD Language Policy for Irish and Ulster Scots commits the Department to accepting and responding to correspondence received in Irish. The policy also commits us to providing pro-active translations of documents into Irish and Ulster Scots when they are likely to be of particular relevance to Irish and Ulster-Scots speakers; are likely to be read and used generally; and will contribute to promoting, maintaining and safeguarding either language.

Taking the above factors into account it is not possible to estimate the spend in this area over the next twelve months.

Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what criteria are used under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme to assess if a legal charge is applicable to a project.

(AQW 10190/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A legal charge is applicable where:-

- a) grant aid of more than £50,000 is awarded for the building, development or refurbishment of any land or property; or
- b) where grant aid of more than £50,000 is awarded for the purchase of a building or the purchase of land. In such cases, except where the project is Council lead, the applicant is required, prior to any payment of grant aid, to register a charge in favour of the Department (DARD), over the land or property with Land Registry under the Land Registration Act (NI) 1970.

Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development which section of the Operating Rules permits her Department to levy a legal charge on a project which has been offered funding under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme; and when this section was introduced.

(AQW 10191/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The relevant sections of the current Axis 3 Operating Rules are Chapter 2 paragraph 2.74, Chapter 6 paragraph 6.13 and also letter of offer 'Terms and Conditions Booklet' paragraph 30.1.

Sections relating to the need for a legal charge have been contained within the Operating Rules since version 1 was issued in July 2009.

Evidence and Innovation Stakeholders Forum

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the priorities her Department accepted at the Evidence and Innovation Stakeholders Forum in (i) 2010; and (ii) 2011.

(AQW 10260/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD's evidence and innovation (E&I) priorities are identified on an ongoing basis, informed by both informal and formal stakeholder engagement. Our annual Evidence and Innovation Stakeholder Forum is central to this process.

Before a Forum, stakeholders receive a proposed list of DARD's E&I priorities for that year. At both the 2010/2011 events stakeholders were invited to comment; seek clarification; propose changes; and put forward additional suggestions. The results were published on the DARD website and were used to inform the priorities published in our annual DARD Directed Agri-food Biosciences Institute Research Work Programme.

Evidence and Innovation Stakeholders Forum

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what projects her Department has submitted to the Evidence and Innovation Stakeholders Forum for 2012.

(AQW 10261/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The process for determining the DARD directed Agri Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Research Work Programme for 2012/13, which started with the 2011 Evidence and Innovation Stakeholders Forum, is now coming to a close. We therefore have not yet started planning for the 2012 Forum, but hope to consider the timing and format of the event shortly.

Rural Development Programme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 8570/11-15, what is the breakdown of the expenditure of each cluster on administration.

(AQW 10279/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The breakdown of expenditure for each cluster is as follows:

	ARC	DRAP	GROW	LRP	NER	SOAR	SWARD
Staff costs	1,016,046	572,130	478,524	480,539	643,195	802,148	1,270,668
Construction/ refurbishment							111
Evaluation Costs	265	735					
Marketing & Publicity	70,164	67,849	49,651	83,233	44,996	71,488	39,780
Professional Consultancy	27,462	27,912	64,734	31,080	67,314	38,794	50,802
Purchase of Equipment/ Land	43,316	25,689	4,818	7,740	4,289		29,490
Running costs	189,788	165,411	65,010	67,375	85,722	120,123	194,580
Training		360	1,185		75	2,337	1,348
Travel & subsistence	65,698	29,140	25,743	23,374	57,138	23,981	59,152
Total	1,412,739	889,226	689,665	693,341	902,729	1,058,871	1,645,931

The Department operates an accrual accounting system which does not analyse accruals at a micro level, therefore detailed expenditure analysis can only be provided for expenditure excluding accruals.

Consequently the above breakdown of expenditure is slightly behind the position set out in accrued accounts.

Categorisation of Rural Crimes

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether and how she is working with the Minister of Justice to review the categorisation of rural crimes.

(AQW 10325/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I met with the Minister of Justice last year, to discuss several issues, including the recent rise in rural crime. I also raised the matter of how rural crime statistics are recorded and was advised that the PSNI record crimes on a District Command Unit (DCU) basis.

While any review of the categorisation of rural crimes is primarily an issue for the PSNI, I will continue to work with both the Minister of Justice and the Chief Constable to explore ways in which we can work together to help tackle rural crime.

Single Farm Payments

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of Single Farm Payment (SFP) applications that are (a) still to be finalised; and (b) undergoing adjustments following inspection; (ii) the target time for the payment of a SFP (a) without inspection; and (b) with inspection; (iii) the actual payment time for a SFP (a) without inspection; and (b) with inspection; and (iv) the target date for the completion of Single Farm Payments.

(AQW 10329/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- i) To date, my Department has finalised 35,570 (94%) of the 37,854 claims submitted under the 2011 Single Farm Payment. On-farm checks were carried out on a total of 1,894 of the claims submitted to verify the eligibility of the land declared to support the claims involved. Of the 2,284 claims not yet finalised, 1,307 require the findings of on-farm inspections to be applied to the claim.
- ii) My Department's SFP payment performance targets for the 2011 Scheme were published in November 2011. These targets were to complete 83% of all claims by the end of December 2011 and 90% by the end of January 2012. Our objective is to pay inspection cases, which can require very complex assessments and therefore take longer to process, at the earliest possible time.
- iii) The EU legislation permitted my Department to start making payments for the 2011 scheme year in December 2011. I am pleased to say that 85.3% of claims were processed for payment in the first month of the opening of the payment window. A further 5% were paid in January, the second month of the permitted period, and a further 2.5% were completed in February and March. The claims paid in December 2011, January, February and March 2012, included around 100, 120, 130 and 180 inspection cases respectively.
- iv) EU Commission regulations require that my Department pays out at least 95.24% of the value of its 2011 SFP budget by 30 June 2012. At this time, around 93% of the budget has been paid out and it is anticipated that that the 30 June requirement will be met. It is also anticipated that 2011 inspection cases will be significantly completed by the end of July 2012. It may take some further time to finalise all the remaining 2011 claims where information or action outside of the control of my Department is required, for example, the completion of probate. Not all of the remaining case will be due a payment because of ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10332/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: No staff have availed of the departmental car. On occasion, the Special Adviser and Private Secretary have travelled with me to official events. The cost of the Ministerial driving service in the 2011/12 financial year, including running costs, was £34,151.56. There has not been any benefit derived which has been subject to income tax.

Royal Ulster Agricultural Society: Relocation

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the benefits to communities in Lagan Valley as a result of the proposed relocation of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society.

(AQO 1720/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I would like to offer my best wishes to the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) on their proposed relocation to the Long Kesh site. It will be an exciting opportunity for the agriculture industry if they commit to building an agriculture centre of excellence. The RUAS presence in the Lagan Valley area has the potential to benefit the area and its communities significantly when it stages key agricultural events such as the Balmoral Show and Winter Fair. The new location will allow RUAS to fully realise and capitalise on the scope of the show and other events as visitor attractions.

I believe that development of the strategically located Long Kesh site provides potential not just for the community in the Lagan Valley but also for those across the North of Ireland. The proposed relocation by RUAS and development of an agriculture centre of excellence could lever investment in infrastructure such as broadband services and attract jobs to the area through the creation and expansion of rural businesses associated with the organisation and its events. I hope that the RUAS master plan will be built upon by the development corporation and that, in time, we will see all of the 347 acre site developed for the good of the community.

Dogs: Microchipping

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she plans to conduct any testing on the possible adverse reactions to microchipping in greyhounds before the implementation of the Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

(AQO 1725/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have no plans to conduct testing on possible adverse reactions to microchipping in greyhounds. The Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations 2012 came into operation on 9 April 2012 and includes a short-term exemption from microchipping for thoroughbred greyhounds registered with the Irish Coursing Club until 1 January 2013. This will allow time for the Irish Coursing Club to enhance their systems to facilitate the recording of microchip numbers.

During consultation on the proposals for the new dog control legislation in 2009, a small number of consultees raised concern that there may be a casual link between microchipping and cancer in dogs. The consultation responses, including all the material relating to the health aspects of microchipping, was considered as part of the Assembly legislative process before the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 was enacted in February 2011.

Regarding the health risks associated with implantation of microchips, there are a small number of studies which suggest the possibility of a link between implantation of microchips and the development of tumours. However, it is clear from the British Small Animal Veterinary Association's research (which has been recognised internationally) that any such risk from microchipping is very low. Between 1996 and 2011, more than 5 million animals were microchipped. Of these, only 429 cases of chip failure, or adverse reactions, to a microchip were reported. Of the 429 cases, and I think that this is something that I must stress, only 3 cases involved a tumour in the area of the implantation site, but there was no conclusive evidence of a direct link to the microchip.

The Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 provides for an exemption from the microchipping requirement where a veterinary surgeon confirms that microchipping would have an adverse effect on the health of the dog. If, in a veterinary surgeon's professional opinion, microchipping would have a detrimental impact

on a dog's health the veterinarian should provide the dog owner with a signed certificate to that effect. On production of that certificate the local Council will license the dog without the need for a microchip.

To assist dog owners, Dogs Trust has recently announced that they are extending their free microchipping campaign in the north until the end of 2012.

Common Agricultural Policy: Less-favoured Areas

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the potential changes to the Less Favoured Areas scheme under the current EU Common Agricultural Policy proposals.

(AQO 1729/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowances Scheme currently forms an important part of our Rural Development Programme and operates under Pillar II of the CAP. My Department undertook a review of the support arrangements for less favoured areas in 2009. In policy terms, the evidence from this review clearly points to an underpinning rationale and need for continuing LFA support with a clear focus on contributing, through continued use of agricultural land, to delivering positive environmental outcomes and, in particular, avoiding land abandonment and environmental degradation. The European Commission published legislative proposals for CAP post 2013 last October and these include a provision, within Pillar II of the CAP, to continue support for Less Favoured Areas (or Areas of Natural constraint) post 2013. However, there are some potential changes to the architecture of the Pillar II support in that payments may require to be linked more closely to compensating farmers for the additional costs incurred and income foregone of those farming in the LFAs and to be degressive above a threshold level of area per holding. The CAP Reform post 2013 proposals also provide for an optional payment for areas with natural constraints within Pillar I, but Pillar II payments would need to take account of any Pillar I payment.

The future of LFA support beyond 2013 will also depend on the outcome of the EU-led project on the re-designation of these areas. The EU Commission has proposed that the future designation of areas of natural constraint should be based on a set of objective biophysical criteria. The proposals also suggest that these new designations be in place from 1 January 2014.

Overall, I am working hard to ensure we have sufficient flexibility within the overall CAP framework post 2013 to allow me to address the needs of these areas.

Agri-food Strategy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions have been held with Bord Bia on her plans for a new Agri-food Strategy.

(AQO 1730/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: On 22 March this year, I had a very useful meeting with Aidan Cotter, the Chief Executive of Bord Bia to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Specifically, we discussed how Bord Bia's Pathways to Growth Report and the south's Food Harvest 2020 document are formally guiding the strategic focus and priorities of the agri-food sector. We also discussed similarities that might arise with the work of our Agri-Food Strategy Board, the potential for cross-border collaboration on these and other related work, such as food labelling, and the value of working together to overcome difficulties.

At the meeting, Aidan also emphasised the essential role of partnership with industry in driving the success of Food Harvest 2020. This is a view, I very much share and that is why our Agri-Food Strategy Board, here in the north, will be industry-led. I believe everyone involved in the food chain, from farmers through to processors and suppliers, need to play their part in taking forward work on the Strategy.

Aidan and I agreed to keep in touch as our work on the Strategy develops.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's internal work and external engagement in preparing systems, staff and processes for a possible transitional period between the existing and a reformed Common Agricultural Policy if its implementation is delayed beyond January 2014.

(AQO 1731/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The current CAP legislation covers the period up to the end of 2012 for the Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme and to the end of 2013 for Rural Development Schemes (including Less Favoured Areas and Agri-Environment Schemes). The CAP Reform proposals are intended to apply from 1 January 2014 onwards. Hence the Commission has published a transitional regulation for SFP in 2013 scheme year which is scheduled to be agreed later this year. It is in the most part a rollover of existing arrangements and therefore I would anticipate that our current systems and process will suffice in relation to 2013.

I am aware that it is possible that the implementation of the CAP Reform proposals will be delayed beyond 2014 and we are currently pressing the EU Commission to come forward with proposals to deal with this scenario. At this stage the EU Commission is reluctant to concede that there will be a delay. It is anticipated that any interim arrangements in 2014 for SFP will be a rollover of the current scheme which should mean minimal changes to existing systems and processes. The position in relation to Rural Development schemes in 2014 is more complicated and hence we are pressing the EU Commission to come forward with proposals at the earliest opportunity so that the necessary systems, staff and processes can be put in place.

Rural Primary Schools

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any assessment has been made of the impact on a rural community of a primary school closure.

(AQO 1732/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Quality education and good schools play a vital role in sustaining our rural communities; indeed I have recently raised concerns about school closures directly with the Minister of Education.

Policy responsibility for the schools estate rests with the Department of Education. It is my understanding that a published statutory Development Proposal is required before there can be any significant change in the school estate, such as a school closure. I am assured that the Department of Education's Sustainable Schools Policy which addresses the issue of rural schools and was rural proofed prior to publication, rigorously assesses any published Development Proposal.

The Department of Education has made a number of commitments in relation to sustaining rural communities under their Sustainable Schools Policy. This proposes six criteria for use in assessing a schools educational viability, these are: quality educational experience, stable enrolment trends, sound financial position, strong leadership and management, accessibility and strong links within the community. Schools are therefore assessed not just on numbers attending, but also on a range of criteria including their position within the community.

While the Department of Education is taking the lead on this issue I am fully supportive of their approach. I will continue to work with my Ministerial colleagues and departmental officials through various means including the Rural White Paper Action Plan, to ensure that the provision of high quality education supports the sustainability of our rural communities.

Woodland

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the Department's performance in meeting its target to increase woodland coverage.

(AQO 1733/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Forest Service business plan target in 2011/12 was to create 250ha of new woodland under the Woodland Grant Scheme and by 1 March 2012 this target had been exceeded and 284ha was planted. However I acknowledge that this rate of planting is insufficient to meet our aim to increase woodland cover to 12% of land area by the middle of this century.

To help achieve our long term aim, last November I announced in the Assembly that Forest Service will review support arrangements for private planting to increase the rate of woodland creation. I also indicated that the review will take account of the Commission's proposals under the draft Rural Development Regulation.

While I acknowledge our requirement of agricultural land for food production, I am aware of a limited amount of such land, that since 2008 has or may become ineligible under the Single Farm Payment (SFP) scheme, or which is not in good agricultural and environmental condition. This land may be

suitable for forestry planting in a way to help farmers comply with their SFP responsibilities. Forest Service will explore the potential of this land with stakeholders in advance of the 2013 planting season.

Rural Development Programme

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many measures in Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme are currently open or will be opened in the next six weeks.

(AQO 1734/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The grant application process is open under the Rural Development Programme, and 5 measures are currently open for applications. There is however a backlog of applications across the 7 clusters and officials are working proactively with each cluster to assist in clearing these backlogs before opening calls so that there is a clear indication of the value of uncommitted funds. Presently the current backlog of applications stands at 471 worth £33m. This work will also inform the clusters review and completion of Implementation Spending Plans for the 2012/13 financial year and indeed subsequent years, it is through these implementation plans that the clusters set their financial spend targets. This work will also assist them re-focus their delivery of Axis 3 funding to ensure that it is invested effectively in rural communities.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure: Special Adviser

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she will ensure that the appointment process for her Special Adviser results in the most qualified and suitable candidate being appointed.

(AQO 1743/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The DCAL Special Adviser was appointed in accordance with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as amended.

DCAL: Review of Administration

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what powers or responsibilities her Department will pass to local government as part of the Review of Public Administration.

(AQO 1746/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department is not transferring any powers to local government as part of the Review of Public Administration. The functions which the Department plan to transfer are;

- Armagh County Museum will transfer to the Armagh / Banbridge / Craigavon Council.
- Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) will transfer to local government provided that a suitable delivery arrangement can be agreed with local government.

- Twenty one water recreation sites are to transfer to local councils.
- My Department is committed to transferring funding for local arts to local government in line with the guiding principles set out for RPA. The budget for local Arts in 2009 / 2010 was calculated at £1.1 million.

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10333/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for Ministerial transport was transferred from Department of Finance and Personnel to departments with effect from 1 April 2011. Since that date no staff from my Department has availed of the Ministerial car or driver.

Fish Caught in Lough Neagh by Legal Netsmen

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what procedures are in place to ensure an accurate count of the fish caught in Lough Neagh by legal netsmen from 2012 onwards.

(AQW 10404/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The only requirement on DCAL licensed netsmen to ensure an accurate count of fish caught in Lough Neagh is through the salmon carcass tagging scheme as stipulated in the Fisheries (Tagging and Logbook) Byelaws (Northern Ireland) 2001 as amended. The Department enforces this through inspections on boats and at quaysides where salmon are detected in the catch.

DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers also carry out inspections of fish dealers to ensure fish registers are aligned with fish present on the premises.

There is no legal basis for the Department to ensure an accurate count of all fish caught on Lough Neagh by licensed netsmen. Lough Neagh is a private fishery and the scale fishing rights are claimed by the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society Ltd (LNFSC).

River Bann: Leisure

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given the cultural history of the Mountsandel area of Coleraine, what plans she has to promote the Lower River Bann System as a leisure destination.

(AQO 1736/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: With regard to the Lower Bann, Waterways Ireland plan to carry out a Product Development Study for this region in 2012.

This study will involve the relevant tourism and local authorities being consulted to define the aims and future needs of the region. Waterways Ireland has also published a Lower Bann Chart which details key facilities in this area.

Waterways Ireland sponsors a diverse range of events across the navigations. To date approximately 65,000 people have attended the Riverfest events at Coleraine on the Lower Bann. Other events sponsored by Waterways Ireland include the Head of the River rowing competition and the Ulster Schools Coarse Angling competitions.

In recent years Sport NI has also provided funding towards the development of sporting and leisure activities on the Lower Bann. If there is a demand from local users, activity providers and land managers to develop a forum for the Lower Bann then Sport NI and Waterways Ireland will be happy to support it.

Data on the Fish Life in Lough Neagh

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures are being taken to collect accurate data on the fish life in Lough Neagh, particularly eels, salmon, dollaghan, roach and perch; and when accurate reports will become available.

(AQW 10508/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The responsibility for fish monitoring programmes as required by European Commission law rests with Department of Environment.

Stadium Development Project for Casement Park

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the social clauses that will be part of the Stadium Development Project for Casement Park.

(AQO 1741/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Social clauses, and strategies for maximum social returns, will be firmly embedded throughout the procurement and delivery process for all three sports stadia. Relevant clauses and measures will be included on both contracts for professional services and construction works and will contain provision for delivering sustainable economic, social, environmental and equality improvements. For example, I would wish to see the projects providing skills development opportunities and employment opportunities.

The Sports Governing Bodies' Project teams working on the stadiums are currently liaising with my officials, the Strategic Investment Board, Central Procurement Directorate and the Department for Employment and Learning to ensure that the use of social clauses is both applied and optimised through the development of these major construction projects.

I am pleased that all of the sporting bodies intend to implement my Department's requirements on social clauses and maximum social returns. I am currently considering the detail of how community participation can be maximised, equality impacts measured and monitored, and significant social returns delivered to the most deprived parts of this society.

The Executive is firmly committed to the use of public money for maximum improvements to the lives of those areas and communities suffering greatest socio-economic inequalities. My Department also has stand-alone statutory and public policy requirements as a public authority in its own right which impose specific obligations, such as the general duty and specific procedural duties attached to Section 75 of the NI Act 1998. It is worth noting the words of the now First Minister, when he launched the Executive's guidance on integrating social and equality requirements into public procurement as Finance and Personnel Minister in May 2008. Mr Robinson said: "...opportunities exist within the procurement process for policy makers and procurement professionals to work together with suppliers to promote equality of opportunity and sustainable development in the delivery of our public services". The Executive's May 2008 guidance is the minimum bottom-line guidance to assist Departments on how those opportunities can be maximised. I am requiring that each of the three sporting bodies fully integrates the need for social clauses and socio-economic returns as a "golden thread" within the entire lifetime of each of the stadiums.

Football: Brandywell Stadium

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what implications the Windsor Park lease agreement may have for the redevelopment of the Brandywell Stadium.

(AQO 1745/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The process of developing the policy on regional stadium development has required the Irish Football Association and Linfield Football Club to have the existing financial agreement between them renegotiated before public funding is made available for the redevelopment of Windsor Park. The agreement refers solely to the use of Windsor Park for International football events and therefore does not impact on any other football stadium in the north of Ireland.

Irish Language: Funding

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how core funding for Irish language groups will be developed following the recent consultation on funding arrangements.

(AQO 1748/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The consultation about the proposed changes to the core funding arrangements for Irish language groups ended on 2 April 2012; therefore no decisions have yet been taken on how core funding for Irish language groups will be developed.

At the NSMC Language Meeting held on 14 February 2012, Ministers were given an assurance by Foras na Gaeilge that all submissions received as part of the consultation process would be considered.

The responses are currently being analysed and a report of the findings will be presented to the Board of Foras na Gaeilge in May 2012 for consideration.

While it is important to ensure the best use of the resources available, I will need to be convinced that the proposed changes to the funding arrangements will mean the current and future development needs of the language are fully met.

Following the completion of the consultation process, Foras na Gaeilge will finalise a detailed business case in support of the portfolio of draft schemes.

NSMC approved an extension of interim funding for the existing core funded bodies to the end of June 2013.

Department of Education

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10292/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): On rare occasions, departmental staff have travelled with me to official events. Other than these occasions, departmental staff have not used the Ministerial car. The cost of the Ministerial Driving Service for the Department of Education for the 2011/12 financial year, including running costs, was £36,333. There has not been any benefit derived which has been subject to income tax.

School Leavers with Hearing Loss/Deafness who Achieved at least Five GCSEs

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last three years, to detail the percentage of school leavers with hearing loss/deafness who achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A* - C, broken down by Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 10511/11-15)

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

Percentage of school leavers with hearing loss/deafness who achieved at least 5 GCSEs A*-C inc. equivalents by Education and Library Board 2007/08 to 2009/10

	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
BELB	5	38.5	6	66.7	8	53.3

	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
WELB	*	#	7	53.8	*	#
NEELB	5	50.0	*	#	8	66.7
SEELB	7	35.0	7	38.9	5	35.7
SELB	6	46.2	*	#	*	#

Source: School Leavers Survey

Figures include those pupils with mild/moderate hearing loss and severe/profound hearing loss.

Data excludes special and independent schools

* Denotes fewer than five pupils

figure not provided under rules of statistical disclosure

Department for Employment and Learning

Additional Cost of Providing Services in Our Divided Society

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an estimate of the annual additional cost to his Department of providing its services in our divided society, broken down by (i) capital; and (ii) revenue costs.

(AQW 10093/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): In line with my public commitment to address this aspect of public spending in Northern Ireland, I have undertaken an assessment across the Department for Employment and Learning of the impact of societal division. The services my Department delivers and secures on behalf of the population have been and continue to be affected by the legacy of conflict and the consequences of division in Northern Ireland society.

Arguably this impact is felt most keenly in the demand for services and is indirectly related to previous and continuing lost economic opportunities. The study undertaken indicates that there is less evidence of duplication costs, given the physical location of services. In three business areas the initial analysis suggested elements of duplication:

Employment Service: With the exception of Derry and Belfast, there is little evidence of duplication of services resulting from divisions and segregation. Employment services are generally available on a cross-community basis

Fair Employment Tribunal: Duplication of activity and management has been largely eradicated in recent years. In the longer term, the question remains as to whether it is appropriate to maintain Industrial Tribunal and Fair Employment Tribunal structures which are technically separate. Initial findings suggest that any savings arising from a merger are likely to be small, however, given that duplication has been eliminated to a large extent.

Higher Education: In the higher education sector, particularly with regard to initial teacher training, additional costs are incurred in maintaining existing arrangements. These would be avoided by a more integrated approach to teacher training. I am currently engaged with the first element of a two-stage study examining the future of the teacher training infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the final underspend for the first round of the European Social Fund Programme; and what happened to the unspent monies.

(AQW 10174/11-15)

Dr Farry: Following the first round of the NIESF a total of £1,113m of the Department's contribution to the NIESF Programme was surrendered back to the executive and a further £329k of an easement in 10/11 was utilised internally by the Department.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much of the unspent monies from the first round of the European Social Fund Programme was brought forward to the second round; and how much was transferred between Priority 1 and Priority 2.

(AQW 10175/11-15)

Dr Farry: Funding from within the Northern Ireland European Social Fund was available for allocation under two calls launched during the life-time of the programme from 2007-2013. Any unspent funding identified following the first call activity was not carried forward to the second call as the Department did not have the additional 25% annual funding contribution required to match the ESF funding. However this does not impact on the Department's ability to drawdown the full ESF allocation over the life time of the programme

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether there is provision within the European Social Fund Programme to carry any underspend from the first round to the second round of the Programme.

(AQW 10176/11-15)

Dr Farry: Funding from within the Northern Ireland European Social Fund was available for allocation under two calls launched during the life-time of the programme from 2007-2013. Any unspent funding identified following the first call activity was not carried forward to the second call as the Department did not have the additional 25% annual funding contribution required to match the ESF funding. However this does not impact on the Department's ability to drawdown the full ESF allocation over the life time of the programme

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether there is a mechanism for moving funding between Priority 1 and 2 of the European Social Fund Programme.

(AQW 10177/11-15)

Dr Farry: Complicated mechanisms do exist to move funding between the Priority 1 and 2 of the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NIESF) Operational Programme as set out in the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, Article 65 (g).

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) whether any of the projects which accepted the offer made in April 2011 of financial assistance from the European Social Fund have yet to be added to the EU database; and (ii) the reason for the delay in adding the projects to the database.

(AQW 10248/11-15)

Dr Farry: All successful projects have been issued with a Letter of Offer and this information has been recorded on the Systems 2007 database. Any delay in adding the projects on the database was due

to delay in receiving match funding commitment certificates from the projects. This completes the full cycle for project eligibility and accountability. All projects have been recorded on the database.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation the European Social Fund Programme, to detail the three projects that did not accept an offer of funding in the second round; and the total level of funding unallocated as a result.

(AQW 10249/11-15)

Dr Farry: Two projects withdrew from the second round of the ESF Programme. The total value of ESF and DEL funding was £1,270,337

Educational Provision at the University of Ulster

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he intends to maintain the standard of educational provision at the University of Ulster given the reduction in funding which has occurred.

(AQW 10253/11-15)

Dr Farry: As a result of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review all Higher Education Institutions have had to identify savings equivalent to 6% of their block grants over two successive years. My intention is that funding will be held constant for the final two years of the spending review period.

However, each university and college of higher education is responsible for managing its own resources within the funding available, for the standards of the awards it makes and for the quality of the education it provides to its students. Each has its own annual internal quality assurance procedures and longer term periodic reviews.

Despite the additional funding shortfall, which arose as a result of the decision on tuition fees and is being addressed through a collective Executive agreement, my Department continues to fully discharge its statutory duty to ensure that the teaching provision it funds at the four Northern Ireland HEIs is of high quality and meets agreed standards within the HE Sector, thus ensuring that NI students and/or Institutions are not at a disadvantage to their other UK counterparts.

The Department exercises this duty by working with and contracting the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to devise and implement quality assurance methods.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what savings were identified by his Department's value for money exercise on the European Social Fund Programme.

(AQW 10291/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department carried out an affordability exercise on the second call for funding under the Northern Ireland European Social Fund. The second call was significantly over-subscribed in terms of both the number of applications received and the funding sought. A total of 112 applications were received under the second call compared with 86 for the first call, an increase of over 30%.

The total value of ESF funding sought amounted to almost £50 million, against a budget of £30 million over a three-year period. The Department applied a cut – off point of 134 marks in order to ensure that available funds were distributed to as many projects as possible i.e. fund the greatest number of projects, but at a reduced level that would still be feasible for the projects.

83 projects scoring 134 marks or more were selected for funding subject to a satisfactory economic appraisal as determined by DFP

This arrangement resulted in a much greater number of projects funded than would have been the case. Had all top scoring projects been allocated the full amount bid for, only 49 projects would have been supported in the second call.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department will maximise the funding available through the European Social Fund Programme and issue letters of offer to projects that were successful in their bids but which are currently unfunded, given that there are a further 2 years of the programme remaining.

(AQW 10294/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is satisfied that the 82 Priority 1 projects currently in receipt of ESF funding over the next two years of the second call will be able to maximise and spend the available funding from the European Social Fund.

On this basis it is not the Managing Authority's intention to issue any additional letters of offer at this stage but the situation will be kept under review as part of the programme's ongoing financial management.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether, as of March 2012, there are identified savings or underspend for the end of year 1 of the second round of projects under the European Social Fund Programme; and if so, what plans are in place to redistribute this funding to ensure that there is maximum expenditure with no decommitment to the EU.

(AQW 10299/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is satisfied that the 82 Priority 1 projects currently in receipt of ESF funding over the next two years of the second call will be able to maximise and spend the available funding from the European Social Fund without any decommitment to the EU. Whilst the second call experienced a modest under spend in the first year of operation it is anticipated that this will be corrected in the incoming years as the 82 projects settle down and spend as forecasted.

On this basis it is not the Managing Authority's intention to issue any additional letters of offer at this stage but the situation will be kept under review as part of the programme's ongoing financial management.

Health Professions Admission Test

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the decision to use the Health Professions Admission Test as a screening tool for students applying to health profession courses at the University of Ulster.

(AQW 10310/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster has stated that the proposal to introduce the Health Professions Admissions Test was screened according to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, with no indication of an adverse impact on any Section 75 group.

Health Professions Admission Test

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the impact on students with reading difficulties of the University of Ulster's use of the Health Professions Admission Test, as a screening tool for students applying to health profession courses.

(AQW 10312/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster is responsible for its own policies and procedures, including admissions. The University has stated that all applicants undertaking the Health Professions Admissions Test are advised that they may declare a disability prior to the test and request a reasonable adjustment to be made. This includes applicants with dyslexia or other specific learning difficulties.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Trade and Innovation Programmes

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, further to her statement on 27 March 2012, how much of the £119.8 million 'business value' from companies participating on Trade and Innovation Programmes relates to Northern Ireland business; and what percentage change does this represents from previous years.

(AQW 10187/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): In 2011 the business value achieved by Northern Ireland companies was 64% of the total, in 2009 and 2010 the Northern Ireland percentage was 29% and 27% respectively. Annual comparisons are influenced by the schedules for evaluations and monitoring visits.

Intertrade Ireland Trade and Innovation Programmes

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, further to her statement on 27 March 2012, of the 2576 companies that have participated on Intertrade Ireland Trade and Innovation Programmes, how many are based in Northern Ireland; and how does this number compare with previous years.

(AQW 10188/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Out of the number of companies engaged in North South business through InterTradeIreland activities and services, in 2011 Northern Ireland companies represented 33% of the total, compared with 26% in 2009 and 17% in 2010.

Tourist Industry

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what analysis her Department has carried out on any detriment that is being caused to the tourist industry by not marketing this region as part of Ireland.

(AQW 10223/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 10224/11-15.

Tourists

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she is aware that tourists in many key markets are not aware of the existence of a border and regard Ireland as a single entity.

(AQW 10224/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Responsibility for marketing Northern Ireland overseas lies with Tourism Ireland which was established under the framework of the Belfast Agreement of Good Friday 1998.

Its main objective is to market both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland overseas and to help Northern Ireland realise its tourism potential.

Tourism Ireland works with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, which is responsible for product and enterprise development and marketing to tourism consumers within both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

There is a range of information available to tourists on Tourism Ireland's website www.discoverireland.com

Tourism Stakeholders

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what research her Department has carried out with tourism stakeholders on the issue of this region being marketed as a destination in Ireland.

(AQW 10225/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 10224/11-15.

InvestNI Land

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7967/11-15, to detail (i) whether any of the measures, such as assignment, sub-lease or buy-back have been implemented at Invest NI sites at Station Road and Creagh, including how much land in each case; (ii) the cost to Invest NI of re-purchasing lands previously sold; and (iii) the intentions of InvestNI in relation to the re-purchased land and whether any of it is to be offered to the private sector for development.

(AQW 10246/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The tables attached at Annex A provide the information you have requested at points (i) and (ii) above in respect of both Creagh and Station Road Business Parks.

Companies seeking further information on these property interventions should, in the first instance, contact their Invest NI Client Executive.

In relation to point (iii) I can confirm that land which has been re-purchased by Invest NI, as with all Invest NI owned property, is held in support of economic development and is actively marketed to both foreign and indigenous investors through the agency's NIBusinessInfo.co.uk website.

Invest NI property is available to those companies that meet criteria including turnover and quantity of business outside Northern Ireland. The company must also have a robust, approved business case and a demonstrable immediate property need.

Annex A

CREAGH BUSINESS PARK

Measure	Number of Instances	Acreage	Paid by Invest NI (£)
Sub-Lease	0	0	0
Lease Assignment	0	0	0
Land Buy Back*	2	11.05	1.75m

STATION ROAD BUSINESS PARK

Measure	Number of Instances	Acreage	Paid by Invest NI (£)
Sub-Lease	0	0	0
Lease Assignment	1	2.415	0
Land Buy Back*	0	0	0

* In order for Invest NI to consider the re-purchase of undeveloped land, a company must first demonstrate, to the agency's satisfaction, that it is in acute hardship as a result of the economic downturn. Each case is appraised and is subject to a rigorous approvals process to ensure good corporate governance. The market value of all property, either purchased or sold by Invest NI, is set by DFP Land and Property Services.

Tourism Market

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of local tourism operators being isolated from a larger tourism market if this region is not marketed as Ireland.

(AQW 10290/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 10224/11-15.

Department of the Environment

Moyle Council

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to extend to Moyle Council, the same support given to Coleraine Borough Council to tackle dereliction in the area, given its tourist attractions, such as the Giants Causeway and Bushmills Distillery.

(AQW 9826/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The support to Coleraine Council was provided against the backdrop of the greatly increased media and tourist interest which the hosting of the Irish Open golf championship will bring to the Portrush/Portstewart area, the cross-departmental work that had been carried out in partnership with the Council in identifying the area's worst examples of dereliction and dilapidation and the need to improve amenity experience for general tourist business and those who live locally.

I recognise the potential to extend the principle of the Portrush/Portstewart intervention to other districts suffering similar problems. However, clearly, such projects can only be tackled if the necessary funding is available. If monies become available, it would be through in-year monitoring and / or end of year unspent monies.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to improve his Department's performance in enforcing Tree Preservation Orders.

(AQW 10287/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I believe robust measures should be taken in relation to planning offences and that enforcement – particularly for serious environmental and planning issues - needs to be escalated.

I have been assessing how to achieve this and I have made it crystal clear to my staff that more robust enforcement is an essential element of a balanced planning system.

In particular reference to enforcement of Tree Preservation Orders, I have asked my officials to review existing procedures for alerting the Department outside office hours of active tree felling. In addition, commencing in this new business year, I have requested that my officials provide me with monthly reports in relation to enforcement activities associated with High Priority cases – this includes trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order. I have done this because it is rare for a Tree Preservation Order to end up in court proceedings and I wish to ensure that action is and is seen to be taken against those who breach Tree Preservation Orders.

Derelict Property

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment, given his announcement of funding to deal with derelict sites on the North Coast, whether funding will be extended to other areas for similar projects.

(AQO 1697/11-15)

Mr Attwood: This Assembly will be aware of the particular significance of this year for the Portrush/Portstewart area and of the greatly increased media and tourist interest which will be focused there,

with the hosting of the Irish Open golf championship. It was against that background that I decided to provide some funding to help reduce the potentially negative impact of the area's worst eyesores.

The Assembly will also be aware of the dereliction that is reducing the enjoyment of the area for yearlong tourist visitor and residents.

I would very much like to extend the principle of my Portrush/Portstewart intervention to other districts suffering similar problems. Such projects can only be tackled if supporting funding is available. The principle of such intervention remains one in which I believe and a goal towards which I continue to work. Given the financial pressures in the department and across the public sector, funding opportunities through in year monitoring rounds offer one potential mechanism to take this initiative forward.

On the question of the recovery of monies from the owners' properties improved by this action, Coleraine Borough Council has stipulated, within the Deed of Consent it agreed with affected land and property owners, that the owners accept that a payback clause for monies above £10,000 would be part of the arrangement for works carried out to their property. Any such monies would be returned to the department.

Developers: Incomplete Developments

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment what meetings he has attended in the last month with developers on the issue of incomplete developments.

(AQO 1698/11-15)

Mr Attwood: During the last month I spoke with a senior official in NAMA in relation to this issue. As part of the Portrush/Portstewart intervention, I shall shortly call in developers to make it clear what I consider their responsibility for sites. I am looking to meet with the banks and have also tasked officials to work up how central and local government can intervene more fully and robustly in relation to dangerous dilapidated and derelict sites or properties.

Wildlife: Endangered Species

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what he is doing to protect endangered wildlife species.

(AQO 1699/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Northern Ireland Environment Agency undertakes a variety of actions to protect endangered wildlife species. These include gathering information to help identify species which require legal protection or listing as Northern Ireland priority species. A wide range of measures are used to protect these species including the declaration and management of designated sites such as Areas of Special Scientific Interest, addressing the needs of species in the regulation of activities such as planning, and engagement with the public to inform people about the conservation requirements for species and the law as it relates to wildlife.

Road Safety: Cyclists

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Minister for Regional Development about improving road safety for cyclists.

(AQO 1701/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have met with Minister Kennedy on two occasions. In our meeting on 17 August 2011 we discussed speed limits and the road safety strategy. On 15 December 2011 we met during the Ministerial Road Safety Group. I will meet with Minister Kennedy again when the Ministerial Road Safety Group reconvenes on 9 May 2012.

The focus of the meetings held last August and December was not specifically about cyclists, but concerned the protection of all vulnerable road users including pedestrians, children, the elderly and cyclists.

One of the results of the meetings is that my officials are co-operating with DRD officials in preparing a publication to provide advice on safe cycling.

Local Government: Power Sharing

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will ensure that a structure of governance is put in place when powers are transferred to local government under the Review of Public Administration to promote power-sharing, fairness and the protection of minorities.

(AQO 1702/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am committed to ensuring that equality of opportunity and fairness will be key features in the new councils. The Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill, that I will, subject to Executive agreement, be introducing to the Assembly in the autumn will make provision for the new governance arrangements.

These arrangements will allow councils to select, from a limited number of specified models, the method it wishes to use to allocate positions within the council, and on external bodies. It is intended that the application of each of the models will be specified in legislation.

The arrangements will also include the use of a call-in procedure where a number of councillors, who have an issue with a specific decision, would be able to join together to request that a decision is reviewed. The criteria for "call-in" will cover both issues of a procedural matter and also any issue in relation to the protection of political minorities. A further check and balance will be the introduction of qualified majority voting for specified strategic decisions.

All these arrangements are mindful of the need to ensure effective and inclusive local democracy, to protect the rights of minorities, to prevent any direct or indirect discrimination, and to promote equality of opportunity. If there is any weakness in what is being proposed, I would welcome hearing further. The opportunity to build the highest level of protection into reformed local government structures needs to be fully embraced.

Derelict Property: Portrush and Portstewart

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to recover the money spent on derelict properties in Portrush and Portstewart from the owners of the properties.

(AQO 1703/11-15)

Mr Attwood: This Assembly will be aware of the particular significance of this year for the Portrush/Portstewart area and of the greatly increased media and tourist interest which will be focused there, with the hosting of the Irish Open golf championship. It was against that background that I decided to provide some funding to help reduce the potentially negative impact of the area's worst eyesores.

The Assembly will also be aware of the dereliction that is reducing the enjoyment of the area for yearlong tourist visitor and residents.

I would very much like to extend the principle of my Portrush/Portstewart intervention to other districts suffering similar problems. Such projects can only be tackled if supporting funding is available. The principle of such intervention remains one in which I believe and a goal towards which I continue to work. Given the financial pressures in the department and across the public sector, funding opportunities through in year monitoring rounds offer one potential mechanism to take this initiative forward.

On the question of the recovery of monies from the owners' properties improved by this action, Coleraine Borough Council has stipulated, within the Deed of Consent it agreed with affected land and property owners, that the owners accept that a payback clause for monies above £10,000 would be part of the arrangement for works carried out to their property. Any such monies would be returned to the department.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Departmental Staff

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of staff in post at (i) grades (a) 7; (b) 6; (c) 5; (d) 3; and (e) 1; and (ii) analogous grades, in each Department, at 1 January, in each year between 2000 and 2012.

(AQW 8226/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The number of civil servants at (i) grades (a) 7; (b) 6; (c) 5; (d) 3; and (e) 1; and (ii) analogous grades, in each Department, at 1 January, in each year between 2000 and 2011 is set out in the attached tables. Validated data at 1 January 2012 is not yet available. Data in relation to the Senior Civil Service (Grades 1-5) is held as Grade 5 and above and is not further disaggregated.

NICS STAFF AT GRADE LEVELS 7, 6, AND 5+ BY DEPARTMENT @ 1ST JAN 2000-2011

2000

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	14	1	28	43	9	21	221	251	23	22	249	294
DCAL	4	0	6	10	2	1	6	9	6	1	12	19
DE	9	0	20	29	6	51	1	58	15	51	21	87
DETI	26	3	63	92	1	6	38	45	27	9	101	137
DFP	16	3	52	71	18	40	67	125	34	43	119	196
DHFETE	8	1	27	36	0	0	1	1	8	1	28	37
DHSSPS	12	2	42	56	19	28	33	80	31	30	75	136
DOE	10	1	24	35	6	13	34	53	16	14	58	88
DRD	11	2	26	39	10	17	68	95	21	19	94	134
DSD	16	2	46	64	2	7	2	11	18	9	48	75
OFMDFM	7	2	22	31	4	2	0	6	11	4	22	37
Total	133	17	356	506	77	186	471	734	210	203	827	1240

2001

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	15	1	30	46	8	23	220	251	23	24	250	297
DCAL	4	0	10	14	2	1	6	9	6	1	16	23
DE	9	0	21	30	5	54	1	60	14	54	22	90
DETI	25	3	63	91	2	4	39	45	27	7	102	136
DFP	18	3	51	72	20	53	73	146	38	56	124	218
DHFETE	8	1	28	37	0	1	1	2	8	2	29	39

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DHSSPS	13	3	45	61	17	25	34	76	30	28	79	137
DOE	9	1	28	38	6	14	34	54	15	15	62	92
DRD	12	2	30	44	9	18	70	97	21	20	100	141
DSD	15	2	57	74	2	6	1	9	17	8	58	83
OFMDFM	15	1	35	51	4	5	2	11	19	6	37	62
Total	143	17	398	558	75	204	481	760	218	221	879	1318

2002

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	15	1	30	46	8	27	226	261	23	28	256	307
DCAL	4	1	10	15	2	1	7	10	6	2	17	25
DE	10	0	22	32	5	52	1	58	15	52	23	90
DETI	25	3	69	97	2	4	37	43	27	7	106	140
DFP	19	3	52	74	15	52	72	139	34	55	124	213
DEL	10	1	27	38	0	0	2	2	10	1	29	40
DHSSPS	15	1	45	61	20	30	31	81	35	31	76	142
DOE	11	1	27	39	5	14	36	55	16	15	63	94
DRD	14	2	37	53	9	18	76	103	23	20	113	156
DSD	14	3	61	78	1	1	1	3	15	4	62	81
OFMDFM	18	0	38	56	6	3	3	12	24	3	41	68
Total	155	16	418	589	73	202	492	767	228	218	910	1356

2003

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	16	1	33	50	4	25	227	256	20	26	260	306
DCAL	4	2	15	21	2	0	6	8	6	2	21	29
DE	9	0	23	32	5	53	2	60	14	53	25	92
DETI	12	2	28	42	1	4	21	26	13	6	49	68
DFP	22	3	63	88	15	51	77	143	37	54	140	231
DEL	10	1	29	40	0	0	3	3	10	1	32	43
DHSSPS	13	2	51	66	20	34	34	88	33	36	85	154
DOE	10	2	34	46	6	13	47	66	16	15	81	112

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DRD	15	2	39	56	8	18	78	104	23	20	117	160
DSD	16	4	66	86	1	1	1	3	17	5	67	89
OFMDFM	24	1	41	66	6	3	3	12	30	4	44	78
Total	151	20	422	593	68	202	499	769	219	222	921	1362

2004

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	19	3	40	62	4	23	227	254	23	26	267	316
DCAL	5	1	19	25	2	1	7	10	7	2	26	35
DE	9	0	27	36	5	57	2	64	14	57	29	100
DETI	10	2	28	40	1	4	20	25	11	6	48	65
DFP	25	3	67	95	13	49	77	139	38	52	144	234
DEL	10	1	32	43	0	1	2	3	10	2	34	46
DHSSPS	18	2	52	72	17	32	38	87	35	34	90	159
DOE	12	3	35	50	5	15	50	70	17	18	85	120
DRD	19	2	37	58	4	20	77	101	23	22	114	159
DSD	18	5	65	88	0	0	3	3	18	5	68	91
OFMDFM	24	2	40	66	6	2	3	11	30	4	43	77
Total	169	24	442	635	57	204	506	767	226	228	948	1402

2005

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	19	3	42	64	4	21	257	282	23	24	299	346
DCAL	5	1	21	27	2	1	7	10	7	2	28	37
DE	10	0	27	37	5	63	2	70	15	63	29	107
DETI	11	1	28	40	1	3	22	26	12	4	50	66
DFP	31	12	76	119	11	48	76	135	42	60	152	254
DEL	9	1	33	43	0	0	4	4	9	1	37	47
DHSSPS	18	3	52	73	19	29	37	85	37	32	89	158
DOE	14	4	49	67	4	17	62	83	18	21	111	150
DRD	20	2	40	62	4	19	78	101	24	21	118	163
DSD	20	7	74	101	0	0	3	3	20	7	77	104

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
OFMDFM	24	1	49	74	5	3	2	10	29	4	51	84
Total	181	35	491	707	55	204	550	809	236	239	1041	1516

2006

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	18	2	42	62	3	21	264	288	21	23	306	350
DCAL	5	1	18	24	1	1	7	9	6	2	25	33
DE	10	0	28	38	5	62	2	69	15	62	30	107
DETI	9	1	30	40	1	4	24	29	10	5	54	69
DFP	33	18	90	141	12	44	116	172	45	62	206	313
DEL	8	3	35	46	0	1	2	3	8	4	37	49
DHSSPS	17	3	57	77	18	27	39	84	35	30	96	161
DOE	13	4	49	66	3	15	71	89	16	19	120	155
DRD	20	11	52	83	4	18	51	73	24	29	103	156
DSD	20	8	76	104	0	0	3	3	20	8	79	107
OFMDFM	22	0	34	56	5	2	4	11	27	2	38	67
Total	175	51	511	737	52	195	583	830	227	246	1094	1567

2007

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	17	2	40	59	2	8	206	216	19	10	246	275
DCAL	5	1	18	24	2	0	8	10	7	1	26	34
DE	12	1	30	43	5	58	3	66	17	59	33	109
DETI	9	1	28	38	1	6	24	31	10	7	52	69
DFP	36	19	92	147	11	44	122	177	47	63	214	324
DEL	10	4	35	49	0	2	3	5	10	6	38	54
DHSSPS	19	2	55	76	15	26	39	80	34	28	94	156
DOE	14	5	46	65	3	15	75	93	17	20	121	158
DRD	20	17	49	86	5	16	39	60	25	33	88	146
DSD	17	8	74	99	0	0	3	3	17	8	77	102
OFMDFM	20	2	35	57	5	1	8	14	25	3	43	71
Total	179	62	502	743	49	176	530	755	228	238	1032	1498

2008

	General Service				Analogous Grades				All			
	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total
DARD	17	3	42	62	3	7	201	211	20	10	243	273
DCAL	4	2	17	23	2	0	11	13	6	2	28	36
DE	13	1	32	46	5	59	4	68	18	60	36	114
DETI	8	1	29	38	1	5	20	26	9	6	49	64
DFP	34	17	96	147	12	46	121	179	46	63	217	326
DEL	11	4	37	52	0	1	3	4	11	5	40	56
DHSSPS	17	2	56	75	13	25	34	72	30	27	90	147
DOE	12	6	50	68	4	15	79	98	16	21	129	166
DRD	10	6	33	49	3	9	44	56	13	15	77	105
DSD	16	9	86	111	1	0	3	4	17	9	89	115
OFMDFM	21	2	37	60	5	1	9	15	26	3	46	75
Total	163	53	515	731	49	168	529	746	212	221	1044	1477

2009

	General Service				Analogous Grades				All			
	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total
DARD	17	3	47	67	2	14	188	204	19	17	235	271
DCAL	6	1	17	24	1	0	7	8	7	1	24	32
DE	12	3	36	51	4	64	3	71	16	67	39	122
DETI	9	1	33	43	2	4	21	27	11	5	54	70
DFP	37	25	101	163	11	53	151	215	48	78	252	378
DEL	11	3	46	60	0	2	4	6	11	5	50	66
DHSSPS	17	6	57	80	13	16	41	70	30	22	98	150
DOE	11	10	57	78	4	18	74	96	15	28	131	174
DRD	13	5	39	57	4	9	47	60	17	14	86	117
DSD	19	11	93	123	0	1	4	5	19	12	97	128
OFMDFM	25	2	37	64	4	1	9	14	29	3	46	78
Total	177	70	563	810	45	182	549	776	222	252	1112	1586

2010

	General Service				Analogous Grades				All			
	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total
DARD	18	3	48	69	3	14	182	199	21	17	230	268

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DCAL	5	0	16	21	1	0	6	7	6	0	22	28
DE	14	3	38	55	5	64	2	71	19	67	40	126
DETI	8	2	32	42	1	3	16	20	9	5	48	62
DFP	34	17	93	144	10	53	140	203	44	70	233	347
DEL	11	3	45	59	0	1	3	4	11	4	48	63
DHSSPS	12	2	47	61	14	20	52	86	26	22	99	147
DOE	10	10	50	70	2	16	80	98	12	26	130	168
DRD	14	4	30	48	3	8	46	57	17	12	76	105
DSD	18	11	91	120	0	0	4	4	18	11	95	124
OFMDFM	25	3	39	67	4	1	9	14	29	4	48	81
Total	169	58	529	756	43	180	540	763	212	238	1069	1519

2011

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	18	4	46	68	3	12	192	207	21	16	238	275
DCAL	5	0	14	19	1	0	8	9	6	0	22	28
DE	13	3	35	51	5	59	2	66	18	62	37	117
DETI	10	3	29	42	1	3	15	19	11	6	44	61
DFP	28	15	92	135	13	76	143	232	41	91	235	367
DEL	12	4	45	61	0	2	5	7	12	6	50	68
DHSSPS	12	1	46	59	12	14	47	73	24	15	93	132
DOE	14	7	49	70	3	14	70	87	17	21	119	157
DRD	14	4	29	47	2	9	42	53	16	13	71	100
DSD	16	13	80	109	0	0	5	5	16	13	85	114
OFMDFM	20	3	36	59	7	2	11	20	27	5	47	79
DOJ	23	8	69	100	9	5	57	71	32	13	126	171
PPS	0	0	3	3	11	0	56	67	11	0	59	70
Total	185	65	573	823	67	196	653	916	252	261	1226	1739

Figures for 2011 include Department of Justice (DOJ) and Public Prosecution Service (PPS)

Notes

Data sourced from HRMS, HRConnect & additional DOJ databases.

Staff numbers are provided on a Headcount basis.

Excludes Casual Staff.

Data based on Staff in Post at 1st Jan each year.

The table found in Annex 1 (page 31) of the publication 'Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service' (link below) details status changes resulting in movement of staff into or out of the NICS as well as the years in which these changes occurred, and the approximate number of staff involved.

http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/NICS_Equality_Stats_2011.html

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10295/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Responsibility for Ministerial transport was transferred to departments with effect from 1 April 2011. It was agreed that when not needed for Ministerial purposes, cars would be available for other Departmental use including the transport of officials. Driver log sheets are maintained but not in a format which would enable use by departmental officials to be identified or any costs incurred.

Processing Payments for Domestic Rates by Credit or Debit Card

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the costs of processing payments for domestic rates by credit or debit card; (ii) how much a customer is charged per transaction; and (iii) for what purposes any profit is used.

(AQW 10413/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The LPS staff costs for processing a card payment is £1.30. This is an approximate figure based on the average time taken to process a card payment.

Customers are charged 2% of the transaction amount for credit card transactions. There are no customer charges for other types of card payments.

There is no profit made by Land & Property Services from the charge.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Accident and Emergency Departments at the Antrim Area Hospital and the Mater Hospital, Belfast

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) why the Accident and Emergency Departments at the Antrim Area Hospital and the Mater Hospital, Belfast, have the highest proportion of patients who are not treated, discharged or admitted within four hours; (ii) whether this has changed in the last 12 months; and (iii) what action is being taken to improve the service.

(AQW 10199/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I am aware that the Antrim Area and Mater hospitals had the highest proportion of patients who were not treated, discharged or admitted within 4 hours in February 2012. However this position has varied month by month in the past 12 months.

Information on emergency care waiting times is collected on a monthly basis, and is available to view or download from the link below:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency_care-monthly_waiting_times.htm

Provisional information for February 2012 indicates that 58.3% of attendances at Antrim Area and 57.5% of attendances at the Mater were treated and discharged or admitted within 4 hours of their arrival, compared with 54.2% and 58.5% in February 2011 respectively.

I find it unacceptable that patients have to wait longer than is necessary and recently asked the HSC Board to provide a robust plan of immediate actions to secure improvement in Emergency Departments. The HSC Board, working with the Public Health Agency, has established an Improvement Action Group, as part of a 3 month programme to secure a step-change improvement in 12-hour and 4-hour performance and to the patient experience. In addition, in relation to Antrim Area hospital Mary Hinds, a Director in the Public Health Agency, has been providing support and assistance to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust over a six week period which ended recently. Mrs Hinds is due to present her report in the near future.

Patients Transferred to England for Treatment Associated with Eating Disorders

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been transferred to England for treatment associated with eating disorders in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10200/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below shows the number of patients transferred to England for treatment associated with eating disorders in each of the last three years.

Year	Number of patients transferred
2009/10	19
2010/11	16
2011/12	4

Source: HSC Board

Patients Association Care Campaign

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the South and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trusts have not signed up to the Patients Association Care Campaign.

(AQW 10211/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern HSC Trust has, recently signed up to this campaign and the Southern HSC Trust advises that they will be signing up in the near future.

The key principles within this campaign are already being implemented throughout the Health and Social Care system in Northern Ireland through existing Departmental policies.

Adult Abuse in Nursing Homes

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the on-going review of operational policies and procedures in relation to tackling adult abuse in nursing homes; and for an estimate of the timescale for the introduction of relevant legislation.

(AQW 10212/11-15)

Mr Poots: The prevention of adult abuse and ensuring an effective response whenever abuse occurs, is a key priority for my department. Regional Adult Protection Policies and Procedures are currently being reviewed under the auspices of the Northern Ireland Adult Safeguarding Partnership. The updated policies and procedures are intended to further improve the response of all agencies and establishments to concerns about adult abuse wherever it arises, including in nursing homes.

In parallel, my officials are considering the recommendations of the recent Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission report, In Defence of Dignity – The Human Rights of Older People in Nursing Homes, with a view to identifying what changes, if any, are needed in relation to the current regulatory and inspection framework for nursing homes. Also, my department, jointly with the Department of Justice, is leading on the development of an overarching adult safeguarding policy framework. It is

intended to consult publicly on the framework by the end of this year. The policy framework will seek to ensure that effective preventative and protective mechanisms are established in relation to adult abuse. In the course of consulting, we will seek views on a range of legislative proposals to underpin the policy framework. Subject to the outcome of consultation on the proposals, it is likely to be 2014 at the earliest before a Bill could be introduced in the NI Assembly.

Departmental Funding

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what has been the increase in the total level of funding for his Department between 2007 and 2012.

(AQW 10254/11-15)

Mr Poots: The total funding (current and capital) for my Department increased from £4,068.2m in 2007/08 to £4,614.1m in 2011/12.

Quality 2020 Strategy

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the publication of the Quality 2020 Strategy, what consideration he has given to including pain management in the proposed national outcome measures for health services.

(AQW 10323/11-15)

Mr Poots: An implementation plan is nearing completion for the Quality 2020 Strategy launched by me last November. I would expect this to be published before June of this year.

One of the 5 work-streams in this plan will concentrate on improving quality outcome measurement and the reporting on safety, effectiveness and the patient/ client experience in health and social care services. While some detailed elements of individual initiatives in the plan have yet to be finalised, I will ensure that the honourable Member's suggestion will be passed to the relevant project team in due course.

Admissions to Accident and Emergency Departments as a Result of the Effects of Alcohol

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 9836/11-15, for his assessment of the need for his Department to have access to the information to allow it to measure the extent of substance abuse among young people.

(AQW 10385/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department uses a range of information and data sources to help assess the extent of substance misuse among those aged under 18. This includes:

- the number of under 18s receiving treatment for substance misuse (as reported by the Drug Misuse Database: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dmd_bulletin_2010-11.pdf and the Census of Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services in Northern Ireland: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/census_bulletin_-_1_march_2010.pdf);
- prevalence rate for drug misuse among 15-24 year olds (as reported by the Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland Prevalence Survey: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/bulletin_1-ni_prevalence_rates.pdf);
- information on alcohol and drug use from the Young Persons Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (<http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/YPBAS%202010%20Headline%20bulletin.pdf>);
- the number of alcohol and drug related admissions to HSC Hospitals in Northern Ireland (which can be broken down by age and gender); and
- the number of alcohol and drug related deaths (which can be broken down by age and gender).

Unfortunately information on the number of people under the age of 18 who have attended Accident and Emergency Departments as a result of the effects of alcohol or drug is not currently available and

could only be provided at disproportionate cost. While this information would be useful, it would only be one part of the overall picture used to assess the extent of substance misuse among young people.

Pharmacies: Annual Rural Payment

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 10268/11-15, to detail the criteria the 73 community pharmacies had to meet to qualify for funding. **(AQW 10388/11-15)**

Mr Poots: As I stated in my answer to AQW 10268/11-15, 73 pharmacies have now received the rural support payment in 2011/12. To be eligible for payment a pharmacy had to be open six days a week for a minimum of thirty hours, dispense less than the average dispensing volume of 5666 items per month and be further than 1km from the next nearest pharmacy.

Department of Justice

Prison Reform

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice, in light of his statement on Prison Reform on 26 March 2012 and his comments relating to full-body searches, when he expects licensing to be agreed on the application for Holme House Prison, Yorkshire. **(AQW 10180/11-15)**

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Initial advice was that the outcome of the Holme House application may take some months. I am however exploring options as to whether an application process can be expedited.

Costs Associated with Accommodating Marian Price in Maghaberry Prison and Hydebank Wood Prison

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to provide (i) the total; and (ii) a breakdown of the costs associated with accommodating Marian Price in Maghaberry Prison and Hydebank Wood Prison. **(AQW 10231/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The total cost of accommodating Marian Price in Maghaberry Prison between 13 May 2011 and 16 February 2012 was £192,546.00. A breakdown of the costs is shown in Table A below:

TABLE A

Staffing costs	£189,247.00
Refurbishment costs	£ 3,299.00
Total	£192,546.00

The total cost of accommodating Ms Price in Hydebank Wood from 17 February 2012 to date, is £10,275.83. A breakdown of the costs is shown in Table B below:

TABLE B

Staffing costs	£5,462.18
Refurbishment costs	£4,813.65
Total	£10,275.83

Top Ten Legal Aid Earning Counsel

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the figures on the top ten legal aid earning counsel, how many (i) defendants; and (ii) cases these figures represent for each company over the relevant payment period.

(AQW 10282/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not possible to answer the question in the format requested. The Legal Services Commission (the Commission) does not hold records at case or defendant level and cannot readily provide details of the number of cases or defendants receiving legal aid. Providing information on the number of cases or defendants represented by counsel during this period would require a manual trawl of the Commission's records and information held by the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The table below provides details of the number of legal aid certificates issued in respect of both criminal and civil proceedings, which were paid directly to counsel in 2010/11.

	Number of certificates paid
Miss E M McDermott	49
Mr J A Gallagher	30
Mr D Hopley	14
Mr P Magee	34
Mr A D Harvey	22
Mr J Orr	14
Mr C MacCreanor	81
Mr D P Fee	9
Mr W G Berry	58
Mr K A Mallon	74

Top Four Legal Aid Earning Companies

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the figures of the top four legal aid earning companies, how many (i) defendants; and (ii) cases do these figures represent for each company over the relevant payment period.

(AQW 10283/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not possible to answer the question in the format requested. The Legal Services Commission (the Commission) does not hold records at case or defendant level and cannot readily provide details of the number of cases or defendants receiving legal aid. Providing information on the number of cases or defendants represented by the top four legal aid earning companies during this period would require a manual trawl of the Commission's records and information held by the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The table below provides details of the number of legal aid certificates issued in respect of both criminal and civil proceedings, which were paid in 2010/11.

	Number of certificates paid
Kevin Winters & Co	4,998
McKenna Sweeney McKeown	3,190

	Number of certificates paid
Madden & Finucane	2,443
Trevor Smyth & Co	2,831

Defence Costs for Marian Price

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much has been paid in legal aid for defence costs for Marian Price in relation to her (i) cases currently in the justice system; and (ii) court applications relating to her custody, broken down by (a) solicitor; and (b) counsel.

(AQW 10284/11-15)

Mr Ford: Civil Legal Aid Scheme

Marian Price received civil legal aid totalling £1,636.52 paid to her in the name of Mrs Marion McGlinchey in respect of Judicial Review proceedings to challenge the decision of the Secretary of State to revoke her release from prison on licence. Funding was limited to the necessary steps to prepare and lodge an application for leave with Counsel to make the application before the court.

Legal Aid Advice and Assistance Scheme

Under the 'Green Form Scheme' legal aid has been paid to Ms Price's legal representatives on nine claims to date. Those claims are detailed in the table below.

Advice Category	Solicitor Profit Costs	Disbursement	VAT	Total
PACE	£771.26	£25.70	£134.97	£931.93
PACE	£136.17	£3.57	£23.83	£163.57
PACE	£897.90	£47.13	£179.58	£1,124.61
Complaint/PSNI	£64.11	-	£12.82	£76.93
Criminal charge	£660.70	£12.50	£132.14	£805.34
Bail	£72.08	-	£14.42	£86.50
Judicial Review	£88.00	-	£17.60	£105.60
Judicial Review	£159.55	£25.00	£31.91	£216.46
Life Sentence Review	£375.79	£34.20	£75.16	£485.15
			Total	£3,996.09

Criminal Legal Aid Scheme

From 2010 to present, four criminal legal aid certificates have been issued by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service for the above defendant.

Of these four certificates, three are to defend proceedings in the Magistrates' Court and one is to defend proceedings in the Crown Court.

Only one claim for payment has been received. This is a report from a solicitor for Magistrates' Court proceedings and the fees have not yet been determined.

Fire in the Cell in HMP Maghaberry

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9474/11-15 (i) how a prisoner in the Care and Supervision Unit was in a position to attempt to start a fire; (ii) what article was used to ignite the fire; (iii) whether the prisoner was entitled to be in possession of this article; and (iv) whether the prisoner has been charged with a criminal offence following this incident.

(AQW 10288/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prisoner in question was a smoker and as such was given permission to retain a cigarette lighter while residing in the Care and Supervision Unit (CSU). He then attempted to set fire to his bedding using the lighter.

It is not unusual for prisoners to be permitted to retain cigarette lighters while in the CSU. A needs and risk assessment is carried out by CSU staff in the first instance and consideration is given to allowing them to retain cigarette lighters. The prisoner in this case had been permitted to retain a cigarette lighter which was subsequently removed.

The incident was referred to the PSNI at that time and the prisoner was interviewed. The case is ongoing.

Prison Service Staff

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice what plans the Prison Service has in place to cover the period between the 151 staff leaving in March 2012 and the newly recruited staff taking up their posts.

(AQW 10319/11-15)

Mr Ford: The new Target Operating Model, which was launched on 1 April 2012, reduces the Prison Service staffing requirement by 200 and in this context 151 staff left NIPS on 31 March as a result of the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme. As the Prison Service implements the new Target Operating Model over the next six months, and as we work towards the recruitment of Custody Officers, work will be reprioritised and the use of overtime deployed if required.

Department for Regional Development

Westminster Justice Committee's Review of the Freedom of Information Act

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's position in relation to the submission made by the Civil Service to the Westminster Justice Committee's review of the Freedom of Information Act.

(AQW 10041/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department contributed input to OFMDFM, which co-ordinated material from all Departments and made the response to the review.

My officials noted that:

- 2011 represented a typical year for DRD. Over that year DRD received 370 requests of which 10 were returned for Internal Review and only 3 were appealed to the Information Commissioner. The vast majority of requests were answered to the satisfaction of the recipient and within the timeframe required by the Act. This indicates that the public is generally satisfied with DRD's performance and that the Act is working for them.
- The strengths of the FoI Act appear to be:
- FOI helps focus the Department's need to pro-actively publish as guided by the ICO Publication Scheme.
- It promotes better record keeping and record management.
- It promotes accountability and openness.

There are issues such as:

- The Act overlaps with the operation of the Environmental Information Regulations which causes confusion for public authorities and the public alike.
- The Act is often used by individuals to make repeated requests which are a considerable expense to public funds. We have experience of individual requestors who have literally made hundreds of requests on a wide variety of subjects which have not been motivated by need.
- There are also those who make wide-ranging requests in the hope of finding something of interest but, again, processing and considering these has to be done at a cost to the tax-payer.
- FOI is resource intensive and has to be delivered regardless of resources available, which often leads to considerable diversion of resources from other front-line activities.
- Some of these issues could be addressed by the introduction of a modest registration fee – say £25 or £50 – similar to the practice other jurisdictions. This should not prove to be a barrier for those with a real need to know.

Dualling of the A26 Between Glarryford and Coleraine

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the preparatory work for the dualling of the A26 between Glarryford and Coleraine.

(AQW 10181/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Draft Orders and Environmental Statement for the proposed A26 Glarryford to A44 Drones Road junction scheme were published on 20 March 2012. An exhibition presenting the scheme proposals was held in the Tullyglass House Hotel, Ballymena on the 27 and 28 March 2012.

Should anyone wish to express an opinion to Roads Service regarding the Environmental Statement or draft Orders, they may do so by 11 May 2012. Depending on the type and number of comments received, I will make a decision on whether or not a Public Inquiry for the scheme will be held later in the year.

Water Charges for Non-Domestic Customers

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the impact on small and medium sized businesses of the above-inflation increase in water charges for non-domestic customers; and what consideration has been given to a relief scheme to help businesses which might struggle with these bills.

(AQW 10193/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that for the 2012/13 year the combined water and sewerage bill will increase by 6.9% for measured customers and 8.4% for unmeasured customers. However, taking account of inflation, water charges decreased in real terms while sewerage charges were increased above the rate of inflation.

The increases were unavoidable due to the effects of inflation and the substantial cost of necessary improvements to the water and sewerage infrastructure to meet demanding regulatory standards and improve the quality of services provided. The charges were agreed with the Utility Regulator in order that customers pay the fairest rate for the water and sewerage services they receive. However, in recognition of the difficult economic climate NIW gained agreement to limit any tariff increases as much as possible. A small to medium size shop or hairdressing salon will see an increase of up to 50p per week. An average sized farm will see an increase of up to 20p per week, while a medium to large factory or office will see an increase of up to £4 per week.

Customers experiencing payment difficulties can contact NIW to discuss alternative arrangements such as smaller or more frequent payments and it will ensure that every effort is made to work with customers to secure a reasonable payment arrangement. NIW also offers a number of reliefs and allowances from which the vast majority of business customers currently benefit.

NI Water

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Regional Development what infractions NI Water has incurred for non-compliance with (i) waste water standards; and (ii) drinking water quality directives, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 10206/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Infraction proceedings are the process by which the European Commission takes an EU member state to the European Court of Justice for breach of its obligations under EU Treaties. This can arise in relation to implementation or transposition of European directives. In the case of non-compliance in Northern Ireland, the member state is the United Kingdom.

My Department has been involved in three infraction cases relating to the implementation and enforcement of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC) in Northern Ireland in the past five years.

One case (EC2005/4479) centred on Water Service benefiting from Crown Immunity and therefore not being subject to effective regulatory and enforcement mechanisms to secure compliance with EU legislation. On 1 April 2007 Northern Ireland Water, a government owned company, was created. The company did not benefit from Crown Immunity status and is subject to full environmental regulation and enforcement. Once this change in status was communicated to the European Commission the case was closed.

Two cases (EC 2004/2036 & EC 2003/2008) related to non-compliance with EU waste water treatment requirements. Both these procedures involved the failure of waste water treatment works to meet appropriate waste water standards. I can confirm that these works are now considered compliant and the Northern Ireland elements of these cases have been closed.

My Department has been involved in one infraction case (EC 2006/2005) relating to the Drinking Water Directive (98/83/EC) in the past five years. This related to failure to adequately transpose the requirements of the Directive. Appropriate amendments were made to the relevant legislation and the case is now closed.

Capacity of Reservoirs

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, as of March 2012, what was the percentage capacity of reservoirs; and whether any restrictions will be put in place for Summer 2012.
(AQW 10256/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that around 51% of water supplied comes from impounding reservoirs with the remainder provided from natural loughs (mainly Lough Neagh) and rivers. Overall storage in impounding reservoirs and lakes (excluding Lough Neagh) at the end of March 2012 was in a satisfactory position of almost 90% of total capacity.

However, water is a finite resource and NIW will continue to encourage the public to reduce the demand for water and avoid wastage. Water levels in impounding reservoirs are monitored on a regular basis and NIW will take all reasonable steps to maximise water storage and enhance the security of supply.

Subject to normal weather conditions and water continuing to be used wisely, NIW has no plans to introduce water restrictions this Summer, at this point in time.

Roads Service

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how much was spent by Roads Service on (i) staff overtime; and (ii) grit for the (a) winter 2009/10; (b) winter 2010/11; and (c) winter 2011/12 periods.

(AQW 10305/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service does not maintain an analysis of its winter service costs for non-industrial staff, however, details of winter service costs for industrial staff are set out in the table below:

Year	Industrial Overtime (£k)	Industrial Normal Hours (£k)	Hired Drivers (£k)
2009/10	£425	£345	£388
2010/11	£462	£539	£655
2011/12	£217	£194	£236

I have assumed that the Member's request relates to rock salt, the primary material used by Roads Service for its winter service programme, rather than grit. The purchase of road salt by Roads Service is subject to tender and I am not able to disclose the cost of purchase for reasons of commercial sensitivity and in the interests of securing best value for money in future negotiations. However, details of the volume of rock salt used during the last three winter seasons are set out in the table below:

Winter Season	Rock salt Used (tonnes)
2009/10	100,632
2010/11	110,351
2011/12 to 1 April 2012	47,000

A5 and A8 Road Schemes

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will publish the data on which he based his claim of 14 February 2012, that the A5 and A8 road schemes have the potential to create at least 2,500 new jobs; and for a breakdown of (i) the number of jobs relating to each scheme; and (ii) the different grades and specifications of the workers involved.

(AQW 10306/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that the press statement said there was the potential to create an estimated figure of 2,500 construction sector jobs. This was derived from experience of other recent major projects and consultation within the Industry, including the Construction Employers Federation.

A breakdown of jobs by project, grade or specification is not available.

Department for Social Development

Houses Repossessed in the North Down Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the North Down area have been repossessed in each of the last four years.

(AQW 10163/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): My Department does not hold the information requested. However, the Department of Justice has provided me with the following information.

Possession orders made in respect to mortgages 2008-2011 – North Down constituency

	2008	2009	2010	2011[1]
North Down	69	87	86	77

[1] All 2011 figures are provisional

Notes

Not all writs and originating summonses lead to eviction or re/possession.

The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Regeneration and Development of Former British Army Bases

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development what funding is available for the regeneration and development of former British army bases, such as Ballyhoran, Co Down.

(AQW 10204/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The following table details the Department for Social Development funding which is available for the regeneration and development of former British army bases:

Year	Location	Amount of funding	Purpose of funding
2012/13	Fort George	£3.15 million	Decontamination
	Girdwood	£500k	Strategic Enabling Infrastructure
	Forkhill Military Base	£33.5k (DSD element)	DSD will cover 50% of the consultancy costs for the planning application but DARD will be the main funder of capital works
2013/14	Fort George	£2 million	Decontamination / Infrastructure works
	Girdwood	£500k	Strategic Enabling Infrastructure
2014/15	Fort George	£2 million	Infrastructure works

Additionally Special EU Programmes Body funding of £9.6m has been provisionally granted to Belfast City Council for the development of a Community Hub on the Girdwood site, supported by DSD.

In respect of Ballyhoran the Department for Social Development funded a small social housing scheme to address the housing need. Responsibility for all other matters at this site, fall outside the remit of this Department. However, housing need for Ballyhoran area will be met through 4 units proposed for the nearby Ringawaddy area.

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10297/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Responsibility for Ministerial transport was transferred to departments with effect from 1 April 2011. It was agreed that when not needed for Ministerial purposes, cars would be available for other Departmental use including the transport of officials. Driver log sheets are maintained but not in a format which would enable use by departmental officials to be identified. No additional cost is incurred for non –Ministerial use of the car.

Mary Portas Review of UK High Streets

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development which recommendations from Mary Portas' review of UK high streets he is planning to implement and when.

(AQW 10309/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have established a taskforce of senior officials to respond to the difficult trading challenges facing Northern Ireland's High Streets. The taskforce will review the support which the Department already provides to regenerate town centres to see whether this might be further strengthened in light of the recommended actions identified by Mary Portas in her recent report to the UK Coalition Government ('The Portas Review: An independent review into the future of our high streets'), and also reflect Northern Ireland's particular trading circumstances. The taskforce will submit its report to me in June 2012 and I intend to publish my Department's response following consultation with my Executive colleagues.

Revaluation of Town Centre Business Rates

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to a revaluation of town centre business rates.

(AQW 10311/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As a member of the Executive I considered and agreed proposals put forward by the Minister of Finance and Personnel for a revaluation of non-domestic property in 2015.

Mary Portas Review of UK High Streets

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development what plans he has to replicate the actions of the UK Government which has accepted the main recommendations from Mary Portas' review of UK high streets.

(AQW 10313/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Further to my reply to AQW 10309/11-15 the taskforce of senior officials will also consider the UK Coalition Government's response to Mary Portas' review published on 30 March 2012. I wish to ensure that the work of the taskforce not only takes account of proposed initiatives for high streets in England but also reflects Northern Ireland's particular trading circumstances. The taskforce will therefore hold a series of local meetings with traders across Northern Ireland before submitting its report to me in June 2012.

Phase Two Enhancement of the Public Realm Scheme

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will consider including the remaining main commercial streets in Dungannon in the Phase Two enhancement of the Public Realm Scheme.

(AQW 10318/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Dungannon Public Realm Scheme was developed through extensive consultation with Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council, Dungannon Regeneration Partnership and the local community. This process identified the main commercial streets in Dungannon and the preferred phasing of the Public Realm scheme. It was decided that the scheme should be delivered in two phases. Phase 1 of the scheme will include Castle Hill Street, Market Square, Irish Street and Church Street. The tender documents for the construction of Phase 1 have been prepared and will issue shortly. It is proposed that Phase 2 of the Public Realm will include Upper and Lower Scotch Street, Georges Street, William Street, Anne Street, Thomas Street and Perry Street.

Chronic Pain: Absenteeism

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for his assessment of the correlation between chronic pain and absenteeism from employment; and (ii) for an estimate of how many working days per annum are lost within his Department as a result of chronic pain.

(AQW 10322/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Sickness absence in the NICS, including the Department for Social Development, is recorded using codes from the Sickness Absence Recording Tool (SART). Chronic pain may be a symptom of many conditions and is not recognised as a separate category within SART, therefore it is not possible to comment on any possible correlation between chronic pain and absenteeism from

employment in the NICS. For that reason it is also impossible to estimate the number of working days per annum lost within my Department as a result of chronic pain.

Social Housing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the revenue and capital budgets for social housing, including new builds and maintenance in each year of the 2011-15 budget period; and (ii) the current number of Housing Executive houses that require multi-element improvements, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 10328/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Table 1 below details the Housing Executive's revenue and capital budgets for the Social Housing Development Programme and maintenance in each of the 2011-15 budget periods.

	2011/12 (£m)	21012/13 (£m)	2013/14 (£m)	2014/15 (£m)
Capital	143.1 (SHDP)	93.1 (SHDP)	83.9 (SHDP)	91.4 (SHDP)
Revenue	137.9 (Maint)	171.1 (Maint)	190.0 (Maint)	186.9 (Maint)

It should be noted that a 5% rental income uplift has been assumed in years 2013/14 and 2014/15.

The information for part (ii) of the question is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not collate information by parliamentary constituency. The Housing Executive has identified that 5,676 homes require Multi Element Improvement work and these homes are listed below. MEI work can only be funded through capital budget.

District	Properties
East Belfast	119
North Belfast	202
Shankill	36
South Belfast	767
West Belfast	194
Antrim	323
Ballymena	747
Carrickfergus	161
Coleraine	355
Larne	313
Newtownabbey 1	403
Newtownabbey 2	115
Armagh	225
Banbridge	106
Dungannon	62
Lurgan/Brownlow	131
Newry	282

District	Properties
Portadown	62
Bangor	224
Castlereagh	67
Lisburn	131
Newtownards	229
Cookstown	34
Limavady	193
Magherafelt	36
Omagh	35
Strabane	10
Waterloo Place	114
Total	5,676

Central Investment Fund for Charities

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development by how much the fund managers for the Central Investment Fund for Charities exceeded the agreed benchmark for investment returns over the past five years.

(AQO 1711/11-15)

Mr McCausland: For the five years to December 2011 the Fund returned an annualised total return of 2.9% against the benchmark return of 3.8%.

- The Fund has had an income bias in terms of its investment objective and this was reaffirmed through the introduction of the principle aim of achieving an income equivalent to a 20% premium to the Benchmark and thereafter long term capital growth. This objective is being achieved.
- Over different time periods income stocks have generated a lower return when compared to growth stocks - for example over the five years to 31 December 2011, the FTSE All Share Index (the broadly based UK equity index) generated an annualised return of 1.2%. Over the same period, the FTSE 350 High Yield Index generated an annualised return of -1.3%. With a focus on income, the Fund Manager is required to invest in higher yielding shares which, as these figures suggest, have underperformed lower yielding (growth orientated) companies.

Welfare Reform

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development what opportunities exist to mitigate the negative impacts of Welfare Reform.

(AQO 1713/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I welcome and recognise the need for many aspects of the reform of our Welfare System. Whilst there are many positive improvements, equally I accept that we need to protect the vulnerable in our society from some of the less welcome proposals from the Coalition Government.

I and my Executive colleagues on the Executive Sub-Committee have, over the last number of months, been exploring areas where we believe flexibilities could exist within the confines of parity.

This is important work but is still at an early stage.

We are focused on identifying areas where we can introduce changes within the reforms which will help mitigate any negative impacts to ensure that those who are most vulnerable to the changes will be protected.

I am open to suggestions on possible flexibilities within parity for the Executive Sub-Committee to consider. All executive parties are represented on the Executive Sub-Committee.

I will be continuing to review the different measures to ensure understanding of the impact of the Welfare Reform policy.

I have regular meetings with Department for Work and Pensions Ministers and will ensure that all possible opportunities for flexibilities to be introduced are raised during discussions with them and I will be having a further meeting with Lord Freud next month.

Urban Renewal

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many Urban Renewal projects are currently under way in towns and how many are planned over the next three years.

(AQO 1714/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department continues to pursue a very active programme of town centre regeneration work in towns outside the two main cities right across Northern Ireland.

Currently, the Department is working on or about to complete six public realm schemes in Portrush, Carrickfergus, Larne, Newry, Downpatrick and Ballycastle. A further six revitalisation projects funded by the Department are currently underway. These are in Larne, Lurgan, Portadown, Armagh, Downpatrick and Portrush. Work is also being done to finalise four masterplans, for Cookstown, Enniskillen, Coleraine and the towns on the South Down coast.

A substantial programme of public realm improvement schemes and revitalisation projects is planned for the period of this Comprehensive Spending Review. My Department is working on a further 40 schemes in towns across Northern Ireland which we hope to implement between now and March 2015, subject to the availability of funding and all the necessary approvals.

My Department is working to promote regeneration schemes on 12 derelict or underused sites in towns across Northern Ireland. Although this work is not helped by the current condition of the property market, we are looking at what might be done to accelerate these schemes.

In April 2011, the Urban Development Grant scheme became fully available to towns outside Belfast and Londonderry. There has been a high level of interest in this scheme and to date over 30 applications and 120 expressions of interest have been received.

Window Replacement Scheme: Lagan Valley

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the level of uptake of the Window Replacement Scheme in the Lagan Valley constituency.

(AQO 1715/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assume the Member is referring to the double glazing programme for Housing Executive houses, where I ensured that the Programme for Government contains a priority to improve the thermal efficiency of Housing Executive stock and ensure full double glazing in its properties.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring rounds has enabled an increase in this activity. However, the Housing Executive is working to identify those additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

In relation to the Lagan Valley constituency, the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency. However, I can advise that there is currently one window replacement

scheme ongoing at Ballymacoss/Old Warren, Lisburn for 294 properties. The scheme commenced in December 2011 and to date, refusals from tenants have been minimal.

Communities: Early Intervention

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has had with his Executive colleagues in relation to the development and implementation of early intervention strategies in local communities in partnership with the voluntary and community sectors.

(AQO 1716/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department via Neighbourhood Renewal, the Executive's strategy for tackling social deprivation in urban areas, continues to work with all Departments and the voluntary and community sector to develop and implement early interventions in our most deprived local communities.

I am personally committed to encouraging early interventions as it is clear they yield the most return in terms of influencing the life chances of our young people. I have already met with the Minister for Education and the Minister for Health regards how we can embed early interventions at the heart of Departmental policies. Furthermore, I met with the Minister for Justice where I raised the need for early interventions in respect of the effect they can have on reducing crime and anti social behaviour. I will continue to take every opportunity when meeting with my Executive colleagues to raise the need for and benefit of such interventions.

Portrush Regeneration Scheme

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his Department's investment in the regeneration of Portrush.

(AQO 1717/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Portrush Western Peninsula Strategy published in 2007 set out the strategic approach for the regeneration of Portrush. Since then my Department has worked closely with Coleraine Borough Council to help deliver the initiatives set out in that strategy. To date my Department has provided funding for the following:-

- £420,000 towards public realm improvements at the East Strand. These works were completed in June 2011.
- Up to £1,322,000 towards the Station Square public realm scheme that is due to be completed before the busy summer season of 2012.
- £15,000 towards the costs of a consultancy assignment to determine if it is feasible to re-locate Portrush train station to potentially free up ground for a 4* star hotel with conference and spa facilities.
- Up to £150,000 for a re-vitalisation scheme for Main Street in Portrush, to help businesses improve the appearance of their premises and the overall competitiveness of the town.

In addition, my Department is considering a number of applications for funding for Urban Development Grant to redevelop vacant or derelict property in Portrush and I have nominated a senior official to work with Coleraine Borough Council to assist them in the off-course management arrangements for the Irish Open this year.

My Department will continue to work with Coleraine Borough Council to ensure that the other initiatives in the Portrush Western Peninsula, such as the extension and development of the harbour, are taken forward to ensure that Portrush can realise its full potential over the coming years.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development how many medical assessments of Employment and Support Allowance claimants have been carried out in the last year.

(AQO 1718/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There have been 25,307 medical assessments of Employment and Support Allowance claimants carried out in the last year (March 2011 to February 2012).

Social Housing

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to increase the amount of shared social housing.

(AQO 1719/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In 2010/11 social housing made up just over 16% of the total number of homes in Northern Ireland with the Private Rented Sector making up a further 16% and the remaining almost 68% being owner occupied.

I do not believe that we should continue to build single tenure estates of social housing alone as this can often further segregate people. I want to see how we can develop more social and affordable housing alongside each other so that people can have greater choice and flexibility about where they live and who they live beside. It is not about forcing anything on anyone, we need to allow people to share housing because they want to, not because Government says they must.

This is equally the same when we talk about shared housing for people from different community backgrounds, race or religion. Again I want to see how we can provide choice for people to come together in a more natural way and not through the results of social engineering that will simply not work.

Written Answers Index

Department for Regional Development	WA 34	Window Replacement Scheme:	
A5 and A8 Road Schemes	WA 37	Lagan Valley	WA 42
Capacity of Reservoirs	WA 36		
Dualling of the A26 Between Glarryford and Coleraine	WA 35	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	WA 2
NI Water	WA 36	AgriFood Strategy	WA 7
Roads Service	WA 36	Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme	WA 3
Water Charges for Non-Domestic Customers	WA 35	Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme	WA 3
Westminster Justice Committee's Review of the Freedom of Information Act	WA 34	Categorisation of Rural Crimes	WA 5
		Common Agricultural Policy	WA 8
Department for Employment and Learning	WA 13	Common Agricultural Policy: Less-favoured Areas	WA 7
Additional Cost of Providing Services in Our Divided Society	WA 13	Designation of Waterways	WA 2
Educational Provision at the University of Ulster	WA 15	Dogs: Microchipping	WA 6
European Social Fund Programme	WA 14	Evidence and Innovation Stakeholders Forum	WA 3
European Social Fund Programme	WA 14	Evidence and Innovation Stakeholders Forum	WA 4
European Social Fund Programme	WA 14	Funding Spent on Irish Language and Cultural Projects	WA 2
European Social Fund Programme	WA 14	Ministerial Cars and Drivers	WA 5
European Social Fund Programme	WA 15	Royal Ulster Agricultural Society: Relocation	WA 6
European Social Fund Programme	WA 15	Rural Development Programme	WA 4
European Social Fund Programme	WA 16	Rural Development Programme	WA 9
European Social Fund Programme	WA 16	Rural Primary Schools	WA 8
Health Professions Admission Test	WA 16	Single Farm Payments	WA 5
Health Professions Admission Test	WA 16	Woodland	WA 8
Department for Social Development	WA 37	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	WA 9
Central Investment Fund for Charities	WA 41	Data on the Fish Life in Lough Neagh	WA 11
Chronic Pain: Absenteeism	WA 39	DCAL: Review of Administration	WA 9
Communities: Early Intervention	WA 43	Fish Caught in Lough Neagh by Legal Netsmen	WA 10
Employment and Support Allowance	WA 44	Football: Brandywell Stadium	WA 11
Houses Repossessed in the North Down Area	WA 37	Irish Language: Funding	WA 12
Mary Portas Review of UK High Streets	WA 38	Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure: Special Adviser	WA 9
Mary Portas Review of UK High Streets	WA 39	Ministerial Cars and Drivers	WA 10
Ministerial Cars and Drivers	WA 38	River Bann: Leisure	WA 10
Phase Two Enhancement of the Public Realm Scheme	WA 39	Stadium Development Project for Casement Park	WA 11
Portrush Regeneration Scheme	WA 43	Department of Education	WA 12
Regeneration and Development of Former British Army Bases	WA 38	Ministerial Cars and Drivers	WA 12
Revaluation of Town Centre Business Rates	WA 39	School Leavers with Hearing Loss/ Deafness who Achieved at least Five GCSEs	WA 12
Social Housing	WA 40		
Social Housing	WA 44		
Urban Renewal	WA 42		
Welfare Reform	WA 41		

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 17	Department of Justice	WA 31
Intertrade Ireland Trade and Innovation Programmes	WA 17	Costs Associated with Accommodating Marian Price in Maghaberry Prison and Hydebank Wood Prison	WA 31
InvestNI Land	WA 18	Defence Costs for Marian Price	WA 33
Tourism Market	WA 19	Fire in the Cell in HMP Maghaberry	WA 34
Tourism Stakeholders	WA 18	Prison Reform	WA 31
Tourist Industry	WA 17	Prison Service Staff	WA 34
Tourists	WA 17	Top Four Legal Aid Earning Companies	WA 32
Trade and Innovation Programmes	WA 17	Top Ten Legal Aid Earning Counsel	WA 32
Department of Finance and Personnel	WA 22	Department of the Environment	WA 19
Departmental Staff	WA 22	Derelict Property	WA 19
Ministerial Cars and Drivers	WA 28	Derelict Property: Portrush and Portstewart	WA 21
Processing Payments for Domestic Rates by Credit or Debit Card	WA 28	Developers: Incomplete Developments	WA 20
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety	WA 28	Local Government: Power Sharing	WA 21
Accident and Emergency Departments at the Antrim Area Hospital and the Mater Hospital, Belfast	WA 28	Moyle Council	WA 19
Admissions to Accident and Emergency Departments as a Result of the Effects of Alcohol	WA 30	Road Safety: Cyclists	WA 20
Adult Abuse in Nursing Homes	WA 29	Tree Preservation Orders	WA 19
Departmental Funding	WA 30	Wildlife: Endangered Species	WA 20
Patients Association Care Campaign	WA 29	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	
Patients Transferred to England for Treatment Associated with Eating Disorders	WA 29	Older People's Strategy	WA 1
Pharmacies: Annual Rural Payment	WA 31	Strategic Investment Board	WA 1
Quality 2020 Strategy	WA 30	Suicide Among Young People	WA 2



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