

Written Answers to Questions

Official Report (Hansard)

Friday 31 August 2012

Volume 76, No WA6

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Suggested amendments or corrections will be considered by the Editor.
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to arrive not later than two weeks after publication of this report.

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Wells, Jim (South Down)
Wilson, Sammy (East Antrim)

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 31 August 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Nomination Form for an Honour

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the how their Office determines which nomination form for an honour to submit to the Cabinet Office when a person who resides outside Northern Ireland submits a form to their Office.

(AQW 2681/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Where the nominee is resident in Northern Ireland and the activities for which recognition is being sought relate wholly or primarily to here, the nomination is referred to the Honours Secretariat in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Nominations where the activities relate to elsewhere are referred to the Cabinet Office for consideration.

Travel Costs

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the travel costs incurred by (i) the First and deputy First Minister; and (ii) departmental officials in the last 12 months.

(AQW 3697/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The following table sets out the costs incurred by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in relation to travel costs in respect of the twelve months ended 30 September 2011.

	Year ended 30 September 2011
First Minister and deputy First Minister	£41,569
Departmental Officials	£262,879

Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 4775/11-15, whether the Executive is currently making any plans to mark the occasion of Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee, in consultation with the Department for Culture, Media and Sports.

(AQW 5595/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: At its meeting on 31 May the Executive agreed to present a gift to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

Evangelical Alliance Paper 'Seeking Peace and Prosperity'

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the Evangelical Alliance paper 'Seeking Peace and Prosperity' which includes the proposition that the Programme for

Government should set out a broader concept of prosperity to include well-being and a commitment to fostering good relationships.

(AQW 5989/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There are five overarching and inter-connected priorities in the draft Programme for Government which, collectively, will help us work towards our vision of a shared and better future. Priority two, "Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Wellbeing" and priority four, "Building a Strong and Shared Society" are intended to deliver interventions that encourage personal and community development both socially and economically.

Number of Children Living in Poverty

Mr Moutray asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of children in the (i) Upper Bann; (ii) Banbridge; (iii) Lurgan; and (iv) Portadown areas who were deemed to be living in (a) relative poverty; (b) mixed poverty; and (c) absolute poverty in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6636/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department for Social Development, Analytical Services Unit publishes annually the Households Below Average Income report.

WAVE Trauma Centres

Mr Cree asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 9649/11-15, whether the WAVE Trauma Centres are in a position to provide the services necessary for military personnel who have medical problems and mental health issues as a result of active service overseas.

(AQW 10515/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: WAVE receives funding from our Department via the Community Relations Council to be used for the benefit of Victims and Survivors who have suffered as a result of the conflict here. The definition of those who can be assisted is contained within Article 3 of the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

WAVE does not receive funding from any other government provider.

AQW 8311/11-15

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why AQW 8311/11-15, which was due for answer on 23 February 2012, remains unanswered.

(AQW 10644/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A response to AQW 8311/11-15 was issued on 14 May 2012.

Peter Hain Controversy

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the Peter Hain controversy, whether the Attorney General still enjoys their confidence.

(AQW 10832/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Attorney General is statutorily independent of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Departments.

The Attorney General enjoys the confidence of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

However, any individual proceedings undertaken by the Attorney are a matter for the Attorney alone.

Inter-Ministerial Groups

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many Inter-Ministerial Groups are in existence.

(AQW 11353/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There are currently 10 Inter-Ministerial Groups in existence.

Inter-Ministerial Group

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many times each Inter-Ministerial Group has met in each of the last five years.

(AQW 11354/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The number of meetings of each Inter-Ministerial Group is set out in the following table:

Title of Group	Number of Meetings in the last 5 years
Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy	8
Ministerial Road Safety Group	4
Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence	3
Ministerial Group on Mental Health and Learning Disabilities	5
Ministerial Co-ordination Group on Suicide Prevention	3
Executive Sub Group on Welfare Form	5
Budget Review Group	15
Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People	8
Executive Sub-Committee on Poverty and Social Inclusion	3
Programme for Government	1

Inter-Ministerial Group

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which Minister has lead responsibility for each Inter-Ministerial Group.

(AQW 11355/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The lead Minister or Ministers for each Inter-Ministerial Group is set out in the following table:

Title of Group	Lead Minister(s)
Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy	Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Ministerial Road Safety Group	Minister of the Environment
Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence	Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Ministerial Group on Mental Health and Learning Disabilities	Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Ministerial Co-ordination Group on Suicide Prevention	Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Title of Group	Lead Minister(s)
Executive Sub Group on Welfare Form	Minister for Social Development
Budget Review Group	First Minister and deputy First Minister
Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People	Junior Ministers OFMDFM
The Executive Sub-Committee on Poverty and Social Inclusion	First Minister and deputy First Minister
Programme for Government Programme Board	First Minister and deputy First Minister

Inter-Ministerial Group

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister who is responsible for calling a meeting of an Inter-Ministerial Group.

(AQW 11357/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is the responsibility of the lead Minister or Ministers to call a meeting of an Inter-Ministerial Group.

Key Achievements of the Executive

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, on the fifth anniversary of the restoration of the political institutions, to outline the key achievements of the Executive in the past five years.

(AQO 1878/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since the restoration of the political institutions five years ago, we have been through a very tough economic period. In spite of that, we delivered a range of key achievements which are benefiting people now and will do so for many years into the future. We exceeded our targets in terms of promoting investment and jobs; securing almost £2.6 billion in investment commitments and £487 million in annual salaries; promoting 15,565 new jobs; safeguarding 5,329 existing jobs and supporting 8,267 new local business starts between 2007/08 and 2009/10. A total of £4.8 billion was delivered in gross capital investment through our Investment Strategy during the period 2007/08 up to 2009/10 and in addition, a number of major road schemes were completed, improving journey times and safety on our Key Transport Corridors. Investment of more than £1 billion in water improvements has been delivered during the previous Programme for Government, as well as a range of new Health and Social Care developments, including over £500 million worth of investment in completed and ongoing works in our hospitals.

Our achievements reaffirm the importance the Executive attaches to supporting economic recovery and providing the foundations for tackling disadvantage. Our achievements to date promise a stronger, more qualified, healthier environment and have set the foundations to re-balance the economy, tackle disadvantage and promote fairness and equality. The recent agreement of a challenging, balanced and extensive Programme for Government, with a clear focus on tangible delivery of economic and social goals, clearly shows the desire to further enhance the pace of delivery.

More information on important initiatives which have been delivered since 2008 are also outlined in the current Programme for Government 2011-2015.

The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they intend, at the next North-South Ministerial Council meeting, to raise the collaborative opportunities which the The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming offers the Northern Ireland economy.

(AQO 1931/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We can confirm that The Gathering was raised at the North South Ministerial Committee Plenary meeting held on 15 June 2012. It was agreed that the Tourism Ministers would meet to discuss how benefits from this can be maximised for both jurisdictions.

Ministers' Hospitality, Gifts, Meetings and Overseas Travel

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether any arrangements, similar to those prevailing at Westminster, exist whereby information on Ministers' hospitality, gifts, meetings and overseas travel is published quarterly; and, if not, whether they will consider introducing such arrangements.

(AQW 12439/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Northern Ireland Executive has not introduced such arrangements but may consider doing so at a future date.

Foyle Pride Festival 2012 in Derry

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the level of funding their Department has allocated to the Foyle Pride Festival 2012 in Derry; and (ii) if their Department has not allocated funds to the event, how much it is willing to provide towards the running costs of £15,000.

(AQW 13229/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM has not allocated funding to the Foyle Pride Festival 2012.

Community Relations Council Staff

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 12129/11-15, what action has been, or is planned to be, taken against the Community Relations Council staff member who failed to declare a relevant interest.

(AQW 13353/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Community Relations Council has advised us that no staff member failed to declare a relevant interest where and when required.

Equality Commission Survey into Discrimination

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the recent Equality Commission survey into experiences of, and attitudes towards, discrimination.

(AQO 2293/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We welcome the research as it contributes to greater understanding and information in relation to the experiences of, and attitudes towards, discrimination.

Fuel Payments for Cancer Patients

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether winter fuel payments will be made available to cancer patients next year.

(AQW 13590/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Each scheme under the Social Protection Fund should be considered as exceptional, stand alone schemes. Future funding allocations will be decided on the basis of need, priorities and proposals.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Illegal or Unlicensed Nets

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 6140/11-15, how officials from her Department were able to identify the persons to whom the warning letters were issued.
(AQW 7295/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): When Fisheries Protection Officers speak to any individual in connection with a potential breach of fisheries legislation they will ask them for some form of identification to confirm their identity.

If individuals do not have any identification available there are a number of checks that the officers may carry out to verify the identity of an individual.

Centenary of the Formation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the centenary of the formation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary will be included in the decade of commemorative anniversaries which the Executive is co-ordinating.
(AQW 11545/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The political, social and cultural consequences of what happened during the decade of 1912-22 reverberate to this day. The Executive agreed that it was appropriate and necessary to set an inclusive tone to examining major centenaries such as, for example, the Ulster Covenant, the Easter Rising, World War 1, the rise of the Labour Movement, Universal Male and Limited Women's Suffrage, and Partition.

These significant events influenced or were the direct cause of multiple developments such as the establishment of the Civic Guard (later renamed the Garda Síochána na hÉireann); the Irish Citizen Army; the Ulster Volunteer Force; the Irish Volunteer Force; and the formation of other groupings. I therefore have no doubt that these wider developments will be examined by a diverse range of organisations and interested individuals as a result of the major centenaries and the inclusive approach being advocated by the Executive.

Ministerial Appointments

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number and percentage of people (i) considered for inclusion; and (ii) successful, in all ministerial appointments since 2007, broken down by perceived community background.
(AQW 13174/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The tables below sets out information on ministerial appointments made since 2007.

TABLE 1 MINISTERIAL APPOINTMENTS

	Community Background		
	Protestant	Catholic	Neither or Unknown
Applications	310	224	74
Number successful	53	44	37
% successful	17.10	18.75	52.70
% of overall appointments	39.55	32.84	27.61

Boxing Strategy

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the upcoming Boxing Strategy will directly address the factors which are perceived to discourage Protestant and Unionist participation in the sport, including the selection of venues for competitions, such as that experienced by the Sandy Row Boxing Club.

(AQW 13501/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My boxing strategy initiative, together with the associated business case for funding, is intended to help the sport directly address any factors that evidence indicates act as barriers to participation in boxing. The initiative should also assist the sport to promote inclusivity, including at venues selected for competition, so that anyone, regardless of community background, who wishes to take part in boxing at participative and competitive levels is clearly not discouraged from doing so.

Boxing in Northern Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, if the present governing body for boxing in Northern Ireland fails to take adequate steps to address sectarian barriers to participation, whether she will take steps to compel governance changes, as was the case with the Irish Football Association.

(AQW 13504/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Neither I nor my Department has or can compel governance changes on any sports governing body, including the Ulster Provincial Boxing Council (UPBC) and the Irish Football Association. However, through Sport NI, the Department will seek to exert influence in order to encourage a sport to undertake governance changes where it deems this to be necessary. In the case of boxing, this process is already ongoing. Sport NI has invited the UPBC to be one of the first organisations to go through the new Equity Standard for sport. This is a mechanism for encouraging better governance and administration, widening access and increasing participation in sport by under-represented individuals, groups and communities.

Ministerial Appointments

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQO 2324/11-15, what positive measures are being put in place to address the disparity in the number of Protestants who are successful ministerial appointments.

(AQW 13587/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is no disparity to address in terms of the number of Protestants who are successful in Ministerial appointments.

All DCAL's public appointments are made in line with the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI. Appointment competitions are regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Department of Education

Equality Impact Assessment on Preparatory Schools Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 11155/11-15, why the publication of the Equality Impact Assessment on preparatory schools did not occur when expected.

(AQW 12679/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Unfortunately the completion and presentational issues on the final EQIA report took slightly longer than anticipated with staff involved in this exercise also dealing directly with a range of queries from schools, prior to and immediately following schools' closures for the summer.

The Final Equality Impact Assessment on the Proposal to Withdraw Funding from the Preparatory Departments of Grammar Schools has now been published on the Department's website. Respondents to the EQIA have been advised that this Report is now available.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Electricity Bills are in Excess of One Million Pounds per Annum

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress is being made to assist employers whose electricity bills are in excess of one million pounds per annum and whose competitors' bills in other nations are considerably lower.

(AQW 9220/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): My Department does not have a direct role in the setting of electricity tariffs however my Department, along with the Utility Regulator, strives to create market conditions to put downward pressure on prices for all consumers.

I have been examining the feasibility of Invest NI providing financial assistance to a limited number of Large Energy Users who could show that by making a significant capital investment, they could reduce their energy costs. As I advised the Assembly on 13 March, Invest NI is willing to consider providing financial assistance on a pilot basis, under its normal Selective Financial Assistance schemes, to Large Energy Users who have proposals for capital expenditure which will make a significant impact on energy efficiency and therefore reduce their costs and improve competitiveness.

Additionally, the UK Government has announced proposals to assist Energy Intensive Industries through provision of a £250m fund to help offset the costs associated with decarbonisation of electricity generation. Individual companies will have to make a case for inclusion in the scheme.

Fusion and Acumen Programmes

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs were created under the Fusion and Acumen programmes; and how many of these jobs still existed after the Intertrade Ireland subsidy had ended.

(AQW 13667/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Analysis for the period 2008 to 2011 shows that 313 jobs were created through the Acumen programme.

During this same period a total of 419 jobs were created through Fusion projects.

Fusion and Acumen Programmes

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the total cost of the Fusion and Acumen programmes, including staff, PR and marketing costs; and how the success of the programme is being monitored.

(AQW 13668/11-15)

Mrs Foster: InterTradeIreland has commenced three phases of each of its Fusion and Acumen programmes. The third phase of each is currently on-going while the first and second phases of each have concluded.

The expenditure to date is as follows:

	Fusion - £'000	Acumen £'000
Phase 1*	3,651	2,445
Phase 2*	10,788	2,658
Phase 3 (To 30th June 2012)	9,093	1,481

The success of both programmes is monitored through mid-term and final evaluations for each phase. These evaluations are conducted by independent consultants who are appointed through a competitive tendering process. Evaluations are conducted in accordance with departmental guidelines. In addition, conclusion reports are completed for each project and InterTradeIreland carries out monitoring visits with each of the companies up to three years after completion.

Department of the Environment

Peatlands

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what action his Department is taking to preserve peatland; and (ii) for his assessment of the potential carbon emissions that may result from the destruction of peatlands.

(AQW 7268/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The Department undertakes a wide range of actions to preserve semi-natural peatland habitats. The best examples of peatland habitats have been designated and are managed as Special Areas for Conservation (SACs) or Areas of Scientific Interest (ASSIs). Published habitat action plans for blanket bog and lowland raised bog deliver positive actions for peatland across Northern Ireland. The implementation of these plans is being co-ordinated by the Peatland and Upland Biodiversity Delivery Group chaired by NIEA.

The estimated stock of carbon held in soils in Northern Ireland is 386 million tonnes with 162 million tonnes (42%) occurring in peatland habitats. Peat extraction for fuel (mainly from blanket bog) was estimated to have released between 75,936 and 126,623 tonnes of carbon a year (tC/yr) in 1990 – 1991. This fell to between 6,481 and 10,807 tC/yr in 2008. However, peat extraction for horticulture increased from an estimated 30,000 tC/yr in 1990-1991 to 36,000 tC/yr in 2007-2008.

A range of other land management activities affect carbon emissions from peatlands including drainage, land reclamation, afforestation, burning, over-grazing and development. These are difficult to quantify but can result in significant emissions of carbon.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of trees felled between the application for, and the imposition of, Tree Preservation Orders in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7366/11-15)

Mr Attwood: When an application for a Tree Preservation Order is received, sites are prioritised in terms of known threats to the trees, and site inspections are undertaken by a small dedicated team in Planning Headquarters.

Since the purpose of the Tree Preservation Order legislation is to protect trees which have high amenity value, felled trees do not form part of the consideration, when trees on a site are being assessed.

Transfer of Planning Functions to Local Councils

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the proposed transfer of planning functions to local councils.

(AQW 9433/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning powers will transfer to councils in circumstances to be determined by the Executive. A sustainable planning system will be handed over to councils – my officials are developing a work force planning model and reviewing fees to make sure that the right number of people are in the right offices and that there is sufficient income to cover costs.

My Department is committed to working with councils to ensure a smooth transition – this includes pilot projects to test different aspects of the proposed arrangements, capacity building, and formal training for councillors.

The reforms to the planning system contained within the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 will result in a modernised system transferring to councils with quicker local development plans, faster decisions on planning applications, faster and fairer appeals, and tougher and simpler enforcement.

In advance of the transfer of powers to councils my Department is bringing forward a Bill that will accelerate the implementation of a number of those reforms, to be administered by the Department. My Department intends to introduce the Bill in this Assembly session and is working on the associated subordinate legislation required to implement the reforms pre transfer of planning powers. This will maintain the momentum of planning reform by allowing the planning system to benefit from these reforms at the earliest possible date.

Planning Application F/2010/0092/F

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on planning application F/2010/0092/F.

(AQW 11316/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Ornithology information required by NIEA was received on 2 April 2012, and advertised as a second addendum for this application on 20 April 2012. Roads clarification was received on 12 April 2012. Environmental Health clarification was received on 17 May 2012.

To date 447 objections have been received for this application, no objections have been received in response to the 2nd Addendum.

This application was presented to Larne Council on 18 June 2012 as an approval. A deferral was requested and granted for this application. The deferred office meeting was held on 28 June 2012. Reconsideration is ongoing and it is anticipated that this application will be re-presented to Larne Council on the 6 August 2012.

Road Haulage Operators

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment what action is taken against road haulage operators, in relation to their operations within Northern Ireland, who are found to be using illegal fuel outside Northern Ireland, or who are otherwise breaking the law.

(AQW 12038/11-15)

Mr Attwood: No licences have yet been refused or revoked because of the use of illegal fuel. This is primarily because to date it has been the policy normally of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) not to prosecute operators found to be using illegal fuel, and instead to rely on the use of fixed penalties. It has also been HMRC's policy not to provide information to my Department on any other penalties imposed, on the grounds that they have no authority to do so. That said, officials in the DVA know of at least one case where an operator received a penalty, that HMRC refused to confirm and that DVA did not take further action in relation to an operator licence. I have asked DVA to explain this approach and how many similar cases have been brought to their attention.

However, as provision of this information would enable the use of illegal fuel to be taken into account when determining an application for an operator's licence, or when considering whether a licence should be retained, I instructed officials to contact HMRC again to seek the sharing of information and to tell HMRC my views, and I can confirm that a memorandum of understanding is now being drafted that will provide for enforcement information to be shared between HMRC and the Driver & Vehicle Agency in the future. I consider the previous approach by HMRC as an impediment to enforcement.

Any other breaches of the law are taken into account in determining an applicant's or licence holder's repute, and such breaches can lead to the refusal of a licence or the revocation of an existing licence.

Planning Applications for Minerals Extraction or Minerals Plant/Machinery

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for minerals extraction or minerals plant/machinery, which have been refused in the last five years, were retrospective.

(AQW 12164/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the last five years the Department refused 9 applications for minerals extraction or minerals plant / machinery. Of these 9 applications, 2 were retrospective. I have instructed officials to provide further details on all cases and I will forward same to the Member.

Sustainable Charcoal

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department has taken to promote the use of sustainable charcoal produced in the UK.

(AQW 12280/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am aware of this issue and research around sustainable charcoal. An intervention that reduces carbon emissions, helps address climate change and helps employment would have my backing. DOE has no particular legal vires on the issue but I will write to DETI and OFMdFM advising of your interest.

Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 4075/11-15, for an update on the Department for Transport bringing vehicle licensing services in Northern Ireland into line with those provided in Britain.

(AQW 12567/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea have been examining how they can deliver an integrated IT system to Northern Ireland that would bring vehicle licensing services here into line with those in Britain and provide online applications, more services from Post Office and other enhanced services to motorists. I enclose a copy of the statement of Mike Penning (DofT) which has updated the position.

A separate study is also examining options for the future delivery of vehicle licensing services following systems integration. I believe that NI drivers should have the full range of services.

I have written to Justine Greening, Secretary of State for Transport, expressing my support for the delivery of these services to customers in NI but emphasising my opposition to any reduction in jobs in NI as a consequence of these changes. I have been assured that no decisions will be made without further consultation with me.

I have met also the Department for Transport Minister, Mike Penning twice; and provided a dossier to London on how to protect local DVA jobs; have met the Secretary of State, Owen Patterson, to urge that he support my argument; have written to the NI MP's to urge they use their influence and so on.

I believe I have made a full case for the retention of DVA jobs or the retention of the full profiled jobs at Coleraine. I hope my argument will prevail. I have kept the Union informed of my actions.

Exemption of Pre-1960 Classic and Historic Vehicles from MOT Testing

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment why pre-1960 classic and historic vehicles are subject to annual MOT tests, when Westminster will be removing this requirement on 18 November 2012.

(AQW 12981/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has consulted on possible exemption of certain categories of historic vehicles from MOT testing and the Environment Committee, at its meeting on 22 March 2012, considered the synopsis of responses to the Department's consultation. The responses indicated that there is broad support for exemption of pre-1960 vehicles from periodic testing.

The Committee was content with the Department's proposed way forward, which was to develop policy on the basis of the consultation responses that would make use of the exemption in Roadworthiness Directive 2009/40/EC concerning the periodic testing of pre-1960 vehicles.

There have been significant European Commission (EC) policy developments since that time. On 13 July 2012, the EC published a 'Roadworthiness Package' that, amongst other things, addresses periodic roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles, therein, making changes to the rules that apply to historic vehicles. The proposals are expected to be introduced no earlier than August 2014.

If implemented as currently drafted, the proposals will narrow the parameters within which the department can provide for exemptions to historic vehicles, as the definition of a historical vehicle is more prescriptively described.

The Department's policy intentions remain the same; that is to make exempt pre-1960 vehicles from the MOT regime, but I have to have regard changing legislative context, to ensure that any changes we make are not made redundant by incoming EC Regulations.

I expect to be in a position to provide further clarification on the Department's position in September, but subject to the above, would wish to take forward exemptions for certain categories.

Black and Minority Ethnic Network 'BME Link'

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the Black and Minority Ethnic Network 'BME Link' set up by the Department of Justice, what consideration he has given to introducing a similar network within his Department.

(AQW 13094/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have asked officials to provide further details on the BME Link, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender network and the Carers network in place in DOJ. I consider these structures have importance and impact. I will look closely at the models and advise the member further.

Tony Bazley's Involvement with Tamboran

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) whether he and his Department were aware of Tony Bazley's involvement with Tamboran prior to October 2011; (ii) whether he declared an interest at the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside meetings; and (iii) if not, whether his position will be reconsidered.

(AQW 13396/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Dr Tony Bazley informed the Chairman of the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC) of his involvement with Tamboran Resources in writing on 28 October 2010. This was proper and good practice and it should be acknowledged as such. Indeed the chair of CNCC has written to me, advised me that the interest was stated and that Dr Bazley confirmed that he would withdraw from CNCC if appropriate.

The Department became aware of Dr Bazley's connection with Tamboran when he gave a presentation to CNCC on shale gas on 30 September 2011.

I understand no further reason has arisen for Dr Bazley to declare an interest at CNCC since that time.

Dr Bazley is an acknowledged geologist. The potential conflict of interest must be and must be seen to be managed properly. I have informed officials and the CNCC that this is the case, but I want to make it clear that there is currently no basis for Dr Bazley to conclude his membership of the council. The CNCC advises me that it intends to produce a public register of declared conflicts. I have asked that other bodies under my control do likewise.

The Chairman of CNCC, Patrick Casement, has consistently responded to queries of this nature that the potential conflict of interest is being managed properly and that Dr Bazley remains a committed and valuable member of the Council.

Moreover, I have to say that it is an incongruous place for the argument presented by some that a person otherwise well qualified for a position, should be excluded because of one aspect of their wider work. That is not a good standard to operate against and diminishes the contribution of CNCC ordinary members, who are also voluntary.

That said there is an issue that, having declared an interest, CNCC then agreed to have a presentation from that member on the very issue where an interest had been stated, and in the knowledge that the issue was contentious and may give rise to public concern. Patrick Casement has informed me that it was the Council which requested this presentation. Nonetheless I have advised the Chair that I do not consider that this was a wise course of action.

Planning Applications in areas Formerly Designated as Green Belt Land

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications have been (i) received; and (ii) approved, in areas that were formerly designated as green belt land in the draft (a) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan ; (b) Magherafelt Area Plan; and (c) Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan, since the introduction of PPS 21,
(AQW 13553/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Based on a spatial search, all planning applications falling wholly within the greenbelt designations from the relevant plans have been identified. Within the period 1 June 2010 to 6 July 2012, 2672 planning application have been received and 2476 have been approved by the Department within Green belt locations associated with (a) Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan; (b) Magherafelt Area Plan; and (c) Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan. This data is broken down by Area Plan in the table overleaf.

Relevant Area Plan	Applications Received	Applications Approved
Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015	1452	1266
Magherafelt Area Plan 2015	96	89
Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015	1124	1121

Source: DOE Planning

Please note: This information has been sourced from a live database, is subject to change following validation, and will not equate to any finalised official statistic which may be later published on the topic.

It is important to note that applications received in the year may not have had a decision issued within the same time period and applications decided in the year may not have been received in the same time period. Therefore direct comparisons between figures cannot be made.

Revised Proposals for a Future Exemptions Regime Under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 and the Environmental Regulations 2011

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 10298/11-15, in relation to the extraction of shale gas by hydraulic fracturing, to detail (i) what constitutes a minor use of radioactive substances; (ii) how the benefit of the use is assessed; (iii) how an industry is defined as local; and (iv) how the legislation effects foreign-owned companies.

(AQW 13691/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- i) A minor use of a radioactive substance is one where the level of risk associated with its use is sufficiently low to make it suitable for control under the Radioactive Substances Exemption Order regime.
- (ii) The Exemption Orders are a mechanism for providing a “light touch” level of regulation over those beneficial uses of radioactive substances that are of low risk to people and the environment. In the case of hydraulic fracking there is no direct “use” of radioactive substances. The radioactivity,

in the form of naturally occurring radioactive material arises incidentally in one of the waste streams generated during the extraction process and would be defined as radioactive waste. It is unlikely that this waste would be “out of scope” of the legislation or suitable for control under the Exemption Order regime. Based on experience elsewhere in the UK it is proposed that an authorisation under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 would be required to accumulate and/or dispose of this waste.

- (iii) The Radioactive Substances Exemption (Northern Ireland) Order 2011, the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 and the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 apply to any activity taking place in Northern Ireland whether carried out by a “foreign-owned” company or a locally registered one.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Miscellaneous Educational Services

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the Miscellaneous Educational Services budget, to detail what discussions he has had with the Minister of Education (i) regarding the lack of detail available on the budget; and (ii) to ensure that there is effective budgetary oversight in relation to the expenditure of the £13.771 million.

(AQW 13024/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I have had no discussion with the Minister of Education specifically in relation to the Miscellaneous Educational Services budget that the question refers to. However, I can inform the member that this category includes provision for the Sports Initiative, spend on certain Special Educational Needs activities, pupil support and counselling, Young Enterprise schemes, the Exceptional Circumstances Body and certain payments in relation to the School Improvement Programme. Further, a draft paper on the Review of the Financial Process, which proposes the Department of Education provides more detailed information on its budget than is currently the case, has been circulated to Ministerial Colleagues. The aim of the Review is to create a more transparent public expenditure process that meets the needs of the Assembly and the Executive.

Unfunded Costs

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the individual nature of all unfunded costs to which the Executive have made a commitment, for which there is no provision within the current budget.

(AQW 13592/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Executive’s key commitments are defined within the Programme for Government. In addition, the Executive may agree further commitments on an ongoing basis as part of its normal business. OFMdfM is the only department with full insight into the totality of Executive commitments. For that reason I am not in a position to comment on any ‘unfunded costs’ in this respect.

Department for Social Development

Disposal of Capital Assets

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the capital assets of which his Department intends to dispose in each of the next three years.

(AQW 13439/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The capital assets which the Department currently intends to dispose of in the next three years are detailed at Annex A. Values shown are current estimates and are subject to review.

ANNEX A

Capital Asset for Disposal	2012/13 Current estimated value - subject to review.	2013/14 Current estimated value - subject to review.	2014/15 Current estimated value - subject to review.	Surplus (S) Development (D) Transfer (T)
Plots 15 & 16 Birchill Road. Antrim	£1,310,000			S
4 Ballycraigy Road, Antrim	£10,000			S
Land adjacent to Belfast Road, Antrim	£130,000			S
Belmont Road, Antrim.		£2,000,000		S
Steeple Road, Antrim	£63,750			S
Springfarm Road, Antrim	£140,250			S
Ballykeel House, Larne Link Road, Ballymena	£2,550,000			S
Land surrounding built South West Distributor Road.	£70,000			S
Ballee Road West, Ballymena			£7,000,000	S
Tullygarley Road, Ballymena			£1,700,000	S
Ballee Rd East, Ballymena	£4,000,000			S
Wyncroft, 18 Antrim Road.		£12,750		S
Land beside M1/ M12 Motorway, Craigavon	£450,000			S
22 Carbet Road Portadown			£255,000	S
Lands at Tamnificarbet Craigavon			£701,250	S
Charlestown Road, Portadown	£510,000			S
Lands at Lisniskey, Portadown		£3,000,000		S

Capital Asset for Disposal	2012/13 Current estimated value - subject to review.	2013/14 Current estimated value - subject to review.	2014/15 Current estimated value - subject to review.	Surplus (S) Development (D) Transfer (T)
Plot B, Kernan, Portadown	£119,000			S
Phase II, Knockmenagh, Portadown	£1,360,000			S
Site at Westacres, Craigavon	£255,000			S
Lands at Drumgask/ Moyraverty, Craigavon	£297,400			S
Ardowen, Craigavon		£170,000		S
Tannaghmore Nth Rd, Lurgan	£40,000			S
Ballynamoney Lane, Lurgan	£200,000			S
Carbet Road, Portadown	£25,500			S
Drumgor Park, Craigavon		£12,750		S
Knockrammer Park, Lurgan	£17,950			S
Tarsan Lane, Portadown	£748,000			S
Small site at Franklyn Park, Lurgan		£85,000		S
Derryvore Lane, Seagoe, Portadown	£20,000			S
10 Ballynamoney Lane, Lurgan			£70,000	S
Lands at 57 Carbet Road, Portadown	£23,000			S
Lands at the roundabout of Eastway and Silverwood Road, Lurgan	£12,750			S
Ballinaor, Portadown	£36,200			S

Capital Asset for Disposal	2012/13 Current estimated value - subject to review.	2013/14 Current estimated value - subject to review.	2014/15 Current estimated value - subject to review.	Surplus (S) Development (D) Transfer (T)
Site at 55 Carbet Road, Portadown	£20,000			S
Lands at Tannaghmore West Rd, Lurgan	£100,000			S
Parkmore, Craigavon	£170,000			S
Drumellan, Craigavon	£63,750			S
Carn Industrial Estate, Charlestown Road, Portadown	£120,000			S
Land adjacent to 36 Gobhan Close, Portadown	£1,500			S
Curran St, Portadown	£200,000			S
Transfer of 100 Folios to DRD Road Service ¹	N/A	N/A	N/A	T
Parkview Road, Castleterg	£30,000			S
Richmond Chambers, The Diamond, Londonderry	1,250,000 to 2,250,000			S
Harbour Square, Londonderry (part) ²	1000			T
Score Site, Dock Street, Strabane ³				D
Fort George, Londonderry ⁴				D
232 Newtownards Road, Belfast	£17,500			D
Land at Shore Road/Mill Road, Belfast	£5,000			D
Land at Poleglass, Belfast	£250,000			D
11A Ormeau Avenue, Belfast		£2,000,000		D

Capital Asset for Disposal	2012/13 Current estimated value - subject to review.	2013/14 Current estimated value - subject to review.	2014/15 Current estimated value - subject to review.	Surplus (S) Development (D) Transfer (T)
Lanark Way / Mayo Link, Belfast		£230,000		D
Shankill Rd / Lanark Way, Belfast		£91,000		D
124/138 Peters Hill, Belfast		£90,000		D
17/25 Battenberg Street, Belfast		£75,000		D
118/120 Antrim Road, Belfast		£70,000		D
308-312 Shankill Road, Belfast		£50,000		D
Lemberg Street / Rydalmere Street, Belfast		£30,000		D
Peter's Hill/ Greenland Street, Belfast		£30,000		D
Land at Bereford Street, Belfast		£20,000		D
157-161 North Street, and 40 -44 Kent Street Belfast ¹		£500,000		D
Car park at Carrick Hill, Belfast ⁵			£300,000	D
35-37 Carrick Hill and land to rear Belfast ⁵			£400,000	D
SS Nomadic ⁶	£1,900,000			T
Parcel of land at Girdwood Park ⁷	£100,000			D

Note 1: Relates to a perfecting title exercise where some 100 folios of land, consisting of road bed, are wrongly held under DSD title and are to be transferred to DRD. Total acreage of this land is 79 acres.

Note 2: This is a small portion of land being transferred to Derry City Council to facilitate the construction of Guildhall terrace and ramp to Harbour Museum.

Note 3: Strabane Score site will be marketed through the issue of a Development Brief later this year/early next year. However, even if a preferred developer is identified through this process, the land will not transfer to the developer until the proposed development is complete, possibly towards the end of 2015.

- Note 4:** The Fort George site comprises 14 acres providing a major regeneration opportunity within the central area of Londonderry. Ilex urban regeneration company are responsible for its redevelopment. An outline planning application was submitted in July 2012 with a Development Framework which demonstrates the overall urban design concept for the site. The Department plans to lease part of the site to the North West Regional Science Park in 2013/14 however DSD will retain the freehold for the site, but the land will be controlled by the Science Park.
- Note 5:** assets acquired in relation to Northside Urban Village Regeneration Framework; to be disposed off via development brief.
- Note 6:** asset transferred to the SS Nomadic Charitable Trust on 2 April 2012; transaction treated as 'capital grant-in-kind'.
- Note 7:** asset comprising approximately 1.78 acres of 14.1 acre site to be transferred to Belfast City Council (BCC) for the development of the Girdwood Community Hub; transfer subject to BCC obtaining SEUPB funding.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the level of funding allocated to; and (ii) the per capita spend in, each Neighbourhood Renewal area in the 2011/12 financial year.

(AQW 13521/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the level of funding allocated to, and the per capita spend in each Neighbourhood Renewal Area in the 2011/12 financial year.

Neighbourhood Renewal Area	2010 Population Estimates	Total Spend	Total Spend Per Capita
Andersonstown	8,801	£1,313,132.76	£149.20
Colin	16,307	£2,245,358.00	£137.69
Crumlin/Ardoyne	13,680	£1,437,078.00	£105.05
Greater Falls	16,060	£1,579,601.56	£98.36
Greater Shankill	18,394	£1,856,637.22	£100.94
Inner East	22,331	£4,688,296.09	£209.95
Inner North	11,891	£817,973.92	£68.79
Inner South	7,024	£681,936.59	£97.09
Lenadoon	7,906	£950,228.25	£120.19
Ligoniel	1,935	£230,218.00	£118.98
Rathcoole	7,085	£385,109.00	£54.36
South West	6,181	£742,126.95	£120.07
Tullycarnet	2,215	£239,698.00	£108.22
Upper Ardoyne/Ballysillan	2,935	£338,693.59	£115.40
Upper Springfield/Whiterock	10,858	£1,423,801.00	£131.13
BRO Total	153603	£18,929,888.93	£123.24
Triax	16,581	£5,195,000.00	£313.31
Outer North	15,427	£873,000.00	£56.59
Outer West	9,175	£647,000.00	£70.52
Strabane	6,394	£676,000.00	£105.72

Neighbourhood Renewal Area	2010 Population Estimates	Total Spend	Total Spend Per Capita
Waterside	9,251	£1,584,000.00	£171.22
Limavady	2,468	£486,000.00	£196.92
NWDO Total	59296	£9,461,000.00	£159.56
Armagh	4,871	£427,170.72	£87.70
Ballyclare	1,035	£55,804.85	£53.92
Ballymena	4,297	£287,381.61	£66.88
Bangor	2,935	£198,259.45	£67.55
Brownlow	8,137	£1,380,352.41	£169.64
Coalisland	1,921	£71,958.79	£37.46
Coleraine	6,050	£334,111.18	£55.22
Downpatrick	5,468	£268,638.76	£49.13
Dungannon	1,247	£665,529.78	£533.70
Enniskillen	2,802	£507,180.11	£181.01
Lurgan	10,020	£486,207.07	£48.52
Newry	10,791	£753,847.29	£69.86
NW Portadown	3,132	£380,417.65	£121.46
Omagh	3,121	£912,123.09	£292.25
RDO Total	65,827	£6,728,982.76	£102.22

Welfare Reform Bill: Royal Assent

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Social Development what is the timescale for the Welfare Reform Bill to receive Royal Assent before any breach of parity occurs.

(AQW 13603/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is normal practice for a Northern Ireland Social Security Bill be introduced as soon as possible after the corresponding Westminster Bill has received Royal Assent, in this case, the Welfare Reform Act 2012 received Royal Assent on 8th March 2012.

The Department for Work and Pensions accept that some delay between the Great Britain Act and the corresponding Northern Ireland Act is inevitable, as Northern Ireland legislation can only be introduced to the Assembly after the Great Britain legislation has achieved Royal Assent and a number of pre-introductory legislative processes are completed. On previous occasions, this delay was not regarded as a breach of parity as our aim has always been to facilitate the passage of the Bill and obtain Royal Assent in as timely a fashion as possible here.

I should explain that the pre-introductory legislative processes include seeking confirmation from the Departmental Solicitor's Office and the Attorney General that any proposed Bill is within the legislative competence of the Assembly, as well as seeking the consent of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the inclusion of provisions which deal with excepted matters under section 4(1) of, and Schedule 2 to, the Northern Ireland Act 1998. These approvals and consents have all been received and I can confirm that I have issued a paper to the Executive seeking their agreement to introduce the Bill to the Assembly. However, this agreement will not be secured until after the summer recess.

Local Advice Services

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) where funding for local advice services will originate after March 2013; (ii) who will administer the funding; and (iii) how funding will be allocated to bodies.

(AQW 13643/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Funding for local advice services in 2013/14 will continue to be provided through my Department's Community Support Programme. Local Councils will continue to administer that funding, taking responsibility for the commissioning of advice services in their local areas.

Funding for Advice Services

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether a consultation exercise will be carried out with stakeholders on the delivery of funding for advice services from March 2013.

(AQW 13644/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has no plans to carry out a consultation exercise with stakeholders on the delivery of funding for advice services from March 2013.

Funding for advice services will continue to be made available in 2013/14 through my Department's Community Support Programme, with local councils continuing to take responsibility for the administration of funding and the commissioning of local advice services.

Welfare Reform Bill

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the timescale for the introduction and implementation of the Welfare Reform Bill.

(AQW 13645/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At this stage no date has been arranged for introduction and implementation of the Welfare Reform Bill to the Assembly as I am awaiting the Executive's consideration of the final policy proposals of the Bill and for its agreement to the introduction of the Bill to the Assembly.

Funded Posts in the Community and Voluntary Sectors

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of jobs currently funded (a) in full; and (b) in part by his Department; and (ii) how many of the posts are in the community and voluntary sectors.

(AQW 13648/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department supports a broad range of services directly through the core Department, and also through the core Department, and also through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and local councils. Given the broad range of services and initiatives supported, the information requested is not readily available.

In the interest of helpfulness it has been identified that, as a result of funding provided directly by the core Department, approximately 961 individuals are employed by the voluntary and community sector as part of service delivery arrangements. Detail as regards those funded in (a) full, and (b) in part, is not available.

Employment and Support Allowance Appeals

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 13259/11-15, given the impact that further medical evidence may have on Employment and Support Allowance appeals, what consideration has been given to introducing a questionnaire to enable claimants' GPs or specialists, to provide further opinion and evidence before a decision is made.

(AQW 13671/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The customer is responsible for providing Employment and Support Allowance with all relevant medical evidence in support of their claim to the benefit. However, there is a procedure in place to obtain further evidence from a claimant's GP in cases where it is likely that the evidence may allow the healthcare professional to advise either that significant disability is likely or that Support Group criteria are likely to apply. On some occasions, this will remove the need for the customer to attend a medical examination. In addition, customers are provided with two opportunities to provide further evidence that may prevent their claim progressing to an appeal. Social Security Agency Decision Makers contact customers before making a disallowance decision if the existing medical evidence does not support an award of Employment and Support Allowance, in order to give the customer the opportunity to supply additional medical evidence. The decision maker will take this new evidence into account before making a final decision. The Social Security Agency also contacts customers upon receipt of an appeal. This is to provide the appellant with the opportunity to supply any additional evidence that may result in the disallowance being reconsidered and therefore remove the need for an appeal.

Work Capability Assessments for Employment and Support Allowance

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 13259/11-15, what consideration his Department has given to (i) providing assistance to Employment and Support Allowance claimants for the costs associated with providing further medical evidence; (ii) the responsibilities of GPs, hospitals and others for providing the evidence; (iii) the quality and the cost of the evidence; (iv) the non-return rate, of evidence sought; and (v) the onus for seeking additional material resting with the decision maker and his Department, as the claimant may well be under stress due to their health situation.

(AQW 13672/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- i) In accordance with the legislation governing eligibility and payment of Employment and Support Allowance, it is the customer who is responsible for providing all relevant medical evidence in support of their claim to benefit. As the provision of letters of evidence is regarded as a private service, it is a matter for the GP to decide what fee they wish to charge for providing a letter of evidence.
- ii) GPs and Hospital Consultants are independent contractors. Therefore, under the terms of the General Medical Services contract there is no requirement for them to provide letters of evidence in respect of an individual claim for Employment and Support Allowance.
- iii) As the provision of letters of evidence is regarded as a private service, and as GPs are independent contractors, the cost and quality of evidence provided is a matter for the individual GP.
- iv) The information requested is not available.
- v) Throughout the process for claiming Employment and Support Allowance the responsibility remains with the customer to provide all relevant medical evidence in support of their claim to benefit. The Social Security Agency does ensure customers have a number of opportunities to supply this evidence. The Social Security Agency Decision Maker considers all available evidence in relation to a customer's claim before making a decision to entitlement. This will include information from the medical questionnaire, the healthcare professional's assessment and any other relevant information provided. The requirement to seek GP and/or further medical evidence is dependent on the circumstances of each individual case. As a safeguard for vulnerable customers, the Atos healthcare professional will seek further medical evidence where it is likely that the evidence may allow them to advise either that significant disability is likely or that Support Group criteria are likely to apply. On some occasions, this will remove the need for the customer to attend a medical examination. It is also usual for the Atos healthcare professional to request further medical evidence in cases where the available evidence suggests the customer is particularly vulnerable, for example, where there is noted to be an appointee, or where there is a diagnosis of a severe and enduring mental health condition.

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Exemption of Pre-1960 Classic and Historic Vehicles from MOT Testing	WA 665	WAVE Trauma Centres	WA 656
Peatlands	WA 663		
Planning Application F/2010/0092/F	WA 664		
Planning Applications for Minerals Extraction or Minerals Plant/Machinery	WA 665		
Planning Applications in areas Formerly Designated as Green Belt Land	WA 667		

Revised Written Answers

Friday 31 August 2012

(AQW 11648/11-15)

My Department's Roads Service has advised that the lands acquisition process is governed by the Roads Service Policy and Procedure Guide RSPPG SO_31. This sets out the procedures outlined in my reply to the Member's Assembly Question, AQW 11647/11-15. Roads Service officials are willing to make a copy available to the Member if he contacts a local Divisional office.

(AQW 11649/11-15)

My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has received a number of requests to improve visibility for drivers exiting the Ballyvester Road junction in Donaghadee. These include one from the Donaghadee Road Safety Committee with support from the PSNI and residents of both the Millisle and Ballyvester Roads.

When assessed, the scheme was determined to be high priority, and accordingly was included in a programme of improvement works. However, the scheme requires the acquisition of land from adjacent landowners.

For various reasons, it is becoming common practice for Roads Service to acquire land for road schemes through the vesting process, particularly where there are multiple landowners and where there is unregistered land, as in this case. This ensures clear title to land and helps to ensure that schemes are progressed in a timely fashion.

(AQW 11650/11-15)

My Department's Roads Service has advised that initial contact was made with residents of Millisle Road and Ballyvester Road following a site survey by the design engineers in April 2009. Following progress on the design of the scheme, Roads Service officials met with landowners in March 2011. Further meetings have taken place and all residents have been offered an opportunity to respond to the Department's proposals prior to the Notice of Intention to Vest.

Further consultation included a Freedom of Information request from a resident seeking all information relating to the proposal. In addition, a number of letters of objection were received during April and May 2011 and each reply contained a description of the proposal and an offer to meet to discuss residents' concerns. All those who submitted objections declined the offer of a meeting with officials.

However, the Department's offer to meet with residents is still available, should they wish to discuss the proposed scheme.



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

and available from:

Online

www.tsoshop.co.uk

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ISSN 1463-7162

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

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

Printed in Northern Ireland by The Stationery Office Limited

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ISBN 978-0-339-70261-5

