

Written Answers to Questions

Official Report (Hansard)

Friday 16 November 2012

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

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Weir, Peter (North Down)
Wells, Jim (South Down)
Wilson, Sammy (East Antrim)

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 16 November 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Welfare Reform Advisory Group

Mr Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 14370/11-15, whether any departmental staff are members of the Welfare Reform Advisory Group.

(AQW 15099/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Departmental staff are not members of the group.

Officials from the Department have provided secretariat support to the meetings of the Group and supported the Group in making arrangements for meetings.

We would also confirm that the group you refer to is known as the "Advisory Group on Alleviating Hardship" and not the Welfare Reform Advisory Group.

Staff Facing Internal Investigations

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many members of staff their his Department are currently (i) suspended due to internal investigations, and (ii) not suspended whilst facing internal investigations.

(AQW 15853/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We can confirm that no members of staff in OFMDFM are currently (i) suspended due to internal investigations, and (ii) not suspended whilst facing internal investigations.

St Lucia Barracks, Omagh

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether ownership of St Lucia Barracks, Omagh is to be passed from the Ministry of Defence; (ii) whether they are planning for the Ministry of Defence to gift the site to their Department; and (iii) what future use do they envisage for the former military site.

(AQW 15892/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 15 April 2012, part of St Lucia Barracks was gifted to OFMDFM under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement. The listed buildings and parade ground at St Lucia remain the property of the Ministry of Defence (MOD). It has not been possible for the MOD to transfer that part of the site to OFMDFM for legal reasons, although we understand that discussions are ongoing in relation to this and that MOD hopes to resolve the difficulties.

OFMDFM officials will maintain contact with the owners of the listed part of the site, so that any options which involve both portions of the site can be explored.

The purpose of the gifting sites under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement is to raise capital revenue to meet Executive pressures. Officials are currently considering options for disposal of the site to

maximise yield and in the short to medium term are looking at ways to minimise costs and achieve some financial or social return. OFMDFM has established a Strategic Sites Oversight Board to undertake strategic management of the former military sites owned by the department and this will make recommendations to the Departmental Board and Ministers in due course in relation to the future of the sites.

Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what are the estimated financial implications for the cost of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry, in light of the recent decision to extend the date of possible instances of abuse to 1922.

(AQW 15903/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Victims and survivors whose experiences of abuse were before 1945 were already eligible to come to the Acknowledgment Forum. It is anticipated that the Judicial Inquiry will investigate primarily those institutions and periods where allegations of institutional abuse come to light through the Acknowledgment Forum.

It is very unlikely, therefore, that the change of the 1945 parameter to 1922 would impact on the overall cost of the Inquiry.

Ebrington Barracks, Derry

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when opportunities for development of Ebrington Barracks, Derry will be opened to the market.

(AQW 16151/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM is working closely with Ilex on the development of Ebrington. The process of initiating a Development Framework to secure outline planning permission for the legacy usage of the site is underway which will open up the site to full market potential. Ilex has received almost 40 expressions of interest for developments at the site to date and we are assisting Ilex in agreeing a process to identify market interest in some of the existing building stock through non-binding expressions of interest. This process will inform the Development Framework and ensure that, at second-stage, direct market opportunities can be tailored to underpin delivery of the One Plan.

In advance of the Development Frameworks, we are working closely with Ilex to facilitate uses of the site to maintain interest and momentum in the development of Ebrington.

Signature Projects

Mr Hilditch asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress of the recently announced Signature Projects.

(AQO 2764/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 10 October 2012 we announced £26 million pounds of additional investment in the form of six Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes.

These Signature Programmes are designed to tackle multi-generational poverty and to improve children's health, wellbeing, educational and life opportunities.

It is also the intention that the programmes will stimulate economic growth and tackle dereliction through encouraging social enterprise in communities.

Following on from our announcement, a Senior Responsible Owner has now been identified for each of the Programmes and lead departments are currently developing Delivery Plans and Expenditure Profiles, with the aim of having work rolled out at the earliest possible opportunity.

St Lucia Barracks, Omagh

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to detail the current status in relation to the gifting of the St Lucia Barracks in Omagh; (ii) whether they have been involved in discussions with the Ministry of Defence in relation to the gifting of this site to the Executive; and (iii) the expected date that the negotiations between the leaseholders and Ministry of Defence will be completed.

(AQW 16317/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM currently owns a portion of the St Lucia Barracks site consisting of open ground, workshops and former military housing, which was gifted by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in 2011 under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement. The remainder of the site was not gifted because of legal impediments.

OFMDFM officials have maintained contact with MOD in relation to the legal discussions on the remainder of the site, and possible future scenarios, but without any commitment on either side.

The legal negotiations are a matter for MOD rather than OFMDFM and we understand these are still a matter for due process.

St Lucia Barracks, Omagh

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether departmental officials have undertaken any preliminary discussions with officials from Omagh District Council in relation to the potential use of St Lucia Barracks; and whether officials have been in discussion with the Department for Social Development, since the completion of the Omagh Town Centre Masterplan in 2009, in relation to the development of this site.

(AQW 16318/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM officials have undertaken discussions with Omagh District Council and the Department for Social Development in relation to St Lucia Barracks. These discussions have included consideration of the St Lucia site itself, the links to the neighbouring Lisanelly site and the context of St Lucia in the wider development of Omagh Town Centre.

Officials will continue to liaise with the Council, DSD and any other stakeholders on the future of the site.

Delivering Social Change

Mr Molloy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the next steps in the Delivering Social Change agenda.

(AQO 2767/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 10 October 2012 we announced £26 million pounds of additional investment in the form of six Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes.

These Signature Programmes are designed to tackle multi-generational poverty and to improve children's health, wellbeing, educational and life opportunities.

It is also the intention that the programmes will stimulate economic growth and tackle dereliction through encouraging social enterprise in communities.

Following on from our announcement a Senior Responsible Owner has now been identified for each of the Programmes and lead departments are currently developing Delivery Plans and Expenditure Profiles, with the aim of having work rolled out at the earliest possible opportunity.

Strategic Investment Board

Ms Boyle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Strategic Investment Board.

(AQO 2769/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) supports the Executive in the delivery of complex projects, helping to accelerate the ongoing transformation of the region into an excellent location in which to live, work and invest.

SIB is currently supporting some 40 departmental projects and programmes with an estimated capital value of £2.6 billion. This support includes the provision of Project Directors for Desertcreat College; Colin Town Regeneration; the Lisanelly Educational Campus, the Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation; the Belfast Rapid Transit Project; the implementation of the Education and Skills Authority; the Apprentice Boys of Derry Heritage Centre; the Regional Stadiums Programme and the Prisons Estates Strategy. SIB is also providing support to Belfast and Derry City Councils; the Primary Health Infrastructure Programme and the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre. It is supporting Ilex, Derry City Council and the Culture Company by providing project management support for work on an exhibition space and a temporary pavilion at Ebrington Barracks and by facilitating the secondment to Derry City Council of Dermot McLaughlin as Project Director for the City of Culture 2013.

On 8 October 2012 the Executive published the Investment Strategy for 2011-21. This Strategy is the expression of the Executive's long-term vision for investment to renew and upgrade our infrastructure. It sets out a rolling programme of investment for a ten-year period that offers a platform to deliver the objectives of the Programme for Government.

The Executive has established the Asset Management Unit (AMU) within SIB to deliver a programme of asset disposals and to develop a public sector asset management strategy. Since it was fully established in September 2011, AMU has undertaken a rigorous examination of opportunities to extract value from assets with departments. AMU successfully met its target of £2.5m of disposals for 2011/12. AMU is on course to achieve its £25.2m realisation target for asset disposals in 2012/13.

As part of its support to the Executive in the reform and delivery of effective public services, SIB has prepared a Social Clauses Toolkit which will be launched shortly. It is leading, with CPD, the forthcoming review of public procurement which was announced by the DFP Minister in the Assembly on 8 October. We have also directed SIB to bring forward detailed proposals for the provision of additional resources for infrastructure projects through the use of private and alternative finance mechanisms.

Role of the Attorney General

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to outline the reasons for commissioning a review into the role of the Attorney General; (ii) for their assessment of the findings or recommendations contained in the report; and (iii) whether there are any other on-going reviews of which Assembly Committees should be aware.

(AQW 16448/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive agreed in 2010 that the newly appointed Attorney General, in addition to his wider constitutional and legal functions, should act as chief legal adviser to the Executive and departments. It was decided at that time that aspects of this legal adviser role would be reviewed after a period of operation.

Earlier this year, in our capacity as joint Chairs of the Executive, we invited the Rt Hon Dame Elish Angiolini DBE QC, who has particular experience as a Law Officer in a devolved administration, to carry out this limited review of the Attorney General's legal adviser relationship with the Executive and departments. We have recently received her report on an 'in confidence' basis, and we are currently considering it.

Her report deals with internal Executive procedures and arrangements for the provision of legal advice to Ministers and departments. We do not accept the implication that any Assembly Committee needed to be aware of the review.

Staff Facing Criminal Charges or Investigations

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many people employed in their Department are (i) suspended from work pending criminal charges or investigations; and (ii) continuing in their duties whilst facing criminal charges or investigations.

(AQW 16466/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We can confirm that no members of staff in OFMDFM are currently:

- (i) suspended from work pending criminal charges or investigations;
- (ii) continuing in their duties whilst facing criminal charges or investigations.

Items Disposed of for a Monetary Return

Mr McNarry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the items that their Department disposed of for a monetary return in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12.

(AQW 16539/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In 2010/11 there was a single land disposal for £10,000. No other assets were sold during the financial year.

In financial year 2011/12 there were no asset disposals for consideration.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Grievance Cases and Whistleblowing Complaints

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many (i) grievance cases have been taken; and (ii) whistleblowing complaints have been made, against (a) her Department; and (b) its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years; and at what cost to the public purse.

(AQW 16175/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Details in respect of the number of grievances taken and whistleblowing complaints made against DARD and its Arms Length Bodies are detailed in the attached tables. The cost of handling grievance cases is not recorded and is therefore not available. The cost of handling whistleblowing complaints is included where this is known.

Details regarding the number of grievances taken and whistleblowing complaints made in the last 5 financial years against the Department and its Arms Length Bodies are as follows:

Number of Grievances taken against:-		1/01/08*	2008//09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Department-DARD	Number	10	24	34	17	16
	Cost	Not held	Not held	Not held	Not held	Not held
Arms Length Bodies	Number	1	Nil	4	3	3
	Cost	Not held	Not held	Not held	Not held	Not held
Total number of grievances	Number	11	24	38	20	19
	Cost	Not held	Not held	Not held	Not held	Not held

Number of Whistleblowing complaints made:-		1/01/08*	2008//09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Department - DARD	Number	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	nil
	Cost	-	-	-	16k	-
Arms Length Bodies	Number	Nil	2	3	1	3
	Cost	-	8k	51k	Not held	Not held
Total number of Whistleblowing cases	Number	Nil	2	3	2	3
	Cost	-	8K	51K	16k	Not held

* Details only held from January 2008

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that the Countryside Management Scheme has now been in operation for more than three years, will her Department have the ability to fulfil its undertaking to provide grant assistance to comply fully with the requirement to restrict grazing on portions of land, and when this will take place.

(AQW 16179/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Funding has been made available to participants in agri-environment schemes, including the Countryside Management Scheme, to allow them to comply with the requirement to restrict grazing through the provision of protective fencing. Recently some participants in the NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) have requested further approvals for additional work. My Department plans to offer these in 2013.

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute Survey of Sea Angling

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why the Irish Federation of Sea Anglers was not fully consulted on the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute survey of sea angling.

(AQW 16199/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Agri-Food and Bio-Sciences Institute (AFBI) survey of sea angling is a public consultation exercise which uses an internet questionnaire to gather information on the fishing activities and views of sea anglers.

The questionnaire is specifically aimed at individual anglers and was constructed in consultation with economists to gain results representative of the full range of sea anglers, including those who are not members of angling clubs or organisations. It is already generating interest and receiving broad support from a range of sea anglers.

The need for a widely targeted sea angling questionnaire was discussed with the Irish Federation of Sea Anglers (IFSA) on a number of occasions before the survey was launched and the Irish Federation of Sea Anglers is certainly very welcome, collectively and as individual members, to participate and respond to the questionnaire and make their views known.

The survey will provide an overview of the economic activity, fishing habits and attitudes of our sea angling community. AFBI will be content to discuss the results of the questionnaire with stakeholders as requested.

Animal Cruelty

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the benefit of introducing a register or database for persons convicted of animal cruelty.

(AQW 16214/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Welfare of Animals Act 2011 is enforced by my Department in respect of farmed animals, by Councils in respect of other animals and by the PSNI in respect of animal fighting offences and animal welfare offences where other criminal activity is involved.

The 2011 Act allows the Courts to disqualify a person convicted of causing unnecessary suffering to an animal from owning animals, either permanently or for such a period as the Court thinks fit. Provisions in the 2011 Act ensure that a person who is disqualified from owning animals cannot keep, or participate in the keeping of animals, or be party to any arrangements to control or influence the way in which animals are kept.

As the Act is enforced by three different agencies, I believe it is important that each agency has ready access to up-to-date information in order to check if a person has been disqualified from keeping animals or has any previous animal welfare related convictions.

I have arranged to meet with the Justice Minister, David Ford MLA, to discuss the sentencing of animal welfare offences and other related matters. At this meeting I intend to raise a number of issues regarding the enforcement of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011, including how information in respect of animal welfare convictions is recorded and its availability to the respective enforcement bodies.

Farms in North Down

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of farms in the North Down constituency, broken down by (i) size of herd numbers; (ii) in receipt of single farm payments; and (iii) which are arable producers.

(AQW 16388/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Based on the applications for Single Farm Payment in 2012, the number of farms in the North Down constituency broken down by:

(i) size of current herd numbers are:

Herd size (cattle)	Number of farm businesses
Up to 20	20
21 - 100	27
101- 300	23
Greater than 300	11

in receipt of single farm payments:

(ii) 233 farm businesses submitted a claim for 2012 Single Farm Payment (SFP). Payment in respect of these claims will only issue once the claims have been fully verified;

(iii) which are arable producers:

Of the 233 farm businesses that submitted a claim for 2012 Single Farm Payment, 81 indicated they are involved in arable production.

Schmallenberg Virus

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will consider commissioning AFBI to test midges for Schmallenberg Virus, similar to the current programme of testing for Blue Tongue.

(AQW 16417/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: AFBI are undertaking surveillance of aborted and stillborn foetuses that meet a recognised clinical case definition of Schmallenberg virus. (SBV) The recent case in Co Down was detected as a result of that surveillance.

In response to these recent developments, AFBI are undertaking some additional SBV testing on blood samples taken for brucellosis from the herd which had the SBV positive case. This information will let us know the level of exposure to SBV in the herd earlier this year.

Whilst in theory molecular tests may be available to detect virus within the midge population, the proper test protocols and validations have yet to be established. Consequently, at present, routine surveillance for Schmallenberg virus in midge populations is practically impossible.

The surveillance currently being undertaken to date is proportionate to the assessed risk.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mobile Libraries

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any measures her Department has taken to ensure maximum public participation in the Mobile Library Service Strategy consultation.

(AQO 2845/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Libraries NI will consult on the Mobile Library Service Strategy until Friday 14th December. They are promoting participation in the following ways:

- Press release to all local and regional press;
- Letters to all MLAs, MPs and MEPs;
- Letters to equality consultees and educational organisations;
- Letters were sent to all rural stakeholders, including the Rural Community Network. Libraries NI met with the RCN and stakeholders on the 6th and 7th of November and will continue to do so during the consultation period;
- Via Libraries NI's online presence and their mobile libraries.

I would recommend that all Members contribute to the consultation process to ensure that the views of their constituents are considered during the decision making process.

Sport: People with Disabilities

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what efforts have been made, by the governing bodies of the main sports, to engage with Disability Sports NI and other organisations on the provision of sports facilities and programmes for disabled people.

(AQO 2842/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has a challenging target, set out in its "Sports Matters" strategy covering the years 2011-2019, to deliver at least a 6% increase in the participation rates in sport and physical recreation among people with a disability from a 2011 baseline. The associated Action Plan for Implementation, which is publically available in the Sport NI website, has a range of actions and key steps to which each of the main governing bodies for sport have signed up.

Achieving this target requires a genuine partnership approach with elements of work being taken forward by those best placed to contribute and the pooling of resources and expertise.

That collective approach includes Disability Sports NI, who provide a range of policy and practical advice to the governing bodies of the main sports, who are committed to the delivery of a range of actions detailed in the Sport Matters Action Plan.

These actions include:

GAA: Special schools outreach programme;

IFA: Regular structured participation and competition programmes for various impairment specific groups; and

IRFU: running coaching courses/ clinics specifically for those coaches working with players who have disabilities.

Libraries: Kilkeel

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the timetable for the provision of a new library in Kilkeel.

(AQO 2850/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am committed to the improvement of our library service, and in particular to ensuring that libraries that serve rural areas remain sustainable.

Libraries NI are continuing to develop the Kilkeel replacement Library Project. The design of the replacement library has been developed and Libraries NI have prepared tender documentation.

If everything goes to plan work should start on site early next year and the new facility should open to the public in early 2014.

Arts: People with Disabilities

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what her Department is doing to improve the opportunities for people with disabilities to enjoy arts facilities.

(AQO 2851/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Through the Arts Council, my Department has made a significant investment over a number of years enhancing existing and creating new opportunities for people with disabilities to be able to fully utilise and enjoy arts facilities in a way that suits their wants and needs. My Department centres on tackling barriers to equality based on feedback from people with disabilities.

Arts Council's funding objectives promote the concept of universal accessibility in arts venues. And a condition of grant for their funded capital projects requires that all new and approved schemes provide an access audit report compiled by a suitably qualified and experienced independent access consultant.

Furthermore, new arts venues, such as the MAC, the Lyric, the Crescent and the Playhouse include provision for other methods to support access such as induction loops, braille literature and disabled seating areas as standard. Some venues also offer the 'buddy' scheme, which allows a person who is in need of a carer a free ticket with the purchase of their own ticket.

Libraries

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update of her review of libraries policy.
(AQO 2852/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I informed the CAL Committee that I would carry out a Review of the Library Policy Framework in July last year and it features in my Department's Corporate Plan.

A small Project Team is carrying out research, stakeholder engagement and analysis and officials have briefed the CAL Committee on the work programme.

I am pleased this work has commenced as it is appropriate that all bodies in receipt of public money regularly review their policies, practices and budget allocations to ensure that the money is spent in a way that delivers the best possible service to the public and real outcomes for the communities they serve.

The Project Team will make recommendations in early 2013 which will allow me to decide if a full Policy Review is required or the Library Standards updated.

City of Culture 2013

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department could provide extra funding to the Culture Company, if deemed necessary, to ensure that Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 will be a success.

(AQO 2853/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Executive has agreed to allocate over £30m to City of Culture 2013. My Department is investing up to £12.6 million to support the Cultural Programme of events in 2013.

The Department of Social Development is investing £4.6m to provide the Temporary Pavilion for major events in 2013; a £10m capital fund; £656k for Sports Campus and is considering other legacy projects.

OFMDFM is investing £2.4m in the refurbishment of buildings 80&81 at Ebrington to provide a venue for the Turner Prize. From 2014 this building will then be converted to space for creative and digital industries.

It is anticipated that Derry City Council will be able to deliver a high quality project with this allocation.

Re-Imaging Communities

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what can her Department do to help the Re-imaging Communities Programme.

(AQO 2855/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department through the Arts Council has recently been successful in securing funding from the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) in order to build upon the key successes of the Re-imaging Communities Programme.

The successor programme, Building Peace through the Arts - Re-imaging Communities will be funded by monies from Arts Council (Lottery), the Internal Fund for Ireland and the SEUPB, and is expected to open in January 2013.

The funding will be used to encourage local communities to work creatively with artists in tackling both visible and invisible signs of sectarianism while allowing for legitimate expression of cultural celebration.

Department of Education

St Patrick's High School, Banbridge

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education when the refurbishment works planned for St Patrick's High School, Banbridge will be given approval to proceed.

(AQW 16001/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): My Department has only recently been advised by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) that there are a number of high priority projects which

require to be considered by the Department for inclusion in the Minor Capital Works Programme. The Department of Education has not as yet received individual applications for these projects. I understand, however, that

CCMS is arranging to have these applications forwarded to the Department as soon as possible. Once these applications are received the Department will assess and prioritise the projects alongside all other competing priorities.

Grievance Cases and Whistleblowing Complaints

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how many (i) grievance cases have been taken; and (ii) whistleblowing complaints have been made, against (a) his Department; and (b) its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years; and at what cost to the public purse.

(AQW 16174/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i)(a) In each of the last five financial years, the following grievance cases have been taken against the Department under the formal NICS Grievance Procedure as set out in the NICS HR Handbook. The information can only be provided from October 2007 when HR Connect was introduced. No compensation was paid as a result of any of these cases.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number	0	8	3	3	3
Cost	0	0	0	0	0

In each of the last 5 financial years the following table shows the number of whistleblowing complaints which have been made against the Department and its Arms Length Bodies.

WHISTLEBLOWING CASES

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number	1	0	4	6	10
Cost	0	0	0	£1560	£5000

In each of the last 5 financial years the following table shows the number of grievance cases which have been taken against the Department's Arms Length Bodies.

GRIEVANCES

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number	8	20	26	23	41
Cost	0	0	0	£500	0

Redburn Primary School, Holywood

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail the plans for the development of the site previously occupied by Redburn Primary School, Holywood.

(AQW 16223/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In 2006 a multi-schools project was announced for Holywood which recommended Priory Integrated College relocating to a new build on the Redburn site.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board continues to review best use of the Redburn site including how it could be used to benefit new builds for Holywood Primary School and Holywood Nursery School.

Consultations on the Area Plans for Post-Primary schools have just completed and are being reviewed. The Area Plans for primary provision will also be published for public consultation. It is right that time is allowed for scrutiny and public consultation on these.

In the interim I will continue to examine the case for capital investment, and proposals for the use of the Redburn site will continue to be a part of these deliberations.

Pupil Absenteeism

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of pupil absenteeism in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools, in each of the last ten years, broken down by (a) month; and (b) Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 16243/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Information on the level of absenteeism from schools has been collected by the Department since 2007/08 and is available in relation to complete academic years. Information in this regard has been provided in the tables below.

PERCENTAGE ABSENCE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS BY EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA, 2007/08 - 2010/11

ELB	2007/08 ¹	2008/09 ²	2009/10 ³	2010/11 ⁴
Belfast	6.2	6.3	6.2	6.1
Western	5.3	5.1	5.5	5.3
North-Eastern	4.7	4.5	4.7	4.6
South-Eastern	5.0	4.9	5.0	4.9
Southern	5.2	5.0	5.3	5.1
Average	5.2	5.1	5.3	5.1

Note:

- Attendance information was not available for 32 primary schools in 2007/08. Of the 32 schools, 17 closed just prior to the information being collected and the remaining 15 either did not have access to the electronic schools management information system or did not yet use it to record pupil attendance.
- Attendance information was not available for 20 primary schools in 2008/09. Of the 20 schools, 9 closed just prior to the information being collected and 11 did not have access to the electronic schools management information system or did not yet use it to record attendance.
- Attendance information was not available for 9 primary schools in 2009/10. Of the 9 schools, 4 closed just prior to the information being collected and 5 did not submit the data at pupil level.
- Attendance information was not available for 13 primary schools which had closed or amalgamated with another, prior to the data being collected for 2010/11.
- Figures relate to pupils in Year 1 – 7.
- Attendance or absence is measured in half day sessions (am and pm).

PERCENTAGE ABSENCE IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS BY EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA, 2007/08 - 2010/11

ELB	2007/08 1	2008/09 2	2009/10	2010/11
Belfast	7.8	7.5	7.6	7.2

ELB	2007/08 1	2008/09 2	2009/10	2010/11
Western	7.7	7.9	7.8	7.6
North-Eastern	7.6	7.2	7.4	7.1
South-Eastern	8.4	8.1	8.3	7.8
Southern	7.6	7.7	7.5	7.2
Average	7.8	7.7	7.7	7.4

Note:

1. Attendance information for four post-primary schools which were open in 2007/08, but closed prior to the data being collected in 2008/09 has not been included.
2. Attendance information for four post-primary schools which closed prior to the data being collected in October 2009 has not been included.
3. Figures relate to pupils in Year 8 – 12.
4. Attendance or absence is measured in half day sessions (am and pm).

Taking Pupils out of School During Term Time

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education what advice is given to parents about taking pupils out of school during term time.

(AQW 16245/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department issues guidance to schools on attendance and the recording of absence in Circular 2012/18 Pupil Attendance – Absence Recording by Schools. This is available on the Department of Education website. It is the responsibility of the school to communicate guidance relating to attendance to parents. Decisions relating to family holidays during term time are based on exceptional circumstances and are at the discretion of the school.

Taking Pupils out of School During Term Time

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education what action his Department can take against parents who repeatedly take their children out of school for holidays during term time.

(AQW 16246/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Family holidays taken during term time are categorised as unauthorised absence unless very exceptional circumstances are presented. If a pupil's attendance falls below 85%, a referral will be made to Education Welfare Service (EWS). Following this, EWS will engage with the school and parents to address poor attendance. If the parent fails to comply, the respective Education and Library Board (ELB) may issue a parental fine up to a maximum of £1,000. The ELB can also apply to the Family Proceedings Court to make an Education Supervision Order which places the child under the supervision of the ELB.

Taking Pupils out of School During Term Time

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education whether he plans any further action to discourage parents from taking their children on family holidays during term time.

(AQW 16247/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department provides guidance to schools regarding the recording of attendance. This year the guidance, Circular 2012/18 Pupil Attendance: Absence Recording by Schools, was amended to state that parents should not take pupils on holiday during term time.

My Department is also looking at methods of improving school attendance and reducing levels of absenteeism. To assist with this a working group comprising of DE officials, schools and Education

Welfare Service has been formed to develop guidance to schools on effective policy and practice in promoting good attendance.

Bonus Payments to Staff

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to 15943/11-15, to outline the extra duties that departmental staff carried out to receive the special bonus payments; and how many staff this involved over the three year period.

(AQW 16267/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Special Bonuses are used to reward exceptional performance in particularly demanding tasks or situations during the course of the year or where good performance was achieved under particularly adverse conditions. Departments may make awards to an individual, or to a group of individuals to reward teamwork.

Period	No. of Staff
2009/10	202
2010/11	161
2011/12	126

EU Funded Programmes

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education how many EU funded programmes are currently operated by his Department; and how many will continue beyond 2013.

(AQW 16279/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While my Department is not currently delivering any EU funded programmes, my officials recently had a very useful meeting with representatives from the Special EU Programmes Body where a number of potential projects were identified as potentially being suitable to attract future EU funding. It is likely that any potential EU income from these projects would only arise in the next Budget period i.e. from 2015-16 onwards.

Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Education which schools are participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award; and how many pupils from each school are taking part.

(AQW 16285/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the north of Ireland, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award has a joint agreement with Gaisce – The President's Award, which enables young people who complete the programme to have a choice of award certification: a Duke of Edinburgh's Award Certificate, a Gaisce – The President's Award Certificate or an International Award Certificate.

The schools listed below are taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. A total of 5,713 pupils are currently participating.

Board Area	School
WELB	Foyle & Derry College
	Limavady High School
	Lumen Christi College, Derry
	Collegiate Grammar, Enniskillen
	Thornhill College, Derry

Board Area	School
WELB	Strabane Academy
	Limavady Grammar
	Arvalee School, Omagh
	St Columb's College, Derry
	Drumragh College, Omagh
	St Mary's College, Derry
	St Joseph's College, Enniskillen
	Castledearg High School
NEELB	Antrim Grammar
	Ballycastle High School
	Ballyclare High School
	Ballyclare Secondary School
	Ballymena Academy
	Ballymoney High school
	Belfast High School
	Cambridge House Grammar
	Carrickfergus College
	Carrickfergus Grammar
	Castledawson Youth Club
	Coleraine Academical Institution
	Coleraine High School
	Cross & Passion College
	Dalriada School
	Dominican College
	Downshire High School
	Dunluce School
	Glengormley High School
	Larne Grammar School
	Loreto College
	Maghera High School
	Magherafelt High School
	Monkstown School
	North Coast Integrated College
	Parkhall College

Board Area	School
NEELB	Rainey Endowed
	Slemish College
	St. Benedict's High School
	St. Colm's High School
	St. Killian's College
	St. Mary's Grammar
	St. Patricks College
	Ulidia Integrated College
SELB	Banbridge Academy
	Banbridge High School
	Cookstown High School
	Craigavon Senior High School
	Dromore High School
	The Royal School Dungannon
	Fivemiletown College
	Kilkeel High School
	Lisanally Special School
	Lurgan College
	Newry High School
	Newtownhamilton High School
	Portadown College
	Sacred Heart Grammar School
	St Brigid's High School
	St Catherine's College
	St Colman's College, Newry
	St Joseph's High School
	St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint
	St Mary's High School
St Paul's High School, Newry	
St Patrick's Academy	
BELB	Aquinas Grammar School
	Ashfield Girls' School
	Belfast Royal Academy
	Bloomfield Collegiate School

Board Area	School
BELB	Colaiste Feirste
	Dominican College
	Belfast Girls' Model
	Glenveagh School
	Grosvenor Grammar School
	Hunterhouse College
	Little Flower Girls' School
	Methodist College Belfast
	Royal Belfast Academical Institution
	St Dominic's High School
	St Malachy's College
	Strathearn School
	Victoria College
	Wellington College
	Hazelwood College
	Ashfield Boys' School
SEELB	Bangor Academy
	Bangor Grammar
	Blackwater Integrated School
	Down High School
	Forthill College
	Friends' School
	Glastry College
	Glenlola Collegiate
	Knockbreda High School
	Lagan College
	Laurelhill Community College
	Lisnagarvey High School
	Longstone Special School
	Movilla High
	Newtownbreda High School
	Our Lady & St Patrick's College
Priory Integrated College	
Regent House	

Board Area	School
SEELB	Rockport School
	Shimna College
	St Colman's High School
	St Malachy's High School
	Sullivan Upper
	The High School, Ballynahinch
	Wallace High School

Teaching Time Spent on English and Maths

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to increase the teaching time spent on English and Maths in primary schools.

(AQW 16300/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: English and Maths are not just stand alone subjects - they are part of the cross curricular skills which are embedded throughout all areas of learning in the revised curriculum.

Count, read: succeed, my Department's Strategy to Improve Outcomes in Literacy and Numeracy recognises that teachers are the key to raising standards by meeting the needs and aspirations of pupils through high-quality teaching and learning. It also recognises that teachers need to have the flexibility to draw on their professional judgement and use a broad and balanced range of approaches to developing literacy and numeracy. This would include determining the amount of teaching time devoted to developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and therefore timetabling is a matter for individual schools to manage.

Schools are required by law to deliver the statutory Minimum Content across the Areas of Learning within the revised curriculum and how they choose to do this across year groups is a matter for the senior management of the school. I do not have any plans to change this position.

Whilst there has been improvement delivered in developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, the Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012 highlighted the need to further raise standards in literacy and numeracy for almost one in five of our primary school children. The report also highlighted the need to improve around 18% of learning in primary schools including where teaching does not develop adequately a child's reading and writing skills and mathematical understanding.

Therefore, first and foremost, schools need to ensure that they are providing high quality teaching and learning. Increasing the teaching time spent on literacy and numeracy may be counter-productive if the quality of teaching is not of a suitable standard.

You will be aware that the First and deputy First Ministers recently announced six 'signature' projects worth £26million to improve literacy and numeracy, offer increased family support and to support job creation within local communities. My Department is leading on the project to employ 230 graduate teachers not currently in employment, on a two year contract, to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of our young people; 80 of these teachers will be employed in primary schools. This will have a direct impact on the educational outcomes for pupils who are most at risk of under achieving.

Department officials are currently working on arrangements for the development and implementation of this project including details of which schools will benefit from this additional funding, how schools and teachers will be matched, how teachers will be recruited to these posts and the potential costs.

Appointing Teachers

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether panels appointing teachers to controlled schools in each of the Education and Library Board areas are advised to appoint on merit and within fair employment and equality guidelines; and whether they are also advised that there is no legal barrier to discriminating on grounds of religion or political opinion.

(AQW 16308/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Each Education and Library Board is required to have in place a Scheme for Teaching Appointments outlining the procedures and practices to be followed in the recruitment and selection of teaching staff. The schemes specify that the appointment of teaching staff should be based on merit and suitability for the post, and that there should be no unlawful discrimination, direct or indirect, against any teacher in recruitment, training, promotion or in any other way. Copies of the Teaching Appointments Schemes may be obtained from the Education and Library Boards.

An Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools (TNC 2009/2), which includes reference to recruitment and selection, was agreed by the Teachers' Negotiating Committee and issued to schools for adoption by Boards of Governors. The aim of the policy is to communicate the commitment of the Employing Authorities to the promotion of equality of opportunity. It contains a reference to the exception applied to the recruitment of teachers under Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (NI) 1998 (as amended).

Religion of Teachers

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail by percentage the religion of teachers in the various sectors and levels obtained for in the 2004 Article 71 Investigation by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on the exception of teachers from the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.

(AQW 16309/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is published in the report of the investigation, which may be accessed on the Equality Commission website via the following link:-

<http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/TeacherExceptionReportDec04.pdf>

Projected Capital Spend

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 15269/11-15, which schools will receive funding to progress their projects from the £1.5m provisionally allocated for 2012-13.

(AQW 16328/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: On 25th June 2012 I announced capital investment plans of £133m across 18 major capital build projects, including 5 Special Schools. The schools announced were:

- Colaiste Feirste, Belfast
- St Clare's Convent & St Colman's Abbey Primary School, Newry
- St Joseph's Convent Primary School, Newry
- Dromore Central Primary School
- Eglinton Primary School
- Tannaghmore Primary School, Lurgan
- Ebrington Controlled Primary School, Derry
- Foyle College, Derry
- St Teresa's Primary School, Lurgan
- Victoria Park Primary School, Belfast
- Enniskillen Model Primary School
- St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge
- Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain, Belfast
- Belmont House Special School, Derry
- Rossmar Special School, Limavady
- Castletower, Ballymena
- St. Gerard's Resource Centre (Balmoral facility)
- Arvalee Special School (Lisanelly Project)

Each of the 18 capital build projects are at different stages in their development process. In 2012/13 the £1.5m capital funding will be used to cover costs and fees associated with advancing each of the 18 new build projects through the various stages in design and planning required to bring them to construction.

Again, it should be noted, that due to the nature and the degree of uncertainty associated with timings of capital projects allocations are subject to fluctuation and will be continually reviewed.

Single Tender Actions

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many single tender actions his Department has approved in the current financial year.

(AQW 16330/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Up until the 31 October 2012, the Department of Education had approved six single tender actions in the current financial year.

Enrolment Figures

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the total 2012 enrolment in each of the school sectors; and how this compares to (i) 2000; (ii) 2005; and (iii) 2010.

(AQW 16335/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is routinely published and is available on the Department's website at the following web link. The latest information available relates to the 2011/12 school year.

http://www.deni.gov.uk/enrolment_by_school_management_type_updated_1112.xls

School Maintenance Backlog

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to detail the current maintenance backlog for each school in the Lagan Valley constituency.

(AQW 16338/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: According to the Education and Library Boards' estate management system, the current maintenance backlog in schools in the Lagan Valley constituency is as follows:

School Name	Total Maintenance backlog £
Barbour Nursery	1,670
Pond Park Nursery	12,650
Holy Trinity Nursery	16,825
Anahilt Primary	27,400
Ballinderry Primary	40
Ballymacash Primary	138,900
Brownlee Primary	137,645
Carr Primary	39,525
Dromara Primary	23,565
Dunmurry Primary	149,830
Fort Hill Integrated Primary	46,357
Harmony Hill Primary	165,044

School Name	Total Maintenance backlog £
Killowen Primary	344,560
Knockmore Primary	286,026
Largymore Primary	227,294
Lisburn Central Primary	126,480
Maghaberry Primary	1,600
Moirra Primary	33,680
Oakwood Integrated Primary	2,325
Old Warren Primary	148,974
Seymour Hill Primary	16,830
Tonagh Primary	43,040
Riverdale Primary	830
Meadow Bridge Primary School	481
Saint Aloysius Primary	183,650
Saint Josephs P.S. (Lisburn)	340,715
Laurelhill Community College	406,090
Lisnagarvey High	216,905
Saint Patricks High School	267,560
Fort Hill College	431,255
Friends School	502,920
Beechlawn Special School	118,945
Parkview Special	22,910
Dromore Central Primary School	1,005,330
Fairhill Primary School	5,900
St Colman's Primary School (Dromore)	34,490
St Michael's Primary School (Finnis)	101,340
Dromore High School	488,690

There is a programme of planned maintenance across the schools' estate that influences the overall maintenance backlog (currently £311m for the estate). In addition reactive maintenance is required to address unexpected emergency issues such as a heating system failure. The cost of emergency work is not reflected in the maintenance backlog.

Pupil Numbers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of the percentage of surplus places required within the system at any given time to deal with fluctuations in pupil numbers.

(AQW 16369/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not set a percentage of surplus places required within the system to deal with fluctuations in pupil numbers. If in any given year there is a shortage of places in a sector in any particular area the Department will vary, by way of a temporary variation, a school's numbers to ensure that all pupils can be placed in their chosen sector and within a reasonable travelling distance of their home address. In the future the Area Planning process will be the process through which need for all education provision will be determined. Where area plans identify a need for either an increase or a decrease in the number of places in a particular sector they will also specify how this will be achieved.

Teacher Education Review

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on Teacher Education Review.
(AQW 16370/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My officials briefed the Education Committee on the direction of travel for the strategy in March this year and have since been working to ensure it complements the Department's other policies which are designed to improve education outcomes for all our young people.

On completion of this work I intend to agree the way forward for the strategy with the Minister for Employment and Learning who has responsibility for Higher Education in the north. The Department will offer its key stakeholders, including the Higher Education Institutes and the General Teaching Council, the opportunity to provide comments on the strategy document prior to further engagement with both the Education and Employment and Learning Committees.

My intention is to publish the strategy once this programme of engagement has been completed and views arising from it have been considered.

Irish Medium Examinations

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of the cost of the assessment and marking of Irish Medium examinations by the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 16371/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table outlines the costs associated with the assessment and marking of Irish Medium examinations in each of the last 5 years. This includes the fees paid to examiners and moderators for marking and assessing Irish Medium examinations and coursework/controlled assessments.

TABLE 1: COST OF ASSESSMENT AND MARKING OF IRISH MEDIUM EXAMINATIONS FOR THE LAST 5 YEARS

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Cost	£9,217	£10,751	£11,219	£9,403	£7,067

The cost for translating student responses from Irish back into English is absorbed within the CCEA Irish Medium Team and cannot be separated from the total running costs of the team.

Cycle to Work Scheme

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education (i) which Education and Library Boards do not implement the cycle to work scheme; (ii) to outline the rationale for not implementing the scheme; (iii) whether these Education and Library Boards plan to implement the scheme; and (iv) if so, when it will be implemented.
(AQW 16394/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: None of the 5 ELB's presently operate the cycle to work scheme.

In light of the anticipated changes to organisational structures that are expected, the boards have decided not to participate in any new schemes, in advance of the establishment of ESA.

None of the ELB's therefore plans to implement the scheme at this time.

Sure Start Programmes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education which areas of North Down will benefit from Sure Start Programmes.

(AQW 16412/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Currently, within North Down, Sure Start services are provided in the Super Output Areas of Conlig 3 and Harbour 1. The Dufferin and Whitehill wards will be included in the expansion of the Sure Start programme to serve the North Down Area through the creation of a project in Bangor.

Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education what financial contribution his Department has made to the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS) since its was established.

(AQW 16414/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has made financial contributions to SCoTENS as follows:

2001/02 - £10,000

2002/03 - £10,000

2003/04 - £20,000

2004/05 - Nil

2005/06 - £25,000

2006/07- Nil

2007/08 - £25,000

2008/09 - £25,000

2009/10 - £12,500

2010/11 - £12,500

2011/12 - £12,500

A further £12,500 has yet to be paid in respect of 2012/13.

Public Appointments

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education to detail all the public appointments he has made (i) during the current Assembly mandate; and (ii) the previous mandate, broken down by community background.

(AQW 16450/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since my appointment as Minister for Education in May 2011 I have made 167 public appointments. 78 were from the Roman Catholic community background, 77 were from the Protestant community background, 8 were not known and 4 were from neither community background.

All 2011/2012 public appointments will be detailed in OFMDFM, Central Appointment Unit's Public Appointments and Public Bodies Annual Report in due course.

The reports will be available on the OFMDFM website and can be accessed from the following link:
<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/making-government-work/public-appointments.htm>

Items Disposed of for a Monetary Return

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to detail the items that his Department disposed of for a monetary return in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12.

(AQW 16480/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education did not dispose of any items for a monetary return in 2010/11 or 2011/12.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Inspectors

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education for a list, without names, of the length of (i) classroom experience; and (ii) school management experience of the Inspectors in the Education and Training Inspectorate.

(AQW 16582/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is not readily available in the format required. An exercise to obtain such information would result in disproportionate costs.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Inspectors

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, without naming the individual inspectors, how many Inspectors in the Education and Training Inspectorate have not taught in a classroom in the last (i) five; (ii) six; (iii) seven; (iv) eight; (v) nine; and (vi) ten years.

(AQW 16583/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is not readily available in the format required. An exercise to obtain such information would result in disproportionate costs.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Inspectors

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, without naming the individual inspectors, how many Inspectors in the Education and Training Inspectorate have not held a school management position in the last (i) five; (ii) six; (iii) seven; (iv) eight; (v) nine; and (vi) ten years.

(AQW 16584/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is not readily available in the format required. An exercise to obtain such information would result in disproportionate costs.

Proposed Closure, Amalgamation and Reorganisation of Schools

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how many letters he has received in the past year expressing concern at the proposed closure, amalgamation and reorganisation of schools.

(AQW 16585/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Any significant change to a school, such as closure or amalgamation, requires the publication of a statutory Development Proposal. In the last year, November 2011- November 2012, I can confirm that my Department received 136 letters of concern or objection to published development proposals.

Outside the Development Proposal process, my Department also receives correspondence raising objections to possible changes to education provision. However, until the proposals are published, such letters concern speculation on possible change, not actual proposed change.

Schools: Kilkeel

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Education, following the responses to the area planning consultation, what action he intends to take in the Kilkeel area.

(AQO 2870/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Now that the consultation period for the Post Primary Area Plans has ended the Education and Library Boards, working closely with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools are undertaking an analysis of the responses. Once this has been completed they have been asked to prepare a report to the Department which outlines the key issues raised in the consultation and details what action the Board has taken or plans to take to address such issues.

This report is to be submitted along with revised or enhanced Post-primary Area Plans to the Department for consideration.

Until the work on the area plans is complete and the plans are approved I am not in a position to comment further on options for any specific school or on the specifics in the area plans.

Primary Schools: Common Funding Formula

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to reform the common funding formula as many primary schools complain that they do not get a fair share of the budget.

(AQO 2862/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I announced in my Autumn Statement to the Assembly last September that I was not satisfied that the current Common Funding Scheme adequately supports, and is consistent with, my key policy objectives. I do not believe that it takes sufficient account of social need in our drive for sustainable schools. I confirmed then that I would commission a Review of the Scheme.

In June of this year I appointed Sir Robert Salisbury to chair an independent panel to undertake the Review of the Common Funding Scheme. The independent panel are due to complete their analysis and submit their findings and recommendations to me by the end of December 2012.

Catholic Education

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the 'Together Towards Tomorrow' document for the reform of Catholic education.

(AQO 2863/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While I have not undertaken a formal assessment of the 'Together Towards Tomorrow' document I understand this discussion paper was prepared as part of the Post-Primary Review process in the Derry City Project Area.

I welcome the proposed move away from academic selection and rejection. It offers the Senior Derry Diocesan Trustees strategic vision for post-primary education in that area and I understand that it is intended to be read alongside the recommendations of the Post-Primary Review Strategic Regional Report published by the Commission for Catholic Education in February 2012.

I understand that the recommendations in that Report are reflected in the Western Education and Library Board's (WELB) draft area plan for post-primary education.

The public consultation period on the draft Board area plans concluded on 26 October 2012. The Boards are now analysing the responses received and will present a report on the issues raised during the consultation along with their refined and enhanced plans to the Department for consideration.

Any proposals on Post Primary Education in the Derry City Area coming forward must be aligned with the area plan.

School Absenteeism: South Antrim

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Education to outline the level of absenteeism in the South Antrim area in controlled, maintained and integrated schools at primary and post-primary level in the last year.

(AQO 2864/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:**Primary Schools**

Absence rates for primary schools in the South Antrim area by management type of school, 2010/11

Management Type	Overall absence rate (% of total half days absent)
Controlled (not including integrated)	4.5
Controlled integrated	5.8
Maintained	4.5
Grant Maintained Integrated	5.5
Voluntary	N/A
Total	4.6

Post-Primary Schools

Absence rates for post-primary schools in the South Antrim area by management type of school, 2010/11

Management Type	Overall absence rate (% of total half days absent)
Controlled (not including integrated)	5.5
Controlled integrated	9.7
Maintained	11.0
Grant Maintained Integrated	N/A
Voluntary	N/A
Total	7.2

Notes:

1. Maintained includes Catholic and other maintained schools.
2. Figures for primary schools include Years 1-7 and for post-primary schools include Years 8-12.
3. The figures are based on 44 primary schools and 6 post-primary schools in the South Antrim parliamentary constituency. Care should be taken when interpreting the results at post-primary due to the small number of schools when broken down by management type.
4. Attendance is recorded for every pupil in half day sessions – morning and afternoon.
5. N/A = Not applicable. There are no schools of this management type in the South Antrim parliamentary constituency.

Post-Primary Education: South Armagh

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans for post-primary education provision in south Armagh.

(AQO 2865/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Proposals for post-primary schools in the south Armagh area were detailed in the Southern Education and Library Board Area Plan which was published for public consultation on 5 July 2012.

Consultation on the draft post-primary area plans ended on 26 October 2012 and the Education and Library Boards are now analysing the responses received.

Once this has been completed they have been asked to prepare a report to the Department which outlines the key issues raised in the consultation and details what action the Board has taken or plans to take to address such issues.

This report is to be submitted along with revised or enhanced Post-primary Area Plans to the Department for consideration.

Until the work on the area plans is complete and the plans are approved I am not in a position to comment further on options for any specific school or on the specifics in the area plans.

St Ita's Primary School, Belfast

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with the Minister for Regional Development to ensure the safety of pupils who walk to St. Ita's Primary school, Belfast. **(AQO 2866/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The relevant school authorities have not contacted the Department of Education regarding the safety of pupils who walk to St Ita's Primary School in Belfast. I have therefore not had any discussions with the Minister of Regional Development on this matter.

Schools: Mental Health

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Education what services are available in schools to assist pupils with mental health problems. **(AQO 2867/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: Provision of mental health services is the responsibility of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS).

Schools do, however, focus on the emotional health and well-being of our children and young people through a number of ways. Opportunities to teach pupils about mental health issues are provided through the revised curriculum which is taught to all pupils of compulsory school age in grant-aided schools. At primary level, managing feelings and emotions is a compulsory element of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding while at post-primary level, Learning for Life and Work provides pupils with opportunities to understand the importance of recognising and managing factors that may influence emotional/mental health throughout life.

My Department's "iMatter" programme is addressing how the entire school community should be engaged in promoting resilient emotional health for all pupils, what support systems are available for vulnerable pupils, and what support is available to schools in the event of a crisis. The programme is a vehicle to integrate individual policies and services in a consistent and coherent way. It benefits from the active involvement of other Departments, schools and of the voluntary sector through a series of working groups, each with a specific task.

The groups have developed a range of 'products' including a suite of homework diary inserts/posters on topics of concern to young people such as self esteem, substance abuse, relationships and outline sources of help for pupils.

An independent school based professional counselling service is accessible to young people of post-primary age in mainstream and special schools during difficult and vulnerable periods in their lives.

As part of the current arrangements for support following a critical incident, pupils in primary schools have access to counselling support.

Education and Library Boards promote positive emotional health and well-being using a range of resources. Some schools are involved with issue-based class or group work around resilience, coping with stress, the transition from primary to post-primary school using evidenced-based programmes such

as 'Bounce' and 'Mind Out'. Peer support, peer mentoring and school councils also assist with building positive emotional health and well-being of pupils.

Woodlands Language Unit, Londonderry

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education to outline the rationale behind the proposed closure of Woodlands Speech and Language Unit at the Belmont campus, Londonderry.

(AQO 2868/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am pleased to have the opportunity to answer this question today as Assembly colleagues and parents have expressed a number of their concerns to me about this proposal. I hope that I will now be able to provide them with some reassurance by explaining the statutory processes that must be followed before any decision can be taken.

The Woodlands Language Unit is located on the same site as Belmont House Special School and offers speech and language support for non-statemented children who attend mainstream primary schools.

The management of the unit is undertaken by Belmont House Special School. Belmont House is a special school that caters for a wide range of special needs, including moderate learning difficulties (MLD), language disorders and emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Article 7 of the Education (NI) Order 1996 provides that children with special educational needs (SEN) will be educated in ordinary schools. This will also apply to children who have Statements of SEN unless that is incompatible with a parent's wishes or the provision of efficient education for other children.

All Education and Library Boards and schools have a duty to comply with this legislation. The Western Education and Library Board (WELB) has therefore developed a policy for such facilities to be located at mainstream schools.

In line with this policy, the WELB has been in discussion over the past two years with the Board of Governors of Belmont House Special School about the relocation and extension of the current provision - 4 speech and language classes - to 6 units at 3 mainstream primary school locations in both the controlled and maintained sectors.

The Board has also initiated consultation with parents and other directly affected parties. This consultation is part of the statutory process leading to the publication of a Development Proposal (DP) to support the intent to relocate this provision.

Until a DP is published the issues involved are a matter for the WELB to address. However, once a DP is published a further statutory 2-month period ensues during which any interested party may make their views known to the Department. I take account of all views expressed when making a decision on a DP but it is the best educational interests of the children concerned that are of primary concern.

Bangor Grammar School

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education whether Bangor Grammar School will continue to maintain its current enrolment cap of 900 pupils when it moves to its new build premises on the Gransha Road, Bangor.

(AQO 2869/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The new school currently under construction for Bangor Grammar School has been built to accommodate a Long Term Enrolment (LTE) of 850 pupils. This number was agreed with the school during the early planning stages of the new build.

For the 2012/13 school year the admissions and enrolment numbers of the school are 125 and 900 respectively. Over the next 2-3 school years, the Department will work with the school, in consultation with the South Eastern Education and Library Board, to gradually reduce the approved enrolment number in line with the LTE.

The school are aware of these plans and have already agreed an admissions number of 125 and an enrolment number of 880 for the 2013/14 school year.

Any further increases to the LTE of 850 would require the publication and approval of a Development Proposal.

Department for Employment and Learning

Stranmillis University College

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the financial surplus of Stranmillis University College.

(AQW 15994/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I understand that the accounts for the 2011-12 have not yet been published but I have been informed that they are likely to show a surplus of £559,000 against an anticipated surplus for the year of £435,000. This is a credible performance but one must remember that Stranmillis continues to receive a number of subsidies associated with its activities such as moderation funding (£0.2m), small institution funding (£0.45m) and a historical buildings premium (£0.08m). These are reflected in the above result and have contributed directly to the anticipated surplus position. However, there is continuing concern over the sustainability of the College in the medium term.

16 Year Olds

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of 16 year olds are currently in (i) secondary education; (ii) third level education; (iii) training; (iv) employment; and (v) none of these categories.

(AQW 16118/11-15)

Dr Farry: The percentages of 16, 17, 18, and 19 year olds in secondary education; third level education; training; employment; and none of these categories for the most recent available dates are given in the table below. The information has been derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and relate to the period April-June 2012. Some of the categories are too small to be statistically reliable.

PROPORTIONS OF AGE CATEGORY BY CLASSIFICATION

	Age				
	16	17	18	19	16-19
Secondary education	83.3%	69.7%	42.7%	*	53.3%
Third level education	*	*	37.1%	36.0%	23.5%
Training	*	*	*	*	10.3%
Employment	*	*	*	34.6%	18.9%
None of above categories	*	*	*	*	14.0%

* Estimates are too small to be statistically reliable.

Source: LFS April – June 2012, NISRA/DFP

Notes:

(i) Categories are not mutually exclusive, ie individuals can fall into more than one category.

- (ii) LFS is a household survey and estimates produced from it are subject to sampling variability. It is the nature of sampling variability that the smaller the group whose size is being estimated, the proportionately less precise that estimate is.
- (iii) Estimates too small to be statistically reliable will not be released by NISRA.

17 Year Olds

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of 17 year olds are currently in (i) secondary education; (ii) third level education; (iii) training; (iv) employment; and (v) none of these categories.

(AQW 16119/11-15)

Dr Farry: The percentages of 16, 17, 18, and 19 year olds in secondary education; third level education; training; employment; and none of these categories for the most recent available dates are given in the table below. The information has been derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and relate to the period April-June 2012. Some of the categories are too small to be statistically reliable.

PROPORTIONS OF AGE CATEGORY BY CLASSIFICATION

	Age				
	16	17	18	19	16-19
Secondary education	83.3%	69.7%	42.7%	*	53.3%
Third level education	*	*	37.1%	36.0%	23.5%
Training	*	*	*	*	10.3%
Employment	*	*	*	34.6%	18.9%
None of above categories	*	*	*	*	14.0%

* Estimates are too small to be statistically reliable.

Source: LFS April – June 2012, NISRA/DFP

Notes:

- (iv) Categories are not mutually exclusive, ie individuals can fall into more than one category.
- (v) LFS is a household survey and estimates produced from it are subject to sampling variability. It is the nature of sampling variability that the smaller the group whose size is being estimated, the proportionately less precise that estimate is.
- (vi) Estimates too small to be statistically reliable will not be released by NISRA.

18 Year Olds

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of 18 year olds are currently in (i) secondary education; (ii) third level education; (iii) training; (iv) employment; and (v) none of these categories.

(AQW 16187/11-15)

Dr Farry: The percentages of 16, 17, 18, and 19 year olds in secondary education; third level education; training; employment; and none of these categories for the most recent available dates are given in the table below. The information has been derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and relate to the period April-June 2012. Some of the categories are too small to be statistically reliable.

PROPORTIONS OF AGE CATEGORY BY CLASSIFICATION

	Age				
	16	17	18	19	16-19
Secondary education	83.3%	69.7%	42.7%	*	53.3%
Third level education	*	*	37.1%	36.0%	23.5%
Training	*	*	*	*	10.3%
Employment	*	*	*	34.6%	18.9%
None of above categories	*	*	*	*	14.0%

* Estimates are too small to be statistically reliable.

Source: LFS April – June 2012, NISRA/DFP

Notes:

- (vii) Categories are not mutually exclusive, ie individuals can fall into more than one category.
- (viii) LFS is a household survey and estimates produced from it are subject to sampling variability. It is the nature of sampling variability that the smaller the group whose size is being estimated, the proportionately less precise that estimate is.
- (ix) Estimates too small to be statistically reliable will not be released by NISRA.

19 Year Olds

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of 19 year olds are currently in (i) secondary education; (ii) third level education; (iii) training; (iv) employment; and (v) none of these categories.

(AQW 16189/11-15)

Dr Farry: The percentages of 16, 17, 18, and 19 year olds in secondary education; third level education; training; employment; and none of these categories for the most recent available dates are given in the table below. The information has been derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and relate to the period April-June 2012. Some of the categories are too small to be statistically reliable.

PROPORTIONS OF AGE CATEGORY BY CLASSIFICATION

	Age				
	16	17	18	19	16-19
Secondary education	83.3%	69.7%	42.7%	*	53.3%
Third level education	*	*	37.1%	36.0%	23.5%
Training	*	*	*	*	10.3%
Employment	*	*	*	34.6%	18.9%
None of above categories	*	*	*	*	14.0%

* Estimates are too small to be statistically reliable.

Source: LFS April – June 2012, NISRA/DFP

Notes:

- (x) Categories are not mutually exclusive, ie individuals can fall into more than one category.

- (xi) LFS is a household survey and estimates produced from it are subject to sampling variability. It is the nature of sampling variability that the smaller the group whose size is being estimated, the proportionately less precise that estimate is.
- (xii) Estimates too small to be statistically reliable will not be released by NISRA.

People Transferred from Incapacity Benefit to Job Seeker's Allowance

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people who were transferred from Incapacity Benefit to Job Seeker's Allowance have since secured employment.

(AQW 16192/11-15)

Dr Farry: As of 26 October 2012, the number of claims to Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) for those people who were previously in receipt of Incapacity Benefit is 857.

Of this total figure, 260 claims have since been terminated for various reasons, including transfer to another benefit, clients have simply failed to attend or they have moved abroad. The Department has a record of 43 JSA claimants having moved off the benefit and into employment.

Standing Conference on Teacher Education

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much funding his Department has allocated to the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South since its establishment.

(AQW 16427/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has provided the following funding to the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS):

2001/02 - £10,000

2002/03 - £10,000

2003/04 - £20,000

2005/06 - £25,000

2007/08 - £25,000

2008/09 - £25,000

2009/10 - £12,500

2010/11 - £12,500

2011/12 - £12,500

A further £12,500 has yet to be paid in respect of 2012/13.

Undergraduate STEM Places

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many of the additional 500 undergraduate STEM places announced in the Economy and Jobs Initiative will be allocated to the Magee campus of the University of Ulster.

(AQW 16487/11-15)

Dr Farry: A final decision on the allocation of the additional places has not yet been taken. In any event, I will be allocating the places to the higher education providers and it is up to each provider to determine where the places will be deployed.

STEM Places

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many of the additional STEM places will be allocated to the Magee campus of the University of Ulster, in line with the regeneration plan.

(AQW 16615/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have not yet made a final decision on the allocation of the additional STEM places. It will be for the University of Ulster to determine how many of the places will be allocated to its campus at Magee.

STEM Student Places

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, following his comments regarding the allocation of STEM student places at the Employment and Learning Committee meeting on 14 November 2012, for a breakdown of where the places will be allocated.

(AQW 16760/11-15)

Dr Farry: I would hope to be in a position to make a final decision on the allocation of the additional STEM places shortly.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Grievance Cases and Whistleblowing Complaints

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many (i) grievance cases have been taken; and (ii) whistleblowing complaints have been made, against (a) her Department; and (b) its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years; and at what cost to the public purse.

(AQW 16172/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):

	(a) Department	(b) Arms Length Bodies				
	Grievance Cases	Whistle Blowing complaints	Total Costs incurred	Grievance Cases	Whistle Blowing complaints	Total Costs incurred
2007-2008	nil	nil	nil	9	nil	nil
2008-2009	2	nil	nil	3 (one of which incurred additional costs of £1959)	1	£1,959*
2009-2010	nil	nil	nil	1	nil	nil
2010-2011	4	nil	nil	8	1	nil
2011-2012	5	nil	nil	1	nil	nil

* Costs have only been included where these have been additional to the normal internal staffing costs.

Corporation Tax

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the recent market reports published by property agents Lisneys comparing Foreign Direct Investment success in Northern

Ireland with that in the Republic of Ireland, whether the Treasury has been pressed on the need to lower Corporation Tax sooner rather than later.

(AQW 16234/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Clearly as time moved on and discussions around the devolution of corporation tax powers continued, Northern Ireland was potentially losing out on opportunities for jobs and investment that we might have otherwise attracted. This is something that has been raised at the Joint Ministerial Working Group (JMWG) on rebalancing the economy.

It is also one of the reasons why Northern Ireland Ministers have consistently pressed for early decisions, and an implementation timetable, that would allow us the ability to lower corporation tax as soon as possible. In this regard it is helpful that the JMWG held its final meeting on 18 October and so we will now be looking to the Prime Minister for a clear decision.

Department of the Environment

Applications for Individual Wind Turbines

Mr Ó hÓisín asked the Minister of the Environment how many applications for individual wind turbines are currently in the planning system; and what is the average time taken for a decision on an application in the (i) Northern; and (ii) Western divisions.

(AQW 16007/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The Department welcomes the contribution that wind turbines make to the reduction of carbon emissions and acknowledges the importance of processing these types of applications in a timely manner.

Since becoming Minister I have commenced a radical reform of planning in order to reduce delays in processing applications and require active case management and other interventions to improve processing times. Wind turbines are usually categorised as major planning applications and I have included more challenging targets for processing these applications over the next three years. For the 2012/13 business year the target is to process major planning applications within an average of 23 weeks.

Unfortunately, figures to date indicate that this target is not being met. However progress had been made and there has been an overall improvement in processing times for major applications with an average time of 26 weeks in Q1 of 212/2013 compared with 28 weeks in Q1 of 2011/2012.

The number of decisions issued in relation to renewable applications has almost doubled from 73 in Q1 of 2011/2012 to 135 in Q1 of 2012/2013. Over four-fifths of those applications were approved. These improvements reflect the increased focus, across the Area Office network, on actively progressing all renewable applications.

As of 24 October 2012 there were 769 planning applications for wind turbines which are currently being processed by DOE Planning and have not yet been decided. Table 1 below sets out the number of applications for wind turbines in Northern and Western Area Planning Offices as of 24 October 2012. The figures include applications for single wind turbines, wind farms and meteorological masts.

TABLE 1: LIVE WIND TURBINE APPLICATIONS FOR NORTHERN AND WESTERN AREA PLANNING OFFICES (APO)

APO	Number of applications
Northern	193
Western	253

Source: Planning, DOE

Table 2 below outlines the average processing time and number of planning decisions in relation to wind turbine applications during 2011/12 and Q1 of 2012/13 for Northern and Western Area Planning Offices.

TABLE 2: AVERAGE PROCESSING TIME NORTHERN AND WESTERN AREA OFFICES; 2011/12 AND Q1 2012/13

APO	Number Approved	Number Refused	Average Processing Time (weeks)
Northern	77	32	46
Western	110	30	36

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 statistics which may be later published on the topic

In order to further improve performance I have established a Sub Group of the Planning Forum to look at measures to improve planning performance for renewables and to consider issues such as licensing requirements, resources and structures.

To date this work has resulted in the majority of renewable applications being redirected from Strategic Planning Division to the Area Office network which has increased capacity to speed up the decision making process. Prior to the redistribution of this work training was rolled out across the Area Offices to ensure consistency in decision making.

Applications for wind turbines differ in complexity and in quality of submission and are attracting increasing levels of objection. Consultation with a number of statutory and non-statutory bodies is required to inform the decision-making process and all of these issues may prolong the processing of an application.

To improve the consultation process and ensure substantive responses are received in a timely basis, I have instructed my staff to monitor the performance of the statutory bodies. I have also asked Senior Officials to meet with all other interested parties to ensure the consultation process is operating effectively and additional training has been provided to planning staff to reduce the number of consultations. Staff have also been reminded that they should only consult in the correct circumstances to avoid unnecessary consultations and delay.

I would urge applicants to engage with planners and local communities at an early stage in the planning process, and to submit high quality applications accompanied by all of the information and surveys necessary to allow it to be determined as quickly as possible.

Applications for Multiple Wind Turbines

Mr Ó hÓisín asked the Minister of the Environment how many applications for multiple wind turbines are currently in the planning system; and what is the average time taken for a decision on an application in the (i) Northern; and (ii) Western divisions.

(AQW 16038/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department is currently processing 37 planning applications for wind farm developments. Of these applications, 20 relate to the Northern area, 10 relate to the Western area and 7 relate to the South Antrim area.

- (i) Within the Northern Division 31 planning applications for wind farms have been determined. The average determination time has been 33 months.
- (ii) Within the Western Division 36 planning applications for wind farms have been determined. The average determination time has been 34 months.

I would acknowledge that these determination times are considerable. They are large and complex applications accompanied by environmental statements. In the case of wind farm applications, the Department has agreed to a process of negotiation with applicants to seek to secure acceptable schemes where a positive outcome is considered to be achievable. This may properly lead to prolonged processing times as in many instances applicants have to undertake further survey work or technical assessments in order to revise their schemes.

Nevertheless these processing times need to be significantly reduced and to that end I have established a Renewable Energy Subgroup of the Planning Forum, the purpose of which is to engage with stakeholders and, among other things, seek to improve the quality of planning application submitted to the Department for consideration.

Furthermore, significant additional resources have been made available to the Renewable Energy team within DOE Planning and I expect this to result in improvements in processing times. Already in 2012, 14 decisions have issued on wind farm planning applications. This compares with 5 decisions in 2011 and 8 decisions in 2010.

To date my Department has approved 62 wind farms with the potential to generate some 925MW of electricity. The DETI target for 2012 was for 12% of energy generation to come from renewable sources. Largely as a result of wind farm development, that target has been exceeded and currently almost 15% of electricity comes from renewable sources.

The 2020 target for energy generation from renewable sources is 40%. Already, operational wind farms and consented wind farms to date have the potential to produce 28%, if they are constructed.

Slurry Spreading

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment, following an incident in which a farmer was stopped from spreading slurry despite having met the necessary conditions to spread slurry, what advice was given to field officers at a meeting in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency on the 26 October 2012; and how this advice will affect slurry spreading during the closed season.

(AQW 16216/11-15)

Mr Attwood: At a meeting on 10 October, staff working for Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) were informed that the slurry spreading 'closed period' would be regulated as it was last year, when it was emphasised that farmers could avail of the reasonable excuse provision in the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations. In instances where it has been established that slurry spreading has taken place, NIEA needs to assess all relevant information including basic information on weather and ground conditions to determine application of reasonable excuse.

There was no meeting on 26 October 2012. However, an e-mail was issued on 26 October reminding staff of the protocol to follow should they encounter slurry spreading during the closed period.

It further stated that NIEA would not be stopping farmers from spreading slurry solely because this occurred during the closed period. There would need to be some other reason to do so.

I have asked for a report on all cases to date where an inspection has occurred following the closure of the season. Farmers representatives advise me that the 'reasonable excuse' provision worked well last year - I am determined that they work well this year. On a case by case basis I am prepared to speak with MLAs, but must also ensure that I, DOE, NIEA or others do not prejudice any interests.

To Let Signs in the Malone Conservation Area

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of the Environment what action is being taken to enforce the regulations on "to let" signs in the Malone Conservation Area.

(AQW 16228/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department is aware of the proliferation of "to let" signs in areas such as Lower Malone and Stranmillis. Under the Advertisement Regulations, advertisements relating to the sale

or letting of property may be displayed with deemed consent on condition that the advertisement is removed within 14 days after the sale is completed or the tenancy is granted. In areas such as Lower Malone and Stranmillis, "to let" signs may often remain on properties after the property has been sold or let.

When a complaint is received the Department will normally issue a warning letter seeking the removal of the unauthorised sign. There are, however, difficulties in relation to enforcement. It is often difficult to establish the precise date that the tenancy of a property has been granted. Properties may be partially let with only one room remaining unlet, thus allowing the "to let" sign to remain in place. The seasonal nature of letting in these areas very often means that signs may be removed in winter only to reappear again in the summer months prior to the start of the new university term.

In recognition of these difficulties the Department maintains regular contact with local estate agents seeking their co-operation in the control of "to let" signs

Department of Finance and Personnel

Registered Suicides

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the process by which a suicide is registered.

(AQW 16437/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Coroner's Act (Northern Ireland) 1959 instructs medical practitioners to report a death from any cause other than natural illness to the Coroner. The Coroner investigates the circumstances surrounding the death and may order a post mortem investigation or hold an inquest.

On completion of his investigation the Coroner issues a certificate to the District Registrar. Where an inquest is not held, the Coroner's certificate can be issued within 6-12 months on average. Where an inquest is held it takes longer for the certificate to be issued. The Coroner's certificate will state whether or not the death is a suicide.

On receipt of the Coroner's certificate, the District Registrar registers the death in accordance with the provisions of the Births and Deaths Registration (Northern Ireland) Order 1976.

A copy of the registration, together with the Coroner's certificate is sent to the General Register Office. The death is then coded in accordance with the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision. It is only at this time that the death is officially registered as a suicide.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Budgetary Provision in South Tyrone and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department intends to increase the budgetary provision in South Tyrone and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area, in light of the recent census figures.

(AQW 16145/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Using available resources in as fair a way as possible to optimise the levels of health and well-being in our local populations is a key objective of my Department. Achieving equity in commissioning health and social care for local populations is a key objective of the Health and Social Care Board's 2012/13 Commissioning Plan.

A key measure which informs the HSCB in assessing whether resources have been allocated fairly to local populations is the capitation formula. This is a statistical formula which measures the relative

need for local populations, taking into account the population numbers, and other relevant factors such as age and social deprivation. In addition to the formula, the HSCB will also consider the impact on service provision and the pace at which such changes can be implemented. The results of the 2011 Census of population are to be included in the formula for 2013/14 and will subsequently be included in plans going forward.

Consultant Led Acute Medical Care

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15514/11-15, to detail the advice his Department gives to Health and Social Care Trusts on which sources of information are acceptable in determining safe staffing levels within the Health Service.

(AQW 16161/11-15)

Mr Poots: As these questions are related I shall provide a single answer.

The determination of appropriate staffing levels is a matter for HSC employers taking into account service needs and available resources and as such my Department does not routinely provide advice to Health and Social Care Trusts on the issue. The Department's role is to ensure the supply of sufficient, suitably qualified staff to meets the needs of the health service overall.

Health and Social Care Trusts undertake robust evidence-based workforce planning which assists in the determination of appropriate staffing levels. This is a complex area which uses data on workforce numbers matched to an assessment of the needs of patients/clients.

Professional recommendations on staffing numbers are often limited to a single staff group or, particularly in the case of doctors, an individual specialist area of practice. In addition such recommendations often relate to overall population numbers and either assume, or do not take account of, individual service profiles. As a range of professionals can contribute to a specific service in a locality, recommendations relevant to an individual staff group can only be a crude guide to the specifics of service delivery which need to take account of the detailed profile of service provision, the staff already contributing to that service and the quality of service based on that staffing profile.

Consultant Led Acute Medical Care

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15514/11-15, in instances where recommendations made by professional bodies for staffing levels are not used, to outline the basis upon which alternative standards are used; and how the clinical basis for such alternative levels has been determined.

(AQW 16162/11-15)

Mr Poots: As these questions are related I shall provide a single answer.

The determination of appropriate staffing levels is a matter for HSC employers taking into account service needs and available resources and as such my Department does not routinely provide advice to Health and Social Care Trusts on the issue. The Department's role is to ensure the supply of sufficient, suitably qualified staff to meets the needs of the health service overall.

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SMS Reminder Scheme for Medical Appointments

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the plans to introduce an SMS reminder scheme for medical appointments.

(AQW 16272/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following a pilot text messaging scheme conducted in 2010, all Health and Social Care Trusts have plans in place to introduce such a scheme to remind patients to attend their hospital appointments. It is expected these will be in place in all Trusts during 2013/14.

A District Nursing Service for Today and Tomorrow

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the results of the consultation on A District Nursing Service for Today and Tomorrow will be made public.

(AQW 16361/11-15)

Mr Poots: The results of the consultation on a District Nursing Service for Today and Tomorrow are being considered by my Department and will be made public in the New Year along with the publication of the final document.

Newborn Children with a Cleft Palate

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support is given to parents of newborn children with a cleft palate.

(AQW 16376/11-15)

Mr Poots: Newborn children suffering from a cleft palate will either be seen initially by a Consultant Orthodontist or a Consultant Plastic Surgeon, with involvement from a multidisciplinary team.

A cleft palate nurse specialist with a regional remit has recently been appointed and has responsibility for coordinating care and supporting parents at diagnosis.

Children with a Cleft Palate

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what long term aftercare and advice is given to the parents of children with a cleft palate.

(AQW 16377/11-15)

Mr Poots: All cleft palate children are treated by a multidisciplinary team; this includes providing advice to parents and when appropriate to the children at every stage of treatment and in the longer term.

Children are reviewed at around the age of 2 ½ years, 5 years, 7 years, 10 years, 15 years and 20 years, which is in line with guidance applied within the UK.

Abortion Statistics

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the reclassification of abortion statistics, what measures have been, or will be, put in place to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of women who have had legal terminations.

(AQW 16392/11-15)

Mr Poots: The reclassification of termination of pregnancy statistics has no impact on patient confidentiality. Previously published statistics had used the code '004 medical abortion' as recorded on the Patient Administration System (PAS). The audit clarified that Termination of Pregnancy was actually a subset of the term 'medical abortion'. As in the past, only anonymised statistics will be published.

Existing organisational procedures, designed to meet the legal and ethical obligations of patient confidentiality and the data protection act, are maintained.

Cancer Drug Fund

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15625/11-15, to explain the delay in the establishment of a Cancer Drugs Fund; and when a decision on this matter will be taken.

(AQW 16460/11-15)

Mr Poots: My reply to AQW 15625/11-15 advised that no decision has been taken regarding the establishment of a Cancer Drugs Fund for Northern Ireland. Therefore there has been no delay in the establishment of such a fund. Patients in Northern Ireland may access unapproved cancer drugs through the process of individual funding requests (IFR). IFRs are made on behalf of patients by their clinicians. My Department is cognisant with the Cancer Drugs Fund provided in England and will continue to monitor our local funding arrangements to determine whether any adaptation similar to the funding regime in England is considered necessary.

Items Disposed of for a Monetary Return

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the items that his Department disposed of for a monetary return in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12.

(AQW 16481/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department disposed of the following surplus properties for monetary return from 2010/11 and 2011/12, the details of which are set out in the table below:

2010/11	New Building Health Centre Londonderry	£84.5k
2011/12	Irish Street Clinic Londonderry	£37k

Patients with a Fractured Hip

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQO 2780/11-15, how many patients were suspected of having a fractured hip.

(AQW 16484/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of patients presenting at Antrim Area hospital emergency care department that were suspected of having a fractured hip is not available.

Addiction Treatment Unit in Omagh

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the future plans for the Addiction Treatment Unit in Omagh.

(AQW 16529/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has tasked the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) with developing a regional commissioning framework for addiction services in Northern Ireland. The overall aim of this work is to establish a more consistent and effective regional service provision model. Residents in all areas would benefit from access to regional level specialist service provision, including both stabilization/detoxification and rehabilitation provision, within a regional 'Treatment Network' arrangement.

In light of this, the Western Health and Social Care Trust has stated that it has no current plans to cease the Addiction and Alcohol Treatment Services in Omagh, however, it will consider the outcomes and recommendations from the commissioning framework, and its implication for services, once it has been finalised.

No actual decisions have been or will be taken about individual services in advance of the outcome of this work.

Thalidomide Survivors

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the discussions around future funding for Thalidomide Survivors.

(AQW 16599/11-15)

Mr Poots: Officials from each of the UK administrations have been engaged in ongoing discussions about future funding for Thalidomide survivors and I hope to make an announcement on the future of the health grant in the near future.

Multiple Sclerosis Patients at the Ballycastle Unit

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the current 8 week respite package which is available to multiple sclerosis patients at the Ballycastle Unit will continue into 2013 and beyond.

(AQW 16606/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that, for the foreseeable future, respite care will continue to be provided in the specialist Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Respite Unit at Dalriada Hospital, Ballycastle. Furthermore, there is no standard respite package for MS patients, as such care is provided commensurate with an individual's specific assessed needs.

Department of Justice

Edward Connors

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 15155/11-15, and in line with the stated guidance of Article 49 of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008, to state why the case of convicted rapist Edward Connors does not meet the criteria for a serious case review, as there were "significant failures in the risk management" (PPANI Guidance 2.14) and the stated outcome of reviews is to examine if all agencies did all they reasonably could to manage the assessed risks and if lessons can be learned about the effectiveness of public protection arrangements.

(AQW 16169/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): PPANI guidance states that the Strategic Management Board, the joint agency forum which oversees the management of the public protection arrangements, must be informed by the relevant agencies of any case where an individual, whose risk of serious harm is being managed through those arrangements, is charged with a serious sexual or violent offence, or where a significant failure occurs in risk management. Where a case warrants the commission of a review in those circumstances, this would be taken forward by the agencies concerned.

Mr Connors has not been charged in relation to further sexual or violent offending, and there is no evidence of any significant failure in risk management procedures. Therefore, a serious case review was not deemed necessary by the agencies in this case.

It is my view that a serious case review in this case would not strengthen the arrangements that exist under PPANI for the management of risk from offenders in the community.

Non-Natural Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to all non-natural deaths in custody over the last 10 years, including those which have been classified as suicide, was there a history of sustained drugs abuse.

(AQW 16170/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service is unable to quantify the number of deaths in custody where there was a history of sustained drug abuse.

However, since the Prisoner Ombudsman took on the role of investigating deaths in custody in Northern Ireland Prisons in September 2005, nine reports into non-natural deaths in custody have made reference to the prisoner having used illicit drugs or prescribed medications in the community and/or in prison.

Regulations Provided for in Statutory Rules and Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14503/11-15 and prior to the devolution of Policing and Justice, to outline the legislation that authorised a Secretary of State, or their Private Secretary, to approve rules or regulations provided for in Statutory Rules and Orders.

(AQW 16176/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison & Young Offenders Centre Rules (NI) 1995, specifically Rule 6, provided the power for the Secretary of State to approve a Code of Conduct and Discipline for use within the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Downpatrick Courthouse

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Justice how much it cost to heat Downpatrick Courthouse in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16229/11-15)

Mr Ford: The cost to heat Downpatrick Courthouse in each of the last five years is outlined in the table below.

Date	Cost
April 2012 to date	£12,045
April 2011 to March 2012	£28,382
April 2010 to March 2011	£30,799
April 2009 to March 2010	£28,686
April 2008 to March 2009	£24,321

Crime Among Elderly People

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice whether he will (i) undertake research into the fear of crime among elderly people; and (ii) offer assurances to elderly people regarding the penalties available to the courts for people found guilty of such criminal activity.

(AQW 16261/11-15)

Mr Ford: Tackling crime against older and vulnerable people is a commitment for my Department within the Programme for Government and the Community Safety Strategy.

The Community Safety Strategy includes a commitment to improve our understanding of the fear of crime. As part of this commitment, my Department is currently in discussions with partners to consider research on fear of crime and its impact on vulnerable people.

As part of the Programme for Government commitment I intend to develop and build on work already underway to build community confidence in sentencing.

Under the current legislative framework, custodial offences are available to the judiciary for those convicted of serious crime. Sentencing decisions within this legislative framework are a matter for the independent judiciary. In making these decisions, judges are guided by sentencing guidelines which already indicate that the courts should treat the age and vulnerability of the victim as aggravating factors. The Lord Chief Justice, in his Programme of Action, is enhancing the structures by which the judiciary ensure consistent and appropriate sentences. But I believe more needs to be done

to increase transparency and confidence in sentencing which is why I have announced that two lay members will be included on the Lord Chief Justice's Sentencing Group, one of whom will be representative of the views of victims. My Department will also be bringing forward a community engagement strategy.

Child Abuse Cases

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of child abuse cases; and (ii) the percentage of cases that resulted in conviction, in each year since 2002.

(AQW 16319/11-15)

Mr Ford: Child abuse is a colloquial term and there is no specific offence for child abuse. The data reported in this answer are sexual and/or violence against the person offences involving children and young persons. Related offences may be prosecuted under a range of legislation including

the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968, the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968, the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, the Child Support (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, the Child Abduction (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and the Offences Against the Person Act 1861.

The table below gives the number prosecuted, convicted and conviction rate for the calendar years 2002 -2006 and the number convicted for the calendar years 2007 – 2009 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). It is not possible to provide prosecution data for 2007 to 2009.

Number of prosecutions and convictions for sexual and/or violence against the person offences involving children and young persons.

Year	Prosecutions	Convictions	Conviction rate
2002	50	36	72%
2003	50	35	70%
2004	62	38	61%
2005	50	37	74%
2006	96	46	48%
2007	N/A	58	-
2008	N/A	52	-
2009	N/A	54	-

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

People Working in the Wider Justice Sector

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice whether he will review the security arrangements for people working in the wider justice sector, as a result of the recent murder of prison officer David Black.

(AQW 16322/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following the murder of Prison Officer David Black, and in parallel with an assessment of security arrangements for Prison Officers and prison staff, advice was sought from the relevant authorities in relation to the Department of Justice, its Agencies and Arms Length Bodies.

Victims of Crime

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the potential for the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing minimum standards for the rights, support and protection of victims of crime to change the definition of a victim in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 16334/11-15)

Mr Ford: The new Directive on minimum standards for the rights, support and protection of victims of crime is due to be formally published this month and must then be transposed within three years.

While Northern Ireland is already largely compliant with the Directive, the position of victims, in terms of service provision and rights, will be strengthened following its implementation.

The draft five-year strategy for victims and witnesses of crime, which I published for consultation last month, includes two proposed commitments relating to the new Directive. These are that we will amend the existing Code of Practice for Victims of Crime to ensure that it is in compliance with the provisions in the Directive and that we will routinely consider, and keep under review, wider national and European developments in relation to the treatment of victims and witnesses.

My officials will shortly, in conjunction with counterparts in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, begin progressing work to give effect to the Directive and this will include an analysis of the definition of a victim of crime, for which there is currently no legal provision in Northern Ireland.

Home Protection for Prison Service Staff

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what steps he is taking with the Northern Ireland Office to address the issues surrounding the provision of the security measures needed to provide and maintain home protection for Prison Service staff.

(AQW 16444/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I said on the floor of the Assembly on Monday, following the murder of Prison Officer David Black last week, NIPS management responded immediately to remind staff of the need for vigilance and re-issued guidance on personal security.

The Director General also triggered an urgent review of security and subsequently issued further advice to staff, reminding them of the range of personal security measures which are already available to staff. My Department has taken steps to ensure all necessary equipment is available.

NIPS Officials have met with the PSNI to discuss the security of prison staff, and I have met the Chief Constable.

NIPS is responsible for the administration of Prison Service Protection Scheme which provides additional security measures for staff who are deemed to be at significant risk. An earlier policy which imposed an 18 month time limit on the maintenance of equipment under this scheme, following installation, has been withdrawn with immediate effect.

The Northern Ireland Office is responsible for the Home Protection Scheme which provides limited home protection for those in public service, including NIPS staff. I plan to discuss the operation of this scheme with the Minister of State for Northern Ireland when I meet him later this week.

The safety and personal security of NIPS staff is a high priority and is of course kept under constant review. My Department and Prison Service management continue to work closely with the appropriate authorities to consider further any implications for staff security.

People Serving Sentences in Prison

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice how many people are currently serving sentences in prison.

(AQW 16566/11-15)

Mr Ford: At 08:30am on 12 November 2012 the Northern Ireland Prison Service had a total of 1254 sentenced prisoners.

PSNI: Agency, Consultancy and Associate Staff

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Justice what discussion he has had with the Chief Constable about the findings of the Audit Office report into the use of agency, consultancy or associate staff.

(AQO 2830/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not had any detailed discussions with the Chief Constable about the findings of the Audit Office although the issues have arisen in the context of wider conversations about policing.

As I previously informed the House on 25 June, the awarding and management of contracts by the Police Service is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, for which he is accountable to the Policing Board. It was therefore appropriate that the Chief Constable and the Chief Executive of the Policing Board gave evidence with my Permanent Secretary at the Public Accounts Committee hearing.

This is a valuable report which contains a number of recommendations. I know the PSNI takes the report very seriously and that the PSNI has accepted all of the recommendations made in the report. It is important that the lessons are learned from the report and the subsequent PAC hearing.

Police resourcing needs to be seen in the round. I believe that the use of managed service contracts and agency staff can be justified in cases where there is a clear business need and against the context of uncertain future budgetary provision and I welcome the Audit Office's agreement with that approach.

It is the case that since devolution, the governance and accountability requirements around the police and other justice organisations have been tightened, a fact acknowledged in the report.

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service: Estate Management

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Justice when the 2009 PricewaterhouseCoopers report on a Strategic Outline Case for an Estate Management Strategy for the Northern Ireland Courts Service was made public.

(AQO 2832/11-15)

Mr Ford: Although the PricewaterhouseCoopers Outline Business Case has not been formally published, it has been shared with the Justice Committee. It is a policy development document, completed prior to the devolution of justice, to assist the then Northern Ireland Court Service in its work to develop an Estate Strategy.

On 1 May 2012, following the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland report into the adequacy of the court estate, I instructed my officials to begin work on drafting an Estate Strategy that is affordable and meets the needs of court users. Officials will be briefing the Justice Committee on progress on 22 November 2012.

Marie Stopes Clinic, Belfast

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice whether he plans to carry out investigations into the running of the Marie Stopes clinic to ensure the legality of its activities.

(AQO 2835/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not for me as Minister of Justice to carry out such investigations but for the agencies which have that responsibility.

Firearms Licensing

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Justice for a summary of the responses to the consultation on the proposals to vary the firearms licensing fees.

(AQO 2837/11-15)

Mr Ford: A consultation response document will be published on the Department of Justice website early in the New Year when the 55 consultation responses have been considered and a proposed way forward has been agreed. The publication will follow the Justice Committee being provided with a summary of the consultation responses.

Counterfeit Goods

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Justice to outline what work his Department, in conjunction with the PSNI, has undertaken to combat the sale of counterfeit goods.

(AQO 2838/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF), of which I am the Chair, has a dedicated Intellectual Property Crime sub-group which is made up of representatives from the law enforcement agencies and business partners. The aim of this group is to develop strategies to deal with a range of issues associated with intellectual property crime, including counterfeit goods.

In terms of practical steps, local markets throughout Northern Ireland continue to be a source of counterfeit goods. The PSNI has conducted searches at market venues in NI and continue to monitor the situation for further investigative opportunities. On 20 July 2012, the OCTF, in conjunction with Belfast City Council, launched the 'Real Deal' initiative at St. George's market. The 'Real Deal' provides a framework for market operators, councils, enforcement agencies and businesses to work together, at a local level, to keep counterfeit and other illicit goods, out of markets. The issue of counterfeiting was also discussed at an event with the Business community at the end of last year.

The education of the public on the dangers of the goods and where the income is going (often to drugs supply etc.) is important as is their assistance in reporting suspicions. The OCTF will continue to build on its programme of engagement with the public.

Confiscation of Criminal Assets

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Justice how many applications were received for funding under the Criminal Confiscation Scheme.

(AQO 2839/11-15)

Mr Ford: A call for projects was launched on 29 August with a closing date of 12 October. One hundred and thirteen (113) expressions of interest were received from a range of organisations.

Requests for funding total approximately £2.4m, which far exceeds the amount of money available.

All those who expressed an interest in the scheme have been written to, inviting them to submit further information. This stage of the process will close on 26 November.

Prison Service: Estates Strategy

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Justice to outline the next steps in the development of the Prison Service Estates Strategy.

(AQO 2840/11-15)

Mr Ford: A public consultation on the Northern Ireland Prison Service's Outline Estate Strategy was launched on 7 June this year. The written consultation formally closed on 28 September and since then NIPS has hosted a number of workshops with consultees to explore some of the issues raised, as well as public meetings and meetings with staff.

Throughout this consultation process I have been impressed by the level of engagement and the quality of input from stakeholders. The concerns and the suggestions which have been raised have been useful and insightful and are helping to challenge assumptions and to shape the strategy.

In response to some of the issues raised I have written to those consultees who have participated in workshops inviting further engagement on a range of themes, including how best to build in flexibility

to our management of women prisoners in order to best meet their needs; how to put in place an effective approach, based on learning and development, to work with young offenders; and how best to meet the needs of the adult male population, including whether any of those needs might be served by locating a prison in the North West, rather than in a more central location. I have also met with three Coleraine, Limavady and Ballymoney Borough Councils and have invited further submissions from them on whether there is scope to build on and improve rehabilitation opportunities for prisoners in the North West.

NIPS' strategy for the development of the prison estate is an opportunity to create an environment which will promote rehabilitation, reduce risk and enhance public safety. That is why I want to ensure that all consultation responses are properly considered and evaluated before making final decisions. However, I hope to be able to make an interim announcement on the way forward before the end of November.

Department for Regional Development

Residents Only Parking Schemes: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 15741/11-15, to outline the timescale for any residents parking schemes in the centre of Bangor.

(AQW 16283/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I would advise the Member that, as stated in my answer to AQW 15741/11-15, my Department's Roads Service is currently not in a position to outline a timescale for the implementation of Residents' Parking Schemes in the North Down area, which includes the centre of Bangor.

Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 15674/11-15, to list all organisations and associations that are members of, or benefit from, the Northern Ireland Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme .

(AQW 16288/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Northern Ireland Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme is open to all public transport operators in receipt of a valid Road Service Operators Licence to run stage carriage services as issued by the Department of Environment. In accordance with long standing Department for Regional Development policy, operators who apply for and show that they can meet the terms and conditions of the scheme are accepted onto the Fuel Duty Rebate scheme. A list of all organisations and associations that are members of, or benefit from, the Northern Ireland Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme is as follows:

- Ace Coaches
- Airporter Limited
- B&C Coaches
- Cavehill Coaches
- Citybus Limited (Metro)
- Logans Executive Coach Hire
- Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company T/A The Swilly Bus Service
- Ulsterbus Limited
- West Belfast Taxi (Transport) Limited
- Yellowline Coach Hire

EU Funded Programmes

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development how many EU funded programmes are currently operated by his Department; and how many of these will continue beyond 2013.

(AQW 16310/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not currently operate or manage any EU programmes and it is unlikely that it will operate or manage any future programmes. However, during the current EU programme period (i.e. 2007 to 2013) the Department has engaged with the following EU funding programmes and networks:

- the Cross Border Territorial Co-operation Programme;
- the European Sustainable Competitiveness Programme; and
- the Trans-European Transport Network.

It is likely that these programmes and networks will continue to support projects across the EU during the next EU programme period (i.e. 2014 to 2020).

Link Road Between the Existing A5 and the Proposed New Hospital in Omagh

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to constructing a link road between the existing A5 and the proposed new hospital in Omagh; and whether he has had any discussions with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to the proposals.

(AQW 16350/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I met with a cross party delegation of councillors from Omagh on 10 October 2012, to discuss the potential for an access road to link the proposed new hospital in Omagh, from the main A5 arterial route.

Following that meeting, I am now arranging a meeting with Minister Poots to discuss the matter further. Abercorn Bridge, Newtownstewart

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he intends to take as a matter of urgency to address the safety issues on the Abercorn Bridge, Newtownstewart.

(AQW 16351/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Abercorn Bridge in Newtownstewart is 80 years old and has suffered a significant amount of corrosion, which has consequently reduced the strength of the bridge. Officials have further advised that, in order to address these safety concerns, interim measures of limiting the weight of vehicles using the bridge to three tonnes and restricting traffic on the bridge to one lane were introduced in 2006.

Roads Service is currently investigating the cost effectiveness of refurbishing and strengthening this bridge. If this option proves to be good value for money and sufficient funding is available, it is hoped that the work could commence in autumn 2013. However, it is likely that, even after completion of the strengthening works, a permanent restriction in terms of either vehicle weight, or the number of traffic lanes will be required.

Rural Transport Fund

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Rural Transport Fund.

(AQW 16372/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Rural Transport Fund (RTF), which is administered by my Department, continues to provide support to:

- (i) the rural community transport partnerships to provide transport options for members who live in rural areas and do not have access to public transport due to reduced mobility;

- (ii) Translink to provide routes in rural areas which are deemed socially necessary but are uneconomic to run; and
- (iii) the Community Transport Association to provide advice guidance and some training to the partnerships.

This year we expect to provide RTF funding of £3.1m and attain 660,000 passenger trips (both individual and group trips). These figures are based upon the business plans submitted by the partnerships for 2012/13.

The main scheme which is provided by the partnerships is the Dial-A-Lift scheme which provides access to local services for its members. I am aware of the increase in the demand for Dial-A Lift services across all the partnerships and indeed rising costs in providing them. This has led the partnerships to focus on the most cost effective and efficient ways of delivering front line services including partnership working and mergers.

One of the most frequent requests made to the partnerships is to provide direct transport to hospital appointments outside their operational areas and primarily to hospitals in Belfast. There has been no change to my Department's approach to funding services in this regard Under the Dial a Lift scheme, the partnerships have always been able to provide transport to local GP surgeries, dentists and local clinics. My Department agreed with the Partnerships in 2010 that they may provide transport to local hospitals for members who do not qualify for DHSSPS assistance with travel. This has been done both directly through services provided by the partnerships and by linking members with existing public transport services provided by Translink. In this regard the position remains unchanged. However this is not a substitute for health funded transport, which is the statutory responsibility of the DHSSPS under the auspices of the Patient Care Service. The Patient Care Service (a tier of the NI Ambulance Service) provides non-emergency patient transport services across Northern Ireland. I recognise the need for my Department to interact with other Departments on these important issues. A process has started at official level and it is hoped this will allow these issues to be progressed within statutory and budgetary constraints.

Staff Bonus Payments

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) what extra duties departmental staff carried out to receive bonus payments; and (ii) how many staff received a bonus in (a) 2009/10; (b) 2010/11; and (c) 2011/12.

(AQW 16379/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Bonus payments were made in recognition of a variety of behaviours and actions which were of significant benefit to the Department at a local or strategic level. These ranged from examples of exceptional commitment in difficult or demanding circumstances to incidences of outstanding teamwork which made a major contribution to the improvement of service delivery standards.

Details of the numbers of DRD staff who received bonuses during each of the years concerned were supplied in my recent answer to AQW 15836/11-15.

NI Water Sewage Pollution Alleviation Scheme at Kinnegar Lagoons, Holywood

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on the NI Water sewage pollution alleviation scheme at Kinnegar Lagoons, Holywood, including a timescale for commencement and completion.

(AQW 16399/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the £3.5 million project to resolve the sewage pollution at Kinnegar Lagoons, Holywood is on target to be delivered within its PC13 Business Plan which covers the period April 2013 to March 2015. Subject to the usual statutory approvals and budgetary constraints, NIW may be able to commence the project early within the next financial year with a construction period of approximately twelve months.

While this project will prevent further pollution to the Lagoons, a second phase will consider the remediation options for the Lagoons and particularly the odours emanating from the mud at low-tide. NIW has commenced work on this second phase and it is progressing well with several environmental studies and mud samplings completed this year. Further water sampling and flood analysis is also planned and the emerging findings will be known in the Spring of 2013 along with any financial and timing implications which will be largely dependent on the recommended remediation option.

Department for Social Development

Grievance Cases and Whistleblowing Complaints

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) grievance cases have been taken; and (ii) whistleblowing complaints have been made, against (a) his Department; and (b) its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years; and at what cost to the public purse.

(AQW 16173/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):

The information relating to grievance complaints within the Department and its arm's length bodies is included at Table 1. Data relating to whistleblowing complaints is contained in Table 2.

TABLE 1: GRIEVANCE COMPLAINTS OVER LAST 5 YEARS

Year	Organisation							
	DSD	Cost (£)	NI Housing Executive	Cost (£)	Ilex	Cost (£)	Charities Commission for NI	Cost (£)
1/4/2007 – 31/3/2008	30 *	0	25	0	0	0	0	0
1/4/2008 – 31/3/2009	71	0	11	0	1	0	0	0
1/4/2009 – 31/3/2010	87	0	11	0	1	25,352***	0	0
1/4/2010 – 31/3/2011	71	0	14	0	0	0	0	0
1/4/2011 – 31/3/2012	115	0	7	11,400**	3	0	0	0
Total	374	£0	68	£11,400**	5	£25,352***	0	£0

Foot Notes

* HRConnect is the source of data for the grievance information for the Department. This data is only available from 25 January 2008.

** This grievance cost relates to external legal assistance and advice provided to the NIHE.

*** This grievance cost relates to external legal assistance and advice provided to ILEX and the cost was shared equally between DSD and OFMDFM as sponsoring Departments.

TABLE 2: WHISTLEBLOWING COMPLAINTS OVER LAST 5 YEARS

Year	Organisation							
	DSD	Cost (£)	NI Housing Executive	Cost (£)	Illex	Cost (£)	Charities Commission for NI	Cost (£)
1/4/2007 – 31/3/2008	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
1/4/2008 – 31/3/2009	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
1/4/2009 – 31/3/2010	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
1/4/2010 – 31/3/2011	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	0
1/4/2011 – 31/3/2012	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	£0	54	£0	0	£0	0	£0

Foot note: The number of NIHE complaints include those received from staff, the public and anonymous complaints. 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.

Under Occupation Penalty

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in east Belfast will be affected by the under occupation penalty.

(AQW 16188/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of housing benefit claimants who will be affected by the under-occupation penalty in East Belfast is estimated at just under 1,500. This is based on data taken from Housing Executive records in May 2012 and will be subject to change in April 2013 when the under-occupation rules are scheduled to be introduced.

My officials are working with the Housing Executive to develop a range of support measures to compliment those outlined in my Housing Strategy, which will help mitigate the effects of the under-occupation penalty. I have increased funding for discretionary housing payments to help those in difficult situations and will change the legislation to allow such payments to be made to all social housing tenants. I have also asked landlords to ensure, as far as is possible, that all options are explored to prevent social tenants from being evicted from their homes. I continue to work with GB government officials to develop a programme of welfare reform that is tailored to the particular needs of Northern Ireland.

Welfare Reform

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration has been given to the impact of Welfare Reform on other departmental budgets; and for his assessment of the British Medical Association report “Welfare Reform: pain but no gain”.

(AQW 16194/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The impact of Welfare Reform on other departmental budgets is being fully assessed by each individual strand of the Welfare Reform programme, through engagement with both internal and external stakeholders. All known impacts are incorporated within the relevant Economic Appraisals.

My officials are actively considering a number of reports from a broad range of organisations, to ensure that the NI Welfare Reform Bill is fully impacted against the needs of people in Northern Ireland. This includes comments made in the British Medical Association report.

Social Housing Stock Levels in East Belfast

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to detail the social housing stock levels in East Belfast, broken down by bedroom numbers; (ii) to detail the current levels of vacancy and demand for each property type; and (iii) whether his Department holds the same information for the private rental sector.

(AQW 16195/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information regarding social housing stock in East Belfast is as follows: -

HOUSING EXECUTIVE STOCK: -

NIHE Dwellings	0 bed (Bedsits)	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed
Total dwellings	22	287	1888	1139	121	9
Vacant dwellings	2	22	51	5	1	0

HOUSING ASSOCIATION STOCK: -

Housing Association Dwellings	0 bed (Bedsits)	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed
Total dwellings	0	931	1245	675	93	9
Vacant dwellings	0	26	42	4	2	0

WAITING LIST FOR EAST BELFAST (AS 30 SEPTEMBER 2012): -

Calculated Bedroom Requirements	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
	1007	443	174	56

HOUSING EXECUTIVE AND HOUSING ASSOCIATION TRANSFERS REQUESTS: -

Calculated Bedroom Requirements	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
	251	139	79	23

In relation to (iii) my Department does not hold this information but the Land and Property Services in the Department of Finance and Personnel may.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Personal Independence Payments

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development whether assessors for Personal Independence Payments will have access to past medical records; and whether they will have been trained to a sufficient medical standard.

(AQW 16208/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No decision has been taken as to whether medical reports held in Disability Living Allowance files will be available when considering a Personal Independence Payment claim. While there may be potential benefits Personal Independence Payment is an entirely new benefit with very different entitlement criteria from Disability Living Allowance.

Health Professionals that will undertake the Personal Independence Payment assessments must have the following qualifications and experience:

- They are an occupational therapist, nurse (level 1), physiotherapist, paramedic or doctor;
- They are fully registered with the relevant licensing body (doctors must have a licence to practise);
- They have no sanctions attached to registration unless they relate to disability; and
- They have at least 2 years post full registration experience or at less than 2 years post full registration by individual agreement with the Department.

Personal Independence Payments

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development what measures he will put in place to support people with disabilities, who appeal their assessments for Personal Independence Payment, and have to go through several reassessments.

(AQW 16209/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I fully understand and appreciate that existing working age Disability Living Allowance customers may be anxious and concerned about the introduction of Personal Independence Payment and my Department, through the Social Security Agency, will be working to fully support those customers on an individual basis as they encounter the new benefit.

As part of this work, the Social Security Agency has been working with voluntary and community organisations in Northern Ireland in developing detailed customer journeys covering Personal Independence Payment new claims, reassessment, terminally ill cases and disputes process which include reconsideration and appeals. These customer journeys will involve interventions by Social Security Agency staff which are designed to support people through the process. The Welfare Reform Bill also introduces a new mandatory reconsideration process which is intended to enable disputed social security benefits decisions to be changed at the earliest stage in the process and that customers are given a clear explanation of decisions taken. Customers will then be able to make an informed decision on whether to formally appeal, taking the outcome of the reconsideration into account.

It is not envisaged that any customer would have to undergo any more than one independent assessment during the lifetime of any claim.

Personal Independence Payment

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development what measures he will put in place to monitor the impact the removal of Disability Living Allowance and a temporary failure to attain Personal Independence Payment will have on a person's ability to cover their living and care costs while they go through the appeals process.

(AQW 16210/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As with Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment is an additional, non-means-tested benefit and will be available to people with disabilities whether they are in or out of work. The intention is to target support at those disabled people who face the greatest barriers to leading full, active and independent lives.

Where a person is found not to be eligible for Personal Independence Payment, they may appeal the decision. A mandatory reconsideration process is being introduced to avoid unnecessary anxiety and delays for claimants as well as reduce additional administrative costs that can be incurred during the appeals process. Introducing mandatory reconsiderations will help to identify and revise incorrect decisions without the time-consuming appeals process.

You asked about the monitoring measures being put in place. The need to ensure that the Personal Independence Payment assessment is operating correctly and that it can be amended in light of operational experience is recognised. That is why the first independent review is to be undertaken within the first two years of the legislation on Personal Independence Payment coming into operation.

It is also important to remember that disability benefits are only one part of the package of support available to disabled people. For example, the Disabled Facilities Grant and the Supporting People programme provide alternative sources of support.

Personal Independence Payments

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the tendering process for the assessments of Personal Independence Payments; and when he intends to make a final decision.
(AQW 16323/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The procurement process has been completed but there remain a small number of approval and contract award processes which have yet to be completed.

It is anticipated that formal award of the contract will take place within the next 2-3 weeks.

Housing Executive Tenants Evicted for Anti-Social Behaviour

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive tenants have been evicted for anti-social behaviour in each of the last three years.
(AQW 16402/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive tenancy agreements do not capture the number of people resident at a property. However, the table below details the number of Housing Executive properties recovered on the grounds of anti-social behaviour for each of the last three years: -

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Total	54	62	51

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Customer First in South Down

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Social Development to outline any recent developments in the Social Security Agency's plans to roll out 'Customer First' in South Down.
(AQW 16503/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Security Agency announced, on the 1st June 2012, the continued roll-out of the Customer First initiative across the rest of the Social Security Working Age Network having completed the process in what was formerly North District and Belfast West and Lisburn. These have delivered significant service improvements and the continued roll-out of Customer First will ensure all of the Agency's network customers can benefit from these service improvements.

This final phase of Customer First implementation will include offices in South Down namely, Ballynahinch, Downpatrick, Kilkeel and Newcastle Social Security Offices. Current proposals include the establishment of Benefit Processing Centres in Newry (processing Jobseekers Allowance) and

Lurgan (processing Income Support). This will result in processing staff from Ballynahinch, Kilkeel and Newcastle offices relocating to either Newry or Lurgan Benefit Processing Centres. Taking account of the emerging impacts of the Social Fund reforms, it has now been agreed that, as there is a critical mass of Social Fund processing staff already located in Downpatrick Social Security Office and that this location should continue to be utilised. All staff in this office are therefore expected to remain in situ although this will be subject to final confirmation of staffing requirements as a result of Social Fund reform. Additionally, staff in Newcastle Social Security Office currently processing Social Fund, will relocate to Downpatrick Social Security Office.

Personal Independence Payments

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Social Development to outline whether he will take past issues with the Work Capability Assessments into consideration when preparing for the assessments for Personal Independence Payment.

(AQO 2817/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is important to emphasise that the Personal Independence Payment assessment will be very different to the Work Capability Assessment. The assessment for Personal Independence Payment will focus on ability to carry out key everyday activities, the challenges people face, and the support they need where as the Work Capability Assessment is linked to a person's ability to work. Personal Independence Payment will be payable to disabled people regardless of whether or not they are in work. That fact alone means the assessments will be different.

We are seeking to learn from the experience of delivering the Work Capability Assessment to ensure we get Personal Independence Payment right from the start. As part of this we are looking closely at the findings of both of the independent reviews of the Work Capability Assessment carried out by Professor Malcolm Harrington to ensure that where appropriate his recommendations are fully taken into account. We are however aware the assessment itself will be a living tool, which will continue to be monitored to ensure that it reflects any further best practice arising from future recommendations which may be appropriate.

The Personal Independence Payment assessment criteria have also been the subject of extensive consultation –all the consultations have been issued in Northern Ireland at the same time as in Great Britain beginning in May 2011 with most recent issued in January this year.

I have had numerous meetings with the Department for Work and Pensions Ministers on Welfare Reform matters including Personal Independence Payment and made them fully aware of the particular circumstances that we are facing in Northern Ireland to ensure that they are factored into the design of the new benefit. This is important given the differences in Northern Ireland Disability Living Allowance customer base with its much higher proportion of mental health cases.

Following the latest consultation exercises I wrote to the Minister for Disabled People, Esther McVey MP and secured a commitment that all views and concerns expressed from Northern Ireland are being given careful consideration as they evaluate what further changes need to be made to assessment criteria to ensure they are a fair reflection of disabled people's needs.

I fully appreciate the concerns that people have about the Personal Independence Payment assessment processes and understand the views around that there are aspects of the reform which are financially driven. I support reform which is focussed on ensuring resources are properly targeted on supporting those with a disability and not simply intended to reduce benefit expenditure. I am totally committed to ensuring that what is in place in Northern Ireland delivers a positive experience for customers and recognise the importance of having a transparent and empathetic claims and assessment process.

Gambling

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development whether he intends to review the laws on gambling at race meetings on a Sunday.

(AQO 2818/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am currently completing a review of the gambling law within Northern Ireland. Any proposal to change the law will depend upon the agreement of the Executive. I expect to bring a paper to my Executive colleagues in the near future; it is not, however, my intention to propose any changes to the law on gambling on Sunday.

High Streets Task Force

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development to outline any outcomes from the High Street Taskforce.

(AQO 2819/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Earlier this year I established a Taskforce to review the support my Department provides to our town and city centres. The objective of the review was to see if this support could be further strengthened in the light of the High Street Review commissioned by the Prime Minister for England's town and city centres.

The Taskforce has consulted with a range of groups which represent Northern Ireland's high streets and those Departments most closely involved with addressing the issues faced by our town and city centres. The Taskforce also held 29 public meetings across Northern Ireland during May and June to listen to the concerns and hear the ideas of retailers and other businesses owners. My officials are currently considering the evidence collected and their report, including recommendations, will be with me shortly.

I anticipate that a number of the recommendations arising as a consequence of the review will extend beyond my Department and will require the consideration of my Executive colleagues. I will be studying the report carefully and will make my response in due course.

Housing: Ballymena

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on improving the housing stock in the Waveney Estate and Doury Road areas of Ballymena.

(AQO 2820/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Last year, when I visited Ballymena, I was shown around the estate and can only say I was shocked at the poor state of some of the housing. The housing in the north of the estate is without doubt amongst the worst I have seen anywhere. Many of the offending properties are in the private sector and alongside Housing Executive voids, all have left this part of the estate in a very vulnerable position and totally unattractive for prospective new tenants.

It is specifically areas like this, that have suffered decline and empty homes, that prompted me to include community regeneration proposals in my new Housing Strategy. We urgently need to address these kinds of issues that have been blighting once vibrant areas for far too long.

There is an imperative to look anew at how we can best use housing to take the lead in rejuvenating failing communities and put them back on their feet.

That is why, some months ago, I tasked the Housing Executive with undertaking a full economic appraisal to identify the best option that could deliver for the worst part of the Doury Road Estate. Discussions have already taken place with a number of private landlords to determine their intentions and this continues to be work in progress.

I expect the appraisal to be completed by the end of 2012 and I will then make a decision on the way forward.

Meantime, the Housing Executive continues to make improvements to their own stock. Some of their beyond repair houses have been demolished to tidy up the area. Other homes have been improved, with recent kitchen and heating system upgrades.

Housing: Rents

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of whether the use of discretionary payments to supplement rents is a short-term solution to a long-term problem.

(AQO 2821/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Housing benefit reforms are aimed at bringing Housing Benefit expenditure under control, so the long-term problem is being tackled. The intention is to provide a fairer, more sustainable scheme by taking steps to ensure that people on benefit are not living in accommodation that would be out of reach of many people in work.

Discretionary housing payments are available to help people with the impact of housing benefit reforms, though they are not intended to maintain previous housing benefit levels. The Discretionary housing payments budget has been increased substantially, with £3.426million available in 2012-13, £6.944million in 2013-14, £5.939million in 2014-15 and £4.431million in 2015-16 and in 2016-17.

I indicated at the recent launch of my new housing strategy, that I am taking forward a number of actions that will put in place housing services that will provide support and assistance for those households impacted by housing benefit reforms. For example, as well as increasing the funding for discretionary housing payments, to help alleviate the size criteria restriction, an advice service will be put in place which will proactively contact social tenants and help them to consider their housing options. These could include helping them to move to more appropriately sized houses, facilitating home swaps, or advising on how to take in lodgers/boarders. I have also emphasised the need for social landlords to consider their operational flexibility and focus on opportunities to bring forward more appropriately sized accommodation which will increase their stock of small accommodation/one-bedroom units in those designated areas of need. I will ensure as far as is possible that all options are explored to prevent social tenants from being evicted from their homes.

Welfare Reform: Regulations

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development when he expects all the regulations which will flow from the Welfare Reform Bill to be approved.

(AQO 2822/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The target date for approval of all regulations flowing from the Welfare Reform Bill will be dependent on the date on which the Bill receives Royal Assent. Where the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) operational date for regulations is April 2013 or before, I am seeking to have the equivalent Northern Ireland regulations approved by the Assembly as soon as possible after Royal Assent, and where possible to match the DWP operational date.

Welfare Reform: IT

Mr Ó hÓisín asked the Minister for Social Development, following his statement on Welfare Reform on 22 October 2012, whether he has been seeking a commitment from Lord Freud to make the necessary changes to the IT system to facilitate the different circumstances which exist here.

(AQO 2823/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I refer to my Statement to the Assembly on 22 October 2012 (please see link below) in which I explained that after a series of detailed negotiations with the Department for Work and Pensions Ministers, I have secured key commitments from Lord Freud to implement changes to the computer system supporting Universal Credit. These commitments mean that the housing cost element of Universal Credit will be paid automatically to the landlord, unless the claimant chooses to receive the full Universal Credit payment and in turn pays the landlord. In addition additional functionality will enable the computer system supporting Universal Credit, where necessary, to split the payment

between the two parties in the household, or to make two smaller payments each month rather than one single payment.

To allow time to develop, build and test the additional system functionality required to support these local arrangements I have decided to launch Universal Credit in Northern Ireland in April 2014, by which time the supporting information technology systems will be available.

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-12-13/22-October-2012/#1>

Housing: East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development how many new build homes are planned for the East Belfast constituency in 2013.

(AQO 2824/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Plans, as detailed in the current Social Housing Development Programme, are to start 91 new social homes in the East Belfast Constituency in 2012/13 and 26 new homes in 2013/14.

However, proposals outlined in my new Housing Strategy mean that there is potential for these numbers to increase, because of a range of initiatives that look to stretch public funding and provide additional housing.

For example, I am developing a bid through the Get Britain Building Fund for interest free loan funding in the region of £19m for housing associations to build more shared ownership housing. Where social housing is concerned, amongst a raft of other proposals, I plan to harmonise building standards with those used for private housing, which will reduce both bureaucracy and costs and allow more housing to be produced. I also intend to explore long term leasing from the private sector and, in addition, also have work underway to introduce developer contributions when market circumstances improve.

All are designed to use scarce public funding in more innovative ways, in order to speed up, and add to, the supply of housing for our most vulnerable citizens.

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Revised Written Answers

Friday 16 November 2012

(AQW 15675/11-15)

You recently asked, in assembly question AQW 15675/11-15, how many businesses in (i) Lurgan; and (ii) Portadown centres have benefited from the recent non-domestic rates initiatives. In my answer I stated that “As at 21st October 2012, there were 360 businesses in Craigavon Borough Council which have benefited from the recently introduced 20% rate of Small Business Rate Relief. To date no properties in Craigavon Borough Council has benefited from either the Empty Premises Relief or the Shop Window Display relief which also commenced on 1st April 2012.”

My officials have recently carried out some validation checks on these figures and have discovered that the numbers of properties were incorrectly stated. I apologise that the information you received was incorrect.

Given the interest expressed in this topic, the table below provides corrected and updated information on properties getting Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) at 20% and Empty Premises Relief for all 26 District Council areas.

TABLE 1: SMALL BUSINESS RATE RELIEF (SBRR) AT 20% AND EMPTY PREMISES RELIEF BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA AS AT 31ST OCTOBER 2012

District Council	No of properties getting:	
	Empty Premises Relief	SBRR (20%)
Antrim	0	244
Ards	1	318
Armagh	2	258
Ballymena	0	302
Ballymoney	1	124
Banbridge	0	194
Belfast	5	1,628
Carrickfergus	1	131
Castlereagh	0	241
Coleraine	0	294
Cookstown	1	191
Craigavon	2	359
Derry	7	513
Down	2	360
Dungannon & South Tyrone	0	313
Fermanagh	1	311
Larne	1	106
Limavady	1	131
Lisburn	1	581

District Council	No of properties getting:	
	Empty Premises Relief	SBRR (20%)
Magherafelt	2	201
Moyle	0	70
Newry & Mourne	5	467
Newtownabbey	2	357
North Down	3	391
Omagh	3	251
Strabane	2	157
Northern Ireland	43	8,493

I have copied this letter to the Speaker and all MLAs. A copy has also been placed in the library.

(AQW 15813/11-15)

You recently asked, in assembly question AQW 15813/11-15, how many businesses in (i) Bangor; and (ii) Holywood town centres have benefitted from the recent non-domestic rates initiatives. In my answer I stated that “As at 21st October 2012, there were 392 businesses in North Down Borough Council which have benefitted from the recently introduced 20% rate of Small Business Rate Relief. To date a single business in North Down Borough Council has benefitted from Empty Premises Relief, whilst no businesses have taken advantage of the Shop Window Display relief.”

My officials have recently carried out some validation checks on these figures and have discovered that the numbers of properties were incorrectly stated. I apologise that the information you received was incorrect.

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Belfast	5	1,628
Carrickfergus	1	131
Castlereagh	0	241

District Council	No of properties getting:	
	Empty Premises Relief	SBRR (20%)
Coleraine	0	294
Cookstown	1	191
Craigavon	2	359
Derry	7	513
Down	2	360
Dungannon & South Tyrone	0	313
Fermanagh	1	311
Larne	1	106
Limavady	1	131
Lisburn	1	581
Magherafelt	2	201
Moyle	0	70
Newry & Mourne	5	467
Newtownabbey	2	357
North Down	3	391
Omagh	3	251
Strabane	2	157
Northern Ireland	43	8,493

I have copied this letter to the Speaker and all MLAs. A copy has also been placed in the library.



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