



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)
and
**JOURNAL OF
PROCEEDINGS**

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(12 May 2011 to 19 June 2011)

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Table of Contents

Assembly Members	i
Principal Officers and Officials of the Assembly	ii
Ministerial Offices	iii

Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sittings

Thursday 12 May 2011

Assembly Business

Notice of First Meeting	1
Roll of Membership	1
Election of Speaker	4
Election of Deputy Speakers	7
First Minister and deputy First Minister: Appointment and Pledge of Office.....	9

Committee Business

Business Committee: Membership	13
--------------------------------------	----

Monday 16 May 2011

Assembly Business..... 15 |

Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill: Royal Assent.....	15
Welfare of Animals Bill: Royal Assent.....	15
Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Bill: Royal Assent	15
Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill: Royal Assent	15
Sunbeds Bill: Royal Assent.....	15
Civil Registration Bill: Royal Assent.....	15
High Hedges Bill: Royal Assent.....	15
Housing (Amendment) Bill: Royal Assent	15
Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill: Royal Assent	15
Justice Bill: Royal Assent	15
Planning Bill: Royal Assent	15
Single Use Carrier Bags Bill: Royal Assent.....	15
Autism Bill: Royal Assent	15
Suspension of Standing Order 20(1).....	16
Appointment of Ministers.....	17
Appointment of Junior Ministers	19
Minister of Justice	20
Statutory Committees.....	26
Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons	26
Standing Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons	30
Private Members' Business	
Principal Deputy Speaker	32

Monday 23 May 2011

Matters of the Day

Dr Garret FitzGerald.....	37
Maghaberry Prison: Aaron Hogg.....	39

Assembly Business

Suspension of Standing Orders	41
-------------------------------------	----

Ministerial Statement

Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit	41
---	----

Assembly Business

Assembly Commission: Membership.....	50
Statutory Committees: Membership.....	50
Standing Committees: Membership	51
Business Committee: Membership	51

Tuesday 31 May 2011

Assembly Business

Suspension of Standing Order 20(1).....	54
---	----

Private Members' Business

Educational Attainment: Working-class Protestants	54
Special Needs: Services for Young People and Adults	73

Adjournment

A2: East Antrim	84
-----------------------	----

Monday 6 June 2011

Speaker's Business	93
---------------------------------	----

Assembly Business

Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill	93
Public Petition: Down Community Transport	93

Committee Business

Statutory Committee Membership: Committee for Regional Development	94
--	----

Private Members' Business

Domestic Violence	94
Government Structures	111

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	120
Agriculture and Rural Development	126

Private Members' Business

Government Structures (<i>continued</i>)	134
--	-----

Tuesday 7 June 2011

Private Members' Business

A5 Dual Carriageway.....	141
--------------------------	-----

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure	159
Education	164

Private Members' Business

Nursery and Preschool Education	171
---------------------------------------	-----

Adjournment

Mid-Ulster Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit	189
--	-----

Monday 13 June 2011

Matters of the Day

Mr Brian Lenihan.....	199
HRH The Duke of Edinburgh: Ninetieth Birthday	201

Assembly Business	203
--------------------------------	-----

Executive Committee Business

Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes.....	204
---	-----

Oral Answers to Questions

Employment and Learning.....	224
Enterprise, Trade and Investment.....	230

Executive Committee Business

Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes (<i>continued</i>).....	236
Budget (No. 2) Bill: First Stage	259

Committee Business

Business Committee: Membership	260
--------------------------------------	-----

Tuesday 14 June 2011

Assembly Business	261
--------------------------------	-----

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Second Stage.....	262
--	-----

Committee Business

Standing Orders	262
-----------------------	-----

Oral Answers to Questions

Environment.....	280
Finance and Personnel	285

Adjournment

A26: Glarryford to Ballycastle	292
--------------------------------------	-----

Written Ministerial Statement

Culture, Arts and Leisure

2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games	WMS 1
---	-------

Written Answers

Friday 27 May 2011

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	WA 1
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	WA 1

Department of Education	WA 2
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 5
Department of Finance and Personnel	WA 6
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	WA 6
Department of Justice	WA 10
Department for Regional Development.....	WA 13
Department for Social Development	WA 15

Friday 3 June 2011

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	WA 17
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	WA 19
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	WA 22
Department of Education	WA 25
Department for Employment and Learning.....	WA 30
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 33
Department of the Environment.....	WA 36
Department of Finance and Personnel	WA 41
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	WA 41
Department of Justice	WA 48
Department for Regional Development.....	WA 50
Department for Social Development	WA 55

Friday 10 June 2011

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	WA 59
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	WA 62
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	WA 76
Department of Education	WA 82
Department for Employment and Learning.....	WA 87
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 88
Department of the Environment.....	WA 93
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	WA 97
Department of Justice	WA 104
Department for Regional Development.....	WA 114
Department for Social Development	WA 123

Friday 17 June 2011

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	WA 131
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	WA 135
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	WA 137
Department of Education	WA 143
Department for Employment and Learning.....	WA 183
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	WA 191
Department of the Environment.....	WA 203
Department of Finance and Personnel	WA 213
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	WA 231
Department of Justice	WA 240
Department for Regional Development.....	WA 249
Department for Social Development	WA 258

Index for Official Report (Hansard)

Members' IndexIDX 1

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 12 May 2011.....	MOP 1
Monday 16 May 2011	MOP 7
Monday 23 May 2011	MOP 23
Tuesday 31 May 2011	MOP 29
Monday 6 June 2011.....	MOP 33
Tuesday 7 June 2011	MOP 39
Monday 13 June 2011.....	MOP 53
Tuesday 14 June 2011	MOP 59

Assembly Members

Agnew, Steven (North Down)
Allister, Jim (North Antrim)
Anderson, Ms Martina (Foyle)
Anderson, Sydney (Upper Bann)
Attwood, Alex (West Belfast)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Bell, Jonathan (Strangford)
Boylan, Cathal (Newry and Armagh)
Boyle, Ms Michaela (West Tyrone)
Bradley, Dominic (Newry and Armagh)
Bradley, Ms Paula (North Belfast)
Brady, Mickey (Newry and Armagh)
Buchanan, Thomas (West Tyrone)
Byrne, Joe (West Tyrone)
Campbell, Gregory (East Londonderry)
Clarke, Trevor (South Antrim)
Clarke, Willie (South Down)
Cochrane, Mrs Judith (East Belfast)
Copeland, Michael (East Belfast)
Craig, Jonathan (Lagan Valley)
Cree, Leslie (North Down)
Dallat, John (East Londonderry)
Dickson, Stewart (East Antrim)
Dobson, Mrs Jo-Anne (Upper Bann)
Doherty, Pat (West Tyrone)
Douglas, Sammy (East Belfast)
Dunne, Gordon (North Down)
Durkan, Mark H (Foyle)
Easton, Alex (North Down)
Eastwood, Colum (Foyle)
Elliott, Tom (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Farry, Dr Stephen (North Down)
Flanagan, Phil (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Ford, David (South Antrim)
Foster, Mrs Arlene (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Frew, Paul (North Antrim)
Gardiner, Samuel (Upper Bann)
Gildernew, Ms Michelle (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Girvan, Paul (South Antrim)
Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)
Hale, Mrs Brenda (Lagan Valley)
Hamilton, Simon (Strangford)
Hay, William (Speaker)
Hilditch, David (East Antrim)
Humphrey, William (North Belfast)
Hussey, Ross (West Tyrone)
Irwin, William (Newry and Armagh)
Kelly, Mrs Dolores (Upper Bann)
Kelly, Gerry (North Belfast)
Kennedy, Danny (Newry and Armagh)
Kinahan, Danny (South Antrim)
Lewis, Mrs Pam (South Antrim)
Lo, Ms Anna (South Belfast)
Lunn, Trevor (Lagan Valley)
Lynch, Seán (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Lyttle, Chris (East Belfast)
McCallister, John (South Down)
McCann, Fra (West Belfast)
McCann, Ms Jennifer (West Belfast)
McCarthy, Kieran (Strangford)
McCartney, Raymond (Foyle)
McCausland, Nelson (North Belfast)
McClarty, David (East Londonderry)
McCrea, Basil (Lagan Valley)
McCrea, Ian (Mid Ulster)
McDevitt, Conall (South Belfast)
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair (South Belfast)
McElduff, Barry (West Tyrone)
McGimpsey, Michael (South Belfast)
McGlone, Patsy (Mid Ulster)
McGuinness, Martin (Mid Ulster)
McIlveen, David (North Antrim)
McIlveen, Miss Michelle (Strangford)
McKay, Daithí (North Antrim)
McKevitt, Mrs Karen (South Down)
McLaughlin, Mitchel (South Antrim)
McMullan, Oliver (East Antrim)
McNarry, David (Strangford)
McQuillan, Adrian (East Londonderry)
Maginness, Alban (North Belfast)
Maskey, Alex (South Belfast)
Maskey, Paul (West Belfast)
Molloy, Francie (Mid Ulster)
Morrow, The Lord (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Moutray, Stephen (Upper Bann)
Murphy, Conor (Newry and Armagh)
Nesbitt, Mike (Strangford)
Newton, Robin (East Belfast)
Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál (North Belfast)
Ó hOisín, Cathal (East Londonderry)
O'Dowd, John (Upper Bann)
O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (Mid Ulster)
Overend, Mrs Sandra (Mid Ulster)
Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)
Ramsey, Pat (Foyle)
Ramsey, Ms Sue (West Belfast)
Ritchie, Ms Margaret (South Down)
Robinson, George (East Londonderry)
Robinson, Peter (East Belfast)
Ross, Alastair (East Antrim)
Ruane, Ms Caitríona (South Down)
Sheehan, Pat (West Belfast)
Spratt, Jimmy (South Belfast)
Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)
Swann, Robin (North Antrim)
Weir, Peter (North Down)
Wells, Jim (South Down)
Wilson, Sammy (East Antrim)

Principal Officers and Officials of the Assembly

Speaker.....	Mr William Hay MLA
Deputy Speakers.....	Mr Roy Beggs MLA Mr John Dallat MLA Mr Francie Molloy MLA
Clerk to the Assembly/Director-General.....	Mr Trevor Reaney
Director of Clerking and Reporting	Mr John Stewart
Director of Facilities/Keeper of the House	Mr Stephen Welch
Director of Information and Outreach	Dr Gareth McGrath
Director of Legal Services	Mr Hugh Widdis
Director of Resources	Mr Richard Stewart
Examiner of Statutory Rules	Mr Gordon Nabney
Adviser to the Speaker.....	Mr Robin Ramsey
Clerk Assistants.....	Ms Nuala Dunwoody Mr Damien Martin
Editor of Debates	Mr Simon Burrowes
Clerk to the Assembly Commission.....	Mr Tony Logue

Ministerial Offices

The Executive Committee

First Minister	Mr Peter Robinson
Deputy First Minister	Mr Martin McGuinness
Minister for Employment and Learning	Dr Stephen Farry
Minister for Regional Development	Mr Danny Kennedy
Minister for Social Development	Mr Nelson McCausland
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.....	Mrs Michelle O'Neill
Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.....	Ms Carál Ní Chuilín
Minister of Education.....	Mr John O'Dowd
Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	Mrs Arlene Foster
Minister of the Environment	Mr Alex Attwood
Minister of Finance and Personnel.....	Mr Sammy Wilson
Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	Mr Edwin Poots
Minister of Justice	Mr David Ford

Junior Ministers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	Ms Martina Anderson
	Mr Jonathan Bell

Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sitings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Thursday 12 May 2011

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon.

Assembly Business

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Notice of First Meeting

The Clerk to the Assembly: In accordance with Standing Order 2(1), I hereby give notice that the Assembly will meet, as required by section 31(4) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, in Parliament Buildings today at noon on Thursday 12 May 2011. Please stand for the Speaker.

Roll of Membership

Mr Speaker: I ask Members to please take their seats. Before we proceed with today's business, I offer my congratulations to all of you following the election. As well as welcoming back former Members, I extend a particular welcome to those who are present in the Chamber for the first time.

The next item on the Order Paper is the Roll of Membership. I remind the House that Standing Order 3(3) says that a Member shall be regarded as having taken his or her seat only when they have signed the Roll of Membership. I will not, therefore, take any points of order until after the Roll has been signed by all Members present and I have confirmed that Members have taken their seats.

I shall now explain the procedures for the signing of the Roll. After I have signed the Roll here at the Table, I will invite Members to come forward in their party groups. I will call the parties in alphabetical order. Mr McClarty, as the Independent Member, will be called after the party groupings. When each party name is called, I will ask Members of that party to proceed up through the Aye Lobby on my right. Members should then come forward to sign one of the two Roll pages on the table in front of me.

Members should enter today's date, print and sign their name and enter a designation of identity as "Nationalist", "Unionist" or "Other". I draw Members' attention to Standing Order 3(7), which provides that a Member who does not enter a designation of identity will be deemed to be designated "Other".

The process of signing the Roll may take some time, and I ask Members for their patience during this procedure as Members sign the Roll.

(Mr Speaker signed the Roll of Membership.)

Mr Speaker: Order. We shall now proceed to signing the Roll. I invite Members from the Alliance Party to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members signed the Roll of Membership:

Cochrane, Judith	Other
Dickson, Stewart	Other
Farry, Stephen	Other
Ford, David	Other
Lo, Anna	Other
Lunn, Trevor	Other
Lyttle, Chris	Other
McCarthy, Kieran	Other

Mr Speaker: I invite Members from the Democratic Unionist Party to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members signed the Roll of Membership:

Anderson, Sydney	Unionist
Bell, Jonathan	Unionist
Bradley, Paula	Unionist
Buchanan, Thomas	Unionist
Campbell, Gregory	Unionist
Clarke, Trevor	Unionist
Craig, Jonathan	Unionist
Douglas, Sammy	Unionist
Dunne, Gordon	Unionist
Easton, Alex	Unionist
Foster, Arlene	Unionist
Frew, Paul	Unionist
Girvan, Paul	Unionist
Givan, Paul	Unionist
Hale, Brenda	Unionist
Hamilton, Simon	Unionist
Hilditch, David	Unionist
Humphrey, William	Unionist
Irwin, William	Unionist
Lewis, Pam	Unionist
McCausland, Nelson	Unionist
McCrea, Ian	Unionist
McIlveen, David	Unionist
McIlveen, Michelle	Unionist
McQuillan, Adrian	Unionist
Morrow, The Lord	Unionist
Moutray, Stephen	Unionist
Newton, Robin	Unionist
Poots, Edwin	Unionist
Robinson, George	Unionist
Robinson, Peter	Unionist
Ross, Alastair	Unionist

Spratt, Jimmy	Unionist
Storey, Mervyn	Unionist
Weir, Peter	Unionist
Wells, Jim	Unionist
Wilson, Sammy	Unionist

12.15 pm

Mr Speaker: I invite Mr Agnew of the Green Party to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Member signed the Roll of Membership:

Agnew, Steven	Other
---------------	-------

Mr Speaker: I invite Members from Sinn Féin to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members signed the Roll of Membership:

Anderson, Martina	Nationalist
Boylan, Cathal	Nationalist
Boyle, Michaela	Nationalist
Brady, Mickey	Nationalist
Clarke, Willie	Nationalist
Doherty, Pat	Nationalist
Flanagan, Phil	Nationalist
Gildernew, Michelle	Nationalist
Kelly, Gerry	Nationalist
Lynch, Seán	Nationalist
McCann, Fra	Nationalist
McCann, Jennifer	Nationalist
McCartney, Raymond	Nationalist
McElduff, Barry	Nationalist
McGuinness, Martin	Nationalist
McKay, Daithí	Nationalist
McLaughlin, Mitchel	Nationalist
McMullan, Oliver	Nationalist
Maskey, Alex	Nationalist
Maskey, Paul	Nationalist
Molloy, Francie	Nationalist
Murphy, Conor	Nationalist
Ní Chuilín, Carál	Nationalist
Ó hOisín, Cathal	Nationalist
O'Dowd, John	Nationalist
O'Neill, Michelle	Nationalist
Ramsey, Sue	Nationalist
Ruane, Catriona	Nationalist
Sheehan, Pat	Nationalist

12.30 pm

Mr Speaker: I invite members of the Social Democratic and Labour Party to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members signed the Roll of Membership:

Attwood, Alex	Nationalist
Bradley, Dominic	Nationalist
Byrne, Joe	Nationalist
Dallat, John	Nationalist
Durkan, Mark H	Nationalist
Eastwood, Colum	Nationalist
Kelly, Dolores	Nationalist
McDevitt, Conall	Nationalist
McDonnell, Alasdair	Nationalist
McGlone, Patsy	Nationalist
McKevitt, Karen	Nationalist
Maginness, Alban	Nationalist
Ramsey, Pat	Nationalist
Ritchie, Margaret	Nationalist

Mr Speaker: I invite Mr Allister of Traditional Unionist Voice to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Member signed the Roll of Membership:

Allister, Jim	Unionist
---------------	----------

Mr Speaker: I invite Members from the Ulster Unionist Party to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Members signed the Roll of Membership:

Beggs, Roy	Unionist
Copeland, Michael	Unionist
Cree, Leslie	Unionist
Dobson, Jo-Anne	Unionist
Elliott, Tom	Unionist
Gardiner, Samuel	Unionist
Hussey, Ross	Unionist
Kennedy, Danny	Unionist
Kinahan, Danny	Unionist
McCallister, John	Unionist
McCrea, Basil	Unionist
McGimpsey, Michael	Unionist
McNarry, David	Unionist
Nesbitt, Mike	Unionist
Overend, Sandra	Unionist
Swann, Robin	Unionist

Mr Speaker: I invite Mr McClarty, the Independent Member, to come forward to sign the Roll of Membership.

The following Member signed the Roll of Membership:

McClarty, David	Unionist
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Mr Speaker: I thank Members for their co-operation and patience during the signing of the Roll of Membership. Standing Order 3(3) states that my decision as to whether a Member has taken his or her seat is final. I can make that decision only after examining all entries in the Roll. To that end, therefore, I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.45 pm.

On resuming —

2.30 pm

Election of Speaker

Mr Speaker: Members should please take their seats as we move to the next item of business.

I have had an opportunity to scrutinise the entries on the Roll of Membership, and I am satisfied that all Members who have signed the Roll have taken their seat in accordance with Standing Orders. Regarding designation of identity, eight Members have entered a designation of “Other”, which I have deemed to be in order for the purpose of Standing Orders. However, the total number of Members designated as “Other” is nine, as we have eight Members belonging to the Alliance Party and one belonging to the Green Party who are all designated as “Other”. Details of all the designations have been placed in Members’ pigeonholes, and copies are available in the Rotunda.

As I am seeking re-election to the office of Speaker, I am required by Standing Order 4(2) to leave the Chair. Mr Sam Gardiner will preside as Acting Speaker for this item of business, and I invite him, as Father of the House, to come forward and preside over the election of the Speaker.

(The Acting Speaker [Mr Gardiner] in the Chair)

The Acting Speaker: Order. I advise Members that the election of the Speaker will be conducted under the procedure set out in Standing Order 4. I will begin by asking for nominations. Any Member may rise to propose that another Member be elected Speaker. I will then ask for the proposal to be seconded by another Member, as required by Standing Order 14. I will then verify that the Member nominated and seconded is willing to accept the nomination. I will then ask for further proposals and follow the same procedures for each. When it appears that there are no further proposals, I will make it clear that the time for proposals has passed. If Members indicate that they wish to speak, a debate relevant to the election may then take place. At the conclusion of the debate or the conclusion of the nominations if there are no further requests to speak, I will put the Question that the Member first proposed shall be Speaker of the Assembly. The vote will be on a cross-community basis. If the proposal is

not carried, I will put the Question in relation to the next nomination and so on, until all the nominations are exhausted. Once the Speaker is elected, all other nominations fall automatically.

Do I have a proposal for the office of Speaker of the Assembly?

Mr M McGuinness: At the start of the last Assembly, the then First Minister and I agreed that we would ensure that the position of Speaker was shared across both traditions. In return for my party’s support for the DUP’s nomination for the position of Speaker, he indicated that his party would support the nomination of a Sinn Féin Speaker for this term.

In recent days, I have had further discussions with the First Minister. We have agreed that this position will be shared across both traditions during this Assembly term. We have agreed that it will be taken up initially by a Member of the DUP and that, after three years, the position will be taken up by a Member of Sinn Féin. Therefore, I nominate William Hay as the incoming Speaker for the initial phase. In May 2014, a Sinn Féin MLA will be nominated for this position for the remainder of the term.

I am very pleased to nominate Willie Hay, and I take this opportunity to acknowledge the work that he did as Ceann Comhairle in the last Assembly. As far as I am concerned — I believe that my opinion is shared by the overwhelming majority of the Members of the House — he did an excellent job, and I am sure that that is recognised by everyone. Go raibh maith agat.

The Acting Speaker: The proposal is that Mr William Hay be elected Speaker. Is there a Member to second that?

Mr P Robinson: I am delighted to second the proposal of the deputy First Minister to nominate my friend and colleague William Hay for the position of Speaker.

William and I have been friends for many decades, and I know well the strength of his character. During the previous Assembly term, every Member of the Assembly saw how fairly he represented the House and how impartial his judgements were, and I believe that he won the respect and admiration of the whole House. Although I was not part of the initial discussions about which the deputy First Minister spoke, I fully honour the arrangements that he set out,

and my party will go forward on that basis. We welcome the opportunity for William Hay to be returned to the Chair once more.

The Acting Speaker: Members, you have heard the nomination, which has been seconded, for Mr William Hay to be elected Speaker. Mr Hay, are you prepared to accept that nomination?

Mr Hay: Yes, I accept the nomination.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any further proposals?

The time for proposals has expired. A number of Members have indicated that they wish to speak. I remind Members that they may speak only once in the debate. Members will have up to three minutes in which to speak.

Mr Elliott: I congratulate the Speaker designate, William Hay, and congratulate all the Members who have either been re-elected or elected here for the first time. Mr Hay presided over proceedings in the House for the past four years, and I welcomed his contribution. He did an excellent and fair job in the Chamber, and I am sure that most people recognise that.

I look forward to a positive working relationship in the Assembly. That may not always happen, and it may not always be possible. However, where it is practicable, I look forward to that. I also look forward to dealing with the real issues for the people on the ground, especially issues around unemployment, jobs, the economy, health and education. Where possible, I want to see that positive relationship, have those debates and ensure the best outcome for everyone.

Ms Ritchie: Since Mr Hay is the only nominee and is the Speaker elect, I offer you congratulations on behalf of the SDLP. We had a very good working relationship in the previous Assembly. We did not necessarily always agree with your decisions or adjudications, and you will no doubt expect the same level of accountability from us during this mandate.

On behalf of my party, I offer congratulations to all those who have been returned, either returning Members or new Members of the Assembly. The SDLP looks forward to working with everybody in a constructive way on a range of issues. There is absolutely no doubt that the people of the North of Ireland have spoken, given us a mandate and told us to get on with the work on behalf of the people. They are looking for representation and for delivery on

issues such as employment and unemployment; how you bed down an economy; how you provide a better and more efficient health service; and how we can deliver the best education for all our children throughout the North of Ireland. They are also looking at skills, training and higher education and are looking for a good deal for the whole community. That is the challenge that has been put in front of us all.

We are very happy to work with the outgoing and incoming Speaker, Mr Hay, and the Members who are elected as Deputy Speakers. Naturally, the SDLP will put forward its nomination.

Mr Ford: On behalf of the Alliance Party, it also gives me great pleasure to support the renomination of Mr William Hay as Speaker. I have not known him for as long as the First Minister has known him, nor do I share the Derry/Londonderry connection that the deputy First Minister has, but I have known William for 13 years, since we both arrived here just after the Good Friday Agreement. Our group has always found him to be an honourable and decent Member of the House in any role that he has had. During the four years that he has acted as our Speaker, he has been a good and fair representative of the House.

Like Margaret Ritchie, I have not always agreed with Mr Speaker Hay, although that may say more about me than it does about Mr Speaker Hay. However, it is absolutely clear that he has been fair and honourable in his work in the Chair and when representing the Assembly elsewhere. Most particularly, he has stood up for the rights of each individual Member in this place against whatever outside forces might bear down upon us. On that basis and in the spirit of goodwill shown around the Chamber, we have great delight in supporting his nomination.

Mr Allister: The election of a Speaker for any legislative assembly is, of course, an important occasion, not least for the minority voices in it. In that, I declare a very obvious interest. It has been rightly said that you can judge a parliament or an assembly by how it treats its minorities. Therefore, I look forward to seeing how this minority is treated in this Assembly.

At a personal level, I have no difficulty in conveying my best wishes to William Hay as Speaker, but I note that he is, today, the nominee of IRA/Sinn Féin. I note that his elevation is again the consequence of another sordid deal between the DUP and Sinn Féin. I

wonder what additional price the DUP paid to buy back the mortgage that was offered by Ian Paisley four years ago, when he offered Sinn Féin the role in 2011. I am sure that we have not seen or heard the whole price that has been paid in that regard, and now we can look forward to a new depravity in the arrangements of this House when, in 2014, a member of IRA/Sinn Féin takes over the leadership of it. It falls as a shame on those who have facilitated that arrangement.

No doubt that arrangement was facilitated by the fact that, in his four years as Speaker, from what I could see, Mr Hay made several pro-Sinn Féin rulings and several anti-freedom of speech rulings and sought to block the telling of the truth about individuals such as bomber Kelly, who sits in the House. He brought no credit upon this House or upon himself in seeking to suppress freedom of speech during that time. The jury is now out for the next four years. I will watch with interest during the coming three of those four years, while he holds that post courtesy of Sinn Féin, to see whether he finds the courage to come down on the side of freedom of speech in this House.

The Acting Speaker: No other Members have indicated that they wish to speak. *[Laughter.]* Are you pleased at that?

Question, That Mr William Hay be Speaker of this Assembly, put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr William Hay be Speaker of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: I have great pleasure in declaring that Mr William Hay has been re-elected Speaker. I ask him to come forward to take his rightful position. *[Applause.]*

2.45 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Mr Speaker: Order. First, I want to thank the proposer and seconder of my nomination as Speaker. I also want to thank Members for their continued support during the previous mandate and, I hope, during the current mandate. I appreciate greatly the fact that I was the first Speaker to be elected by the Assembly and am now the first to be re-elected.

I am always conscious of the privilege that it is to hold this office. It is not always easy for the

Chair to please all of the people all of the time, but Members know that I have always sought to be fair and will continue to do so. Members know that, if they have issues or problems, I have an open-door policy for those who want to talk to me. I will always act in the Assembly's interests, and I look forward to working with all Members of the new Assembly. Once again, I thank all Members for their support.

Election of Deputy Speakers

Mr Speaker: Order. The next item of business on the Order Paper is the election of Deputy Speakers. Standing Order 5(1) requires three Deputy Speakers to be elected. The procedure for electing Deputy Speakers will be the same as that for the election of Speaker. I will ask for nominations, which must be seconded. I will then confirm that the Member accepts the nomination, and I will continue in that way until there are no further nominations.

I remind Members that a debate may take place after I announce that the time for proposals has passed. Do I have any proposals for the office of Deputy Speaker of the Assembly?

Mr Doherty: As Sinn Féin's nominating officer, I nominate Francie Molloy as Deputy Speaker. He held the post in the previous Assembly and proved to be a very able Deputy Speaker. He was also very much a part of your working group, Mr Speaker, in conducting the business of the House. Therefore, I nominate formally Francie Molloy.

Mr Speaker: Is there a seconder?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Aontaím leis an mholadh. I second the proposal for Francie Molloy to be LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Speaker: Mr Molloy, do you accept the nomination to be Deputy Speaker?

Mr Molloy: A Cheann Comhairle, glacaim leis. I accept the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Are there any further nominations?

Mr Elliott: I nominate Mr Roy Beggs for the position of Deputy Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Is there a seconder?

Mr Kennedy: I second that nomination formally.

Mr Speaker: Does the Member accept the nomination of Deputy Speaker?

Mr Beggs: I accept the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Is there any further nomination?

Ms Ritchie: As the SDLP's nominating officer, I have great pleasure in nominating John Dallat, the Member for East Derry. In the past, John has been Deputy Speaker and a member of your working group, Mr Speaker. He is a person of considerable principle and integrity.

Mr Speaker: Is there a seconder?

Mr McGlone: Cuirim leis an mholadh sin go foirmiúil, a Cheann Comhairle. I second that nomination formally, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Mr Dallat, do you accept the nomination?

Mr Dallat: I am happy to accept the nomination, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Are there any further nominations? I see that there is none. A number of Members have indicated that they wish to speak. I remind them that they may speak only once during the debate and will have three minutes in which to speak.

Mr McCallister: Congratulations on your re-election, Mr Speaker. I also congratulate other Members on their re-election. I know that there was concern in Hansard, as it thought that its workload might be cut; however, it was glad to see that Conall McDevitt was returned. *[Laughter.]* Of course, we were all relieved to see that.

The offices of Speaker and Deputy Speaker are important in protecting the rights of Members and in standing up for the institution; therefore, it is important that they be elected and deemed to act fairly. I am confident that the three nominees will achieve that. I look forward to working with them in building up the reputation of the House and protecting Members' rights.

Ms Ritchie: On behalf of the SDLP, I offer congratulations to the three nominees for the position of Deputy Speaker. Through our nominee the last time, we were happy to participate in the working group with you, Mr Speaker, and we will continue to have a good working relationship through our Deputy Speaker and a constructive working relationship with other Deputy Speakers and with you. At the end of the day, we are here to work on behalf of the people and to deliver for them.

Mr Ford: On behalf of my group, I am happy to support the three nominations. I think that the continuity of your remaining in post, Mr Speaker, with two of the three Deputy Speakers is a good thing. I have no doubt from what I have seen of Roy Beggs in the Chamber that he will make an excellent Deputy Speaker. Some day, perhaps in three years' time, we will see people being selected purely on their merits and not simply on party nominations. That would really be a

sign of maturity in this place. In the meantime, I wish the three nominees well.

Mr Allister: I certainly have no difficulty in offering congratulations and support to the two untarnished democrats who have been nominated: Mr Beggs and Mr Dallat. As for the third nominee, Mr Molloy, I certainly wish to make it abundantly clear that, though he doubtless will take office with the support of his friends from across the Chamber, he will not take office with my support.

Today, I cannot but recall the guidance and information provided by the Member of Parliament for Upper Bann, Mr David Simpson, when he revealed something of the true nature of Mr Molloy. I simply want to say —

Mr Speaker: Order. I must ask the Member to take his seat. We must deal with the business that is before us in the House, which is the election of Deputy Speakers. That is all there is. I must and I will remind the Member that there is no problem with him getting to his feet to speak on the issue of Deputy Speakers, but to widen the debate is totally and absolutely wrong.

Mr Allister: I had no intention of widening the debate, nor have I done so, in my belief. I was referring precisely to one who has been nominated, and I was reminding those who shortly will vote for him about what their colleague Mr Simpson said. Was he telling lies? Was he telling the truth? Do those on my left simply not care?

I stood in Ballymena on Saturday. I listened to three successful Democratic Unionist candidates piously and arrogantly claim that their election was the smile of God on the DUP.

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to take his seat, and I will not call him to speak on this subject again. I will move on. The Member should remain seated.

Mr Allister: It did not take you very long —

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I will take points of order after I have dealt with this issue.

Question put, That Mr Francie Molloy be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

Some Members: Aye.

Mr Allister: No.

Mr Speaker: The election of Deputy Speaker requires cross-community consent. Clear the Lobbies. The Question will be put again in three minutes' time.

Question put a second time.

Mr Speaker: Under Standing Order 27(4), when the Speaker calls for Tellers from each side on a Question but, within a reasonable time, two Tellers have been nominated from one side but not from the other, the determination of the Assembly shall be that of the side for which two Tellers have been nominated. As only one Teller has been nominated for the Noes, the Ayes have it, and I am satisfied that cross-community support has been demonstrated.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr Francie Molloy be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

Question, That Mr Roy Beggs be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly, put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr Roy Beggs be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

Question, That Mr John Dallat be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly, put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr John Dallat be Deputy Speaker of this Assembly.

3.00 pm

Mr Speaker: As three Deputy Speakers have been elected, that item of business is concluded. I offer my congratulations to the successful candidates, and I look forward to working with all the Deputy Speakers.

I will now take Mr Allister's point of order.

Mr Allister: When you call a Member to order, my expectation — maybe it is wrong — is that there would be an identification of the issue on which a Member has transgressed. I have not heard any such identification, and, so that we all might learn, I would be graciously obliged to hear it.

Mr Speaker: When the Member has been in the House for some time, he will find that I do not get into debates about points of order. I often

tell Members that points of order are not for debate and that, if they feel very strongly about a particular point of order or issue, they can come and talk to me in my office or go to the Business Office or wherever they feel they might get an answer. Once again, I say to all Members that I have an open-door policy, and I ask them please to come and talk to me about any issue that they feel strongly about.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, if it is the Speaker's belief that a Member of the House has transgressed, surely that Member is entitled to know where the Speaker believes he or she has transgressed.

Mr Speaker: Order. You are almost reaching the point of challenging the authority of the Chair, and I would not go there. I certainly would not go there.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I understand that Mr Allister is the new kid on the block. However, for his benefit and that of my party, I ask you to do us the courtesy of checking his remarks in today's Hansard and getting back to us. I believe that his remarks were unparliamentary, and, for all his ability to scrutinise, he clearly does not understand the Standing Orders of the House. If he has not already been given a copy of Standing Orders, perhaps he could be furnished with one.

Mr Speaker: I am always happy to give new Members some latitude. However, let me say clearly to Members, as I said many times during the last mandate, that courtesy, good temper and moderation are the standards required during any debate in the Chamber. I remind all Members from all sides of the House to be of good temper in the Chamber.

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Appointment and Pledge of Office

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is the appointment of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. I will conduct the process of filling the offices in accordance with the procedures set out in section 16A of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Standing Order 44(1).

I will begin by asking for nominations. The nominating officer of the largest political party of the largest political designation shall nominate a Member of the Assembly to be First Minister. The nominating officer of the largest political party of the second largest political designation shall nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the deputy First Minister.

I have received a letter from the nominating officer of the Democratic Unionist Party advising me that Mr Sammy Wilson will serve as the nominating officer for the party today. I call Mr Sammy Wilson to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the First Minister.

Mr Wilson: Nominating officer sounds like a very grand title.

I wish to nominate the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to be First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and it is with great joy that I do so. I have known Peter for 40 years, and I could not have imagined that, when I first knew him as party secretary in our rather dowdy offices in Ava Avenue off the Ormeau Road, he would one day be in a position to be nominated to this high office. Even further beyond my imagination was that I would be the person to nominate him. *[Laughter.]* Given the annoyance that I have probably caused him over the years, I was surprised that he asked me to nominate him, but he did. He may have had some regrets and wondered what was coming next when he came into the Chamber and saw me reading 'Private Eye'. *[Laughter.]* However, it is an honour to nominate him for this position, which he has held for the past three years, having inherited it from the former leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, Dr Paisley, and now taking it in his own right. He has earned it. I say "earned it" advisedly because we are where we are because of the vision that Peter Robinson had of a stable Stormont. He looked at the problems for the first Assembly and asked how we could avoid going up and down like a yo-yo. As a strategist, he looked to see what could and had to be done and how that could be delivered and worked on.

For the past three years, Peter Robinson has steered the Executive and Assembly through difficult times. Many said that the stumbling block of the devolution of policing and justice could not be got over. It was his skill in negotiating through those difficulties that brought the stability of full devolution to Northern Ireland. He also led the Executive in the past two years of the Assembly to deal with the recession and the savage cuts in our Budget as a result of decisions made at Westminster.

I know that he will not mind me saying that all that was against the background of massive media publicity against him, domestic difficulties and personal disappointment. To those of us who observed the impact of that on him, it showed what a unique leader we had. Many another person would have folded, thrown in the towel and said that it was not worth it, yet he lived up to the civic responsibility placed on him by the people of Northern Ireland, his party colleagues and the House. For that reason, he has earned this position. He approached the last election with trepidation because many said that it would be very difficult to fill the shoes of the previous party leader, who led the party to become the biggest in 2007. He not only followed those footsteps and filled those footprints but did more than that, which is why we are here with the biggest grouping that we have ever had and the best election success.

We will, over the next four years, face great difficulties in making the Assembly work more efficiently, deliver more quickly and become more relevant to the people in Northern Ireland. We have also to steer our way through the economic storms that lie ahead. There is no better person to do that job than Peter Robinson.

Mr Speaker: Mr Robinson, are you willing to take up the office of First Minister?

Mr P Robinson: I am.

Mr Speaker: I now call on Mr Pat Doherty, as nominating officer of Sinn Féin, to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the deputy First Minister.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As nominating officer for Sinn Féin, I nominate Martin McGuinness MP MLA as deputy First Minister.

I have known Martin probably even longer than Peter has known you as Speaker or, as we like to call you, Ceann Comhairle. Throughout that time he has been able to show extraordinary leadership. However, that really manifested itself as we moved towards the negotiations of the Good Friday Agreement. His ability to lead in the peace process, the political process and the reconciliation process has been quite extraordinary.

Over the past four years, he served as deputy First Minister, for the first year with the Rev Ian Paisley and for the three years after that with Peter Robinson. That working relationship between the deputy First Minister and First Minister has shown a collective leadership for all the people across the Six Counties.

I have no doubt that, as we move into this new term, Martin will continue to show all those leadership qualities and lead us collectively to a better place.

Once again, it is my great pleasure to nominate Martin McGuinness to be deputy First Minister.

Mr Speaker: Mr McGuinness, are you willing to take up the office of deputy First Minister?

Mr M McGuinness: I am.

Mr Speaker: The Act requires that the persons nominated shall not take up office until they have affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to take his seat. I will take points of order after this item of business is concluded.

When both Members nominated have done so and I have announced that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have taken up office, I will invite each of them to make a short address to the House.

I ask the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office.

Mr P Robinson: I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Speaker: I ask Mr Martin McGuinness to affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office.

Mr M McGuinness: Dearbhaím téarmaí an ghealltanais. I affirm the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Speaker: I confirm that the Rt Hon Peter Robinson and Mr Martin McGuinness have affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office and have taken up office as First Minister and deputy First Minister in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act 1998. I offer them both my congratulations and invite them to address the House.

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I begin by congratulating you on your re-election as Speaker of the House.

It is a great honour for me to accept the nomination to be First Minister. It is a privilege, one that I find all the greater because it flows directly from the votes of the people. I am humbled by the trust that they have placed in me. However, there is no mistaking the message of the electorate; it is as plain as a pikestaff. The electorate made it very clear to all of us as we went around the doors that they wanted to see us create and safeguard employment. They want us to help the vulnerable in our society and improve front line services. However, they also want to see us unite this Province and create a shared society. In short — my party managers would not forgive me if I did not say this — they want to see us moving Northern Ireland forward.

I want to make it clear that there are those outside who think that they can disturb the will of the people through terrorism. There might even be some inside who think that they will do that by political means. To all of them I say that I will be a thorn in the flesh of anyone who tries to obstruct the democratic will of the people of Northern Ireland. The truth is that this society works best when it works for all. I was at the Balmoral show yesterday, where I bumped into a gentleman who said that he travels around the world. In the past number of months, more than at any time in his life, he has been able to tell people whom he meets that he is proud to come from Northern Ireland.

Four or five years from now, we will not be judged on the size of our first preference votes but on what we have done to make life better for the people whom we represent. We will be judged on delivery.

I congratulate all those who have been re-elected, and I congratulate those who have been elected for the first time. I also remember those who have not returned but who served the House and this community in the past. However, the elections are over, and now is the time to govern.

As a society, we owe much to those whose lives have been lost or damaged during this period of conflict. None of us should forget the past, but we must all live in the present and plan for the future.

The people have spoken. Their verdict is clear. The new Assembly gives us the chance of a fresh start with a renewed mandate. Let us use it to create the new Northern Ireland. Four years ago, we began a journey to a better future. Although there have been ups and downs along the way, that journey continues, but I am absolutely sure today, more than I have been at any time before, that Northern Ireland's best years lie ahead. Mr Speaker, I pledge to this Assembly today that I will work to make sure that those best days become a reality.

3.15 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. I call the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, to address the House.

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá mé an-bhródúil le bheith ar ais arís mar LeasChéad Aire. First of all, congratulations to you on your election as Ceann Comhairle — as our Speaker.

I am very honoured to be back again as deputy First Minister in this Assembly representing Sinn Féin, and I thank my lifelong friend Pat Doherty for the nomination. At the end of the mandate in March, I said that it was tremendous that we had come through the full four-year term. It was the first time in almost 100 years that a locally elected Administration, elected by and truly representative of our community, had taken vital decisions and passed legislation of benefit to that community. In my view, that was a wonderful achievement. Of course, all that was tested during the election campaign. As the First Minister said, the message has come through loud and clear that, no matter what their allegiance, our people are telling us, their elected representatives, that they want us to work together.

At the beginning of the last term of our mandate, questions were asked about the DUP's mandate. It was said that it did not speak for the unionist people and that it had pulled a confidence trick in going into government with Sinn Féin. Whatever about the doubts then — personally, I had no doubts — there can be no doubt whatsoever about the result of this election. There can be no doubt about what people are saying to their elected representatives.

In her remarks, the leader of the SDLP, Margaret Ritchie, graciously conceded that the people were telling us to stop the bickering and infighting and to join together and unite on behalf of their interests. What are their interests? They are manifold. As Peter said, there are people outside who wish to destroy everything that has been built up over the past 15 years. They do not represent anybody but themselves and their own selfish objectives, and they now find themselves totally isolated from the opinions of the vast majority of the people who live on this island. So they have no mandate whatsoever. They may try to use the argument that conditions exist now that allow them to do that, but those conditions do not exist. The conditions that exist now are the conditions that the people have signed up for. They are the democratic conditions that we find ourselves returned to this House to observe and push forward.

I congratulate every single Member who has been elected to this Administration. The power-sharing North/South and east-west institutions and the agreements that flow from all that, whether they are at St Andrews or at Hillsborough, bind all of us together. There can be no question whatsoever about how, in pursuance of all that, we have improved the quality of our people's lives — for many, beyond belief. Many people thought that it could not happen and that there was no prospect whatsoever of unionists and republicans or nationalists coming together in a united way to push forward the governance arrangements that were established as a result of agreements. We have confounded them all. We have done it, and we have to continue to do it in the time ahead.

There are big issues facing us. Yes, we have different allegiances. There are people in the House whose allegiance is to what they call the United Kingdom. I am an Irish republican, and my allegiance is to the people of Ireland, but I

can work with people who observe a different flag without being offended by that. It is not too much to expect that they can work with me without being offended by the flag that I give my allegiance to.

There is a big challenge ahead. This was an election like no other in the history of the Northern state. This was an election where parties did not tear strips off one another, apart from the odd wee blow-up. On the whole, people recognised that something very powerful had happened during the past four years, and as we move forward —

Mr Allister: You would know all about that.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr M McGuinness: As we move forward, we do so together, united, not fighting against each other in the battles that are out there but fighting one big battle in the interests of our people and doing so together. What is that battle? That battle is against the word "recession". It is against unemployment, disadvantage, inequality and poverty in our society. It is a battle for jobs.

One of the unique experiences that Peter Robinson and I had was travelling to the United States of America. On many occasions, Arlene Foster was with us. We can say without fear of contradiction that our united approach brought more jobs to the North of Ireland than have been brought at any other time in the history of the Northern state. Just think what more we can do if, for example, we can get an agreed outcome in the negotiations on corporation tax. We can bring thousands more jobs here.

The First Minister and I went to the Balmoral show, and we are involved in important negotiations about what to do with the Maze/Long Kesh site. We believe that that site can bring many thousands of jobs for our people. Much construction work can be done if we apply our talents and abilities to how we move forward to bring more jobs for our people, how we can protect front line services and how we ensure that we protect the poorest and most disadvantaged in our society. That is the work that I want to engage in over the next four years, not bickering and fighting with anybody.

When we leave here today, the First Minister and I, along with other party leaders, will go to Stormont Castle to set about that work. I want

us to get off on a good footing. I want us all to recognise that our people deserve better. Yes, the past four years were a huge success, but they could have been even more successful. We know what more needs to be done. Let us knuckle down to that in the coming period. Let us confound everybody. Let us continue to work together in a united way and ensure that we continue to improve the quality of the lives of the people whom we represent. We can do that without undermining the political allegiances that we have in this House. That is the spirit in which I am going forward.

It was an honour to work with Ian Paisley during what were historic times. It has been an honour to work with Peter Robinson over the past three years, and I look forward to the work of the next four years. We can do it but only if we stand together. United we stand, divided we fall.

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Allister has a point of order.

Mr Allister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Have the norms of procedure in the House been so distorted that, although we are filling the offices of joint First Ministers, we deny the opportunity to debate that proposition, particularly in circumstances where one of those is a self-confessed terrorist commander?

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to take his seat. I can almost guess what he is raising in points of order; I am almost ahead of him. However, the Member should read about the process and read the Act. This process is for nominations; it is not an election, as was the case with the Speaker and Deputy Speakers. There is no requirement for a debate on this issue — *[Interruption.]* Order.

That concludes this item of business, and we shall now move on.

Committee Business

Business Committee: Membership

Resolved:

That the Business Committee shall consist of:

The Speaker (Ex officio)

Mr S Dickson

Mr J McCallister

Mr C McDevitt

Mr P Maskey

Lord Morrow

Ms C Ní Chuilín

Mr P Ramsey

Mr R Swann

Mr P Weir — [Mr Speaker.]

Mr Speaker: I advise the House that the Business Committee is scheduled to meet 15 minutes after the House rises to consider further business. An Order Paper for the next meeting will be issued as soon as possible.

Adjourned at 3.25 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 16 May 2011

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: First, I will say a few words about what I expect for debates in the Chamber and about the nature of them, for the benefit of all Members who have been returned to the House. Let me briefly outline what I expect. In line with my rulings in the last mandate, which Members can look back on, debates should be conducted with courtesy, good temper and moderation. Members should avoid personalising remarks to any Member and should be careful to use proper names when addressing Members and referring to parties. Members will know that I was very strong on that issue in the House in the last mandate. When Members rise in their place to address the House, they certainly should not personalise remarks to any other Member.

Also, when it comes to referring to political parties in the Chamber, political parties should be known and referred to as what they are registered as with the Assembly. I do not want Members tagging names on to political parties in the House. There is no difficulty with expressing differences of opinion in the House, as long as debates are conducted with common courtesy and respect. I have said continually in the House that different debates and issues will raise different emotions among Members, and I can understand that. However, all of it should be conducted with courtesy, good temper and moderation. I will leave that with Members.

**Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill:
Royal Assent**

Welfare of Animals Bill: Royal Assent

**Assembly Members (Independent
Financial Review and Standards) Bill:
Royal Assent**

**Licensing and Registration of Clubs
(Amendment) Bill: Royal Assent**

Sunbeds Bill: Royal Assent

Civil Registration Bill: Royal Assent

High Hedges Bill: Royal Assent

**Housing (Amendment) Bill: Royal
Assent**

**Clean Neighbourhoods and
Environment Bill: Royal Assent**

Justice Bill: Royal Assent

Planning Bill: Royal Assent

**Single Use Carrier Bags Bill: Royal
Assent**

Autism Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: I inform Members that 13 Bills have received Royal Assent. The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and the Licensing

and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 became law on 29 March 2011. The Sunbeds Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the Civil Registration Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 became law on 3 May 2011. The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and the Single Use Carrier Bags Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 became law on 4 May 2011. The Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 became law on 9 May 2011.

I advise Members that the Attorney General for Northern Ireland has asked the Supreme Court to determine whether clause 3 and clause 4(2) of the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill would be within the legislative competence of this Assembly. The matter has been listed for consideration by the Supreme Court on 13 June 2011 to 16 June 2011. That is for information to the Assembly.

Suspension of Standing Order 20(1)

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is the motion —

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We are shortly to appoint Ministers, including a Justice Minister. That person will have to work closely with other Ministers, particularly in relation to legal matters. I ask for your ruling, if not today, at an appropriate point in the future. My understanding is that a Historical Enquiries Team investigation into a murder incident some 30 years ago is to begin this week. If it transpires — my understanding is that it will — that the deputy First Minister's name will be implicated in relation to that investigation, how would a Justice Minister be expected to work in the context of a live investigation that was currently going on, until that matter be dispensed with?

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. The Member will know that these are complex issues, so allow me to come back to the Member directly or to the House. It may be that that is a matter for the Minister and the Minister alone.

Mr Weir: I beg to move

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 16 May 2011.

Mr Speaker: Before I proceed to the Question, I remind Members that the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 16 May 2011.

Appointment of Ministers

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is the appointment of Ministers. I will conduct the process for filling those offices in accordance with the procedure set out in section 18 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Standing Order 44. I will ask the nominating officer of each political party in the order required by the formula contained in section 18(5) to select an available ministerial office and nominate a person to hold it who is a member of his or her party and a Member of the Assembly.

I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson, as nominating officer of the political party for which the formula laid down in section 18 gives the highest figure, to select a ministerial office and nominate a person to hold it who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly.

Mr P Robinson: I select the Finance and Personnel portfolio and nominate Mr Sammy Wilson to hold it.

Mr Speaker: Will Mr Wilson confirm that he is willing to take up office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr Wilson: Yes, Mr Speaker, I am willing to take up the office of Minister of Finance and Personnel, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Sammy Wilson appointed Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Mr Speaker: I have received a letter from Mr Pat Doherty notifying me that Mr Martin McGuinness will act as nominating officer for today's business. I call on Mr Martin McGuinness, as acting nominating officer of the political party for which the formula laid down in section 18 gives the highest figure, to select a ministerial office and nominate a person to hold it who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly.

Mr M McGuinness: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Molaim John O'Dowd mar Aire Oideachais. I nominate John O'Dowd as Minister of Education.

Mr Speaker: Will Mr O'Dowd confirm that he is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Glacaim leis an phost d'Aire

Oideachais. Yes, I am willing to take up the office of Minister of Education, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the NI Act 1998.

Mr John O'Dowd appointed Minister of Education.

Mr Speaker: I call again on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select a ministerial office and nominate a Member to hold it.

Mr P Robinson: I select the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and nominate Arlene Foster to hold the ministerial office.

Mr Speaker: Will Mrs Foster confirm that she is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mrs Foster: Yes, I am willing to take up the office of Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mrs Arlene Foster appointed Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Speaker: I call on Mr Elliott, as nominating officer of the political party for which the formula gives the highest figure, to select a ministerial office and nominate a Member to hold it.

Mr Elliott: I select the Department for Regional Development and nominate Mr Danny Kennedy to hold the ministerial office.

Mr Speaker: Will Mr Kennedy confirm that he is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr Kennedy: Yes, I am willing to take up the office of Minister for Regional Development, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as laid out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Danny Kennedy appointed Minister for Regional Development.

Mr Speaker: I call again on Mr Martin McGuinness to select a ministerial office and nominate a Member to hold it.

Mr M McGuinness: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Molaim Michelle O'Neill mar Aire Talmhaíochta agus Forbartha Tuaithe. I nominate Michelle O'Neill to hold the Agriculture and Rural Development portfolio.

Mr Speaker: Will Michelle O'Neill confirm that she is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Glacaim leis an phost. Yes, I am willing to take up the office of Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the NI Act 1998.

Mrs Michelle O'Neill appointed Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Speaker: I call on Ms Margaret Ritchie, as nominating officer of the political party for which the formula gives the highest figure, to select a ministerial office and nominate a Member to hold it.

Ms Ritchie: I select the Department of the Environment and nominate Alex Attwood.

Mr Speaker: Will Mr Attwood confirm that he is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr Attwood: Yes, I am willing to take up the office of Minister of the Environment, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Alex Attwood appointed Minister of the Environment.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select a ministerial office and nominate a Member to hold it.

Mr P Robinson: I select the Department for Social Development and nominate Nelson McCausland to hold the ministerial office.

Mr Speaker: Will Mr McCausland confirm that he is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr McCausland: Yes, I am willing to take up the office of Minister for Social Development, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Nelson McCausland appointed Minister for Social Development.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call on Mr Martin McGuinness to select a ministerial office and nominate a Member to hold it.

Mr M McGuinness: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Molaim Carál Ní Chuilín mar Aire Cultúir, Ealaíon agus Fóillíochta. I nominate Carál Ní Chuilín to hold the Culture, Arts and Leisure portfolio.

Mr Speaker: Will Carál Ní Chuilín confirm that she is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Glacaim leis an phost. Yes, I am willing to take up the office of Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the NI Act 1998.

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín appointed Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

12.15 pm

Mr Speaker: I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select a ministerial office and nominate a person to hold it.

Mr P Robinson: I select the Health, Social Services and Public Safety portfolio, and I nominate Edwin Poots to hold it.

Mr Speaker: Will Mr Poots confirm that he is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr Poots: Yes, I am willing to take up the office of Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Edwin Poots appointed Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Speaker: I call on Mr David Ford, as nominating officer of the political party for which the formula gives the highest figure, to select a ministerial office and nominate a Member to hold it.

Mr Ford: The remaining Department is the Department for Employment and Learning. I have great pleasure in nominating Dr Stephen Farry as Minister.

Mr Speaker: Will Dr Stephen Farry confirm that he is willing to take up the office and affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Dr Farry: Yes, I am willing to take up the office of Minister for Employment and Learning, and I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set

out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Dr Stephen Farry appointed Minister for Employment and Learning.

Mr Speaker: I thank the House for its patience. That concludes the appointment of Ministers under the d'Hondt process. I offer my congratulations to all Ministers on taking up office.

Appointment of Junior Ministers

Mr Speaker: I have received correspondence from the First Minister and deputy First Minister in relation to the appointment of junior Ministers. The letter states:

"Pursuant to the procedure for the appointment of junior Ministers specified in paragraph 3(1) of the determination made by the then First Minister and deputy First Minister on 8 December 1999, as approved by the Assembly on 14 December 1999, we have appointed Jonathan Bell MLA and Martina Anderson MLA as junior Ministers in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. A copy of the letter of appointment is attached."

Will Mr Bell affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Mr Bell: I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Bell appointed a junior Minister.

Mr Speaker: Will Martina Anderson affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office?

Ms M Anderson: Tá mé toilteanach glacadh leis an oifig seo. I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Ms Martina Anderson appointed a junior Minister.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the business of appointing junior Ministers. Once again, I offer my congratulations to the junior Ministers on taking up office.

Minister of Justice

Mr Speaker: I will conduct the process of the filling of the office of Minister of Justice in accordance with the procedures set out in Part 1A of schedule 4A to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Standing Order 44A. I will begin by asking for nominations. Any Member may rise and nominate another Member of the Assembly to hold the office of Minister of Justice. If Members rise from more than one party, I will call first the Member from the largest of those parties to make a nomination, which is the convention for other items of business.

I advise Members that the Act requires that one nomination must be processed before a further nomination can be made. I will, therefore, take only one nomination at a time and put the Question on that nomination. If the Assembly resolves by parallel consent that the Member nominated shall be Minister of Justice and that person takes up office as required by the Act and Standing Orders, no further nominations may be made. I will call for further nominations only if those conditions are not fulfilled. I advise the House that a debate will take place on each nomination. If Members indicate that they wish to speak, they may do so for up to three minutes. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Do I have a nomination of a Member to hold the office of Minister of Justice?

Mr Weir: I have great pleasure in nominating Paul Givan for the position of Minister of Justice.

Mr Speaker: Mr Paul Givan has been nominated. Will he accept the nomination?

Mr Givan: I accept the nomination, Mr Speaker.

Mr Weir: I took great pleasure in proposing the name of my colleague and friend Paul Givan for the post of Minister of Justice.

Some time ago, when the House took on the role of justice, some naysayers in our society predicted that the sky was about to fall. Indeed, there were dire predictions of what would happen if responsibility for justice came to the House. It is clear to everyone, and particularly recently to the electorate, that those fears have been unfounded.

It is a sign of the growing maturity of the House that we have moved things forward to the extent that, with the occasional exception, no Member would now oppose the devolution of policing and

justice. It is the opportunity for us to shape our destiny. For many of our constituents, the issues of law and order and of justice lie at the very heart of our society, and it is in that spirit of moving things forward that I propose Paul Givan for the post of Justice Minister.

I will give some background. Paul grew up in a family involved in the Prison Service — I should say on the right side of the prison walls. Therefore, he is someone who, it might be said, has been in apprenticeship for this job for all his life. He is also someone who in public life has experience of government, serving first as a local councillor and then as a special adviser to Edwin Poots, who was then Minister of the Environment. Latterly, as a Member of the Assembly, he has served with distinction on the Justice Committee. The sort of vision that Paul can bring to the post will benefit all society.

As a party, one of our key pledges was tougher sentences. We believe that the criminal needs to be tackled. At times, too many people in the justice system still get off with too light a sentence. It is important that we have someone in post who will fight for those issues at the heart of government, and Paul is well placed to do so. It is a marker of something that we want to see happen and to which we will come back if we are unsuccessful today. Should we fail to gain cross-community support, we will not be obstructive and stand in the way of appointing a Justice Minister. However, I believe that Paul has demonstrated the experience and ability for the post and will provide the fresh face at the Department of Justice that can help to take forward society in Northern Ireland. I am therefore happy to have proposed Paul Givan.

Mr McNarry: Last Friday, at the talks preparing for today, which, I might say, seems to have gone rather well so far, we put forward a practical proposition to run all Departments under d'Hondt, in the spirit of respecting all mandates and of connecting or reconnecting the work that we do in this institution to the people who sent us here. Our best efforts were not reciprocated, and, despite some other parties seeing merit in our proposals, we find that the Alliance Party will not concede on policing and justice.

I must say that I am somewhat surprised by the name that the DUP put forward, but, nevertheless, on behalf of the Ulster Unionists, I recognise him as someone with whom I have

served on the Justice Committee, where I could see the obvious talents that were there. I like the idea that he might be a bit more right-wing than some of his colleagues. That having been said, it may — *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr McNarry: Members will also have taken on board the cautionary note that Mr Givan's proposer implanted in the debate, which was, "if we are unsuccessful". It may indeed turn out that, as in the past, intransigence will be rewarded with a ministerial position, but that remains to be seen. We are where we are today. We are going through a process that will be repeated in 12 months' time, when we will run d'Hondt for all 12 Departments. Therefore, what we are doing now seems somewhat confusing for the public who may be watching or listening.

The Ulster Unionists will work this process. We will recognise the Minister of Justice and the role that he — it is likely to be a he — will have in the Government during the time of his or her office. The issues that will confront such a Minister will require the guidance and indeed support of all parties. We will play our role in protecting that Minister because —

Mr Speaker: The Member should draw his remarks to a close.

Mr McNarry: That Minister will have in his power the lives of all our citizens. Whoever that is, we will play our part. We wish that Minister well.

Mr Allister: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will reserve my comments until we get beyond what I suspect is the stalking horse candidate.

Mr Agnew: I am delighted to be in a position to speak today after having been elected by the people of North Down. I take the opportunity of my maiden speech to thank all those who put their faith in me to represent them as their MLA —

Mr Speaker: Order. The debate is about the nomination of a Justice Minister. I appreciate that the Member may be very anxious to make his maiden speech, but I suggest that it should not be made during this debate.

Mr Agnew: No problem, Mr Speaker. It was seen as a success of the last Assembly that we were able to devolve policing and justice to Northern Ireland. However, it will be a failure of this Assembly if we do not agree that, in

future, we should treat the position of Justice Minister like any other. My party has no great love of d'Hondt. However, for as long as other Ministries are appointed by d'Hondt, we believe that the Justice Minister should be appointed in that manner.

I accept that we are where we are. We all know how we got here. However, if we are truly to keep Northern Ireland moving forward, we have to keep our politics moving forward. Treating the Justice Ministry like any other is part of that process. I wish the new Justice Minister — whoever that may be — the best of luck in their role. However, I hope that, when we come to review the process by which we appoint the Justice Minister, we will agree that that portfolio should be treated like any other.

12.30 pm

Mr Speaker: That concludes the debate. Before we proceed to the Question, I remind the House that the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that the resolution must be passed by parallel consent.

Question put, That Mr Paul Givan be the Minister of Justice.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 37; Noes 51.

AYES

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr S Anderson and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Nationalist:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff,

Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Other:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McDevitt and Mr McKay.

Total votes	88	Total Ayes	37	[42.0%]
Nationalist Votes	42	Nationalist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Unionist Votes	37	Unionist Ayes	37	[100%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McNarry, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Speaker: Do I have a nomination for a Member to hold the office of Minister of Justice?

Ms Ritchie: I would like to nominate my colleague Alban Maginness, who is a gentleman of considerable ability, not only political but legal. He has a considerable background as a practising barrister of many years and would be eminently qualified to undertake the position of Minister of Justice.

We believe that it should have been possible — indeed, it still is possible — to have an agreed running of d'Hondt. That is the only way —

Mr Weir: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Perhaps you could clarify something. I thought that the person who had been nominated had to accept that nomination before we have speeches on the issue. The leader of the SDLP seems to have got ahead of herself a little bit.

Mr Speaker: I believe that Ms Ritchie is trying to make the nomination and say what she is going to say. I will then ask the Member whether he accepts.

Ms Ritchie: We believe that d'Hondt should have been the process for selecting and electing the Justice Minister. We said that at negotiations the other night, and we maintain that position. We believe that allocating

Ministries to those who do not have the legitimate democratic entitlement simply serves to undermine democracy. It is a gross political distortion when two parties —

Mr Speaker: Order. I am trying to be careful not to widen this debate. The Member should speak about the person who has been nominated, not about the process. We have debated the process and have now moved on to nominations. I remind the whole House of that.

Ms Ritchie: I nominate Mr Maginness, a person who is eminently qualified for the job.

Mr Speaker: Mr Maginness, do you accept the nomination?

Mr A Maginness: I do.

Mr Speaker: The nomination is now open for debate, which I remind Members is about the nomination of the Member, not a wider debate. That debate has already happened in the Chamber, and it is over. The debate is now about the person who has been nominated by Ms Ritchie.

12.45 pm

Mr McNarry: As the House appreciated my earlier remarks, in deference to you and to the House, I have no further comment to make.

Mr Speaker: Mr Agnew is on the list as well. Does the Member wish to say anything?

Mr Agnew: I refer to my previous comments. I have nothing further to say.

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed to the Question, I again remind the House that the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that the resolution must be passed by parallel consent.

Question put, That Mr Alban Maginness be the Minister of Justice.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 42; Noes 46.

AYES

Nationalist:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt,

Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr D Bradley and Mr W Clarke.

NOES

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr S Anderson and Mr G Robinson.

Total votes	88	Total Ayes	42	[47.7%]
Nationalist Votes	42	Nationalist Ayes	42	[100.0%]
Unionist Votes	37	Unionist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result:

Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McNarry, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Speaker: Do I have a nomination of a Member to hold the office of Minister of Justice?

Mr Elliott: I nominate Mr Danny Kinahan, and I will not make a long speech about him, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Mr Kinahan, do you accept the nomination?

Mr Kinahan: I accept the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Mr Elliott, do you want to say anything further?

Mr Elliott: Clearly, Danny Kinahan has been a citizen of Northern Ireland. He knows how the

Prison Service operates, and he has served in Her Majesty's forces and the Ministry of Defence. I think that he would make an excellent Justice Minister. Depending on what level of justice you require, I am sure that Danny can come up with something for it. He is our nomination, and we support him.

Mr Speaker: No other Member has asked to speak.

Question put, That Mr Danny Kinahan be the Minister of Justice.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 52; Noes 37.

AYES

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McCallister and Mr B McCrea.

NOES

Nationalist:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McMullan and Mr Molloy.

Total votes	89	Total Ayes	52	[58.4%]
Nationalist Votes	29	Nationalist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Unionist Votes	51	Unionist Ayes	51	[100.0%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	1	[11.1%]

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result:

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McClarty, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Speaker: Do we have a nomination for a Member to hold the office of Minister of Justice?

Dr Farry: It is my great honour and privilege to propose my party leader David Ford as Minister of Justice. At this stage, David Ford is the only person capable of achieving cross-community support in the Chamber according to the method of election of the Justice Minister as set out in legislation. Other parties have had the opportunity to make their nominations, and those nominations have fallen.

David Ford brings great attributes to the post of Justice Minister. Indeed, he is the outgoing Justice Minister and served with great distinction over the past year. The devolution of justice was a controversial issue this time a year ago. Today, the devolution of policing and justice is widely accepted across the community, and David Ford has established the confidence of all stakeholders and wider society in the performance of his functions.

David Ford has a strong track record of delivery over the past year, including an addendum to the Programme for Government in which he addressed most of the issues. He fulfilled all the requirements set out in the Hillsborough agreement of February 2010 and passed a long, comprehensive piece of justice legislation. He has established a clear sense of direction for the justice system in Northern Ireland in tackling difficult issues such as legal aid and prison reform. He secured additional resources for the police in order to combat the dissident threat, set out a programme for how we better manage offending and set out a strong, liberal direction in which we can take justice forward with the central objective of ensuring that we promote community safety and that the people of Northern Ireland are safe at home, on the

streets and in their work places. He would make an excellent Justice Minister and can, once again, command the support of the House and the wider community.

Mr Speaker: Mr Ford has been nominated. Mr Ford, do you accept the nomination?

Mr Ford: Yes, Mr Speaker, I accept nomination.

Mr Speaker: The nomination will now be open for debate.

Mr Allister: Having appointed, on Thursday and today, something like 15 Ministers without debate and without a vote, I suppose that we should be grateful for the opportunity to debate this proposition, although we all see through and know the charade of the past hour. There were deliberate stalking horse candidates to bring us to this point, when the two blocs in the House will restore Mr Ford to his office. He always was a placeman of the DUP and Sinn Féin in the House, and it is because he has not disappointed them that he will be re-elected today.

1.15 pm

Mr Ford has, of course, disappointed those who wished to see a firm hand on the tiller of justice. In many respects he has been the Minister of escapes. You, Mr Speaker, might think that you have an open-door policy, but it is nothing compared to Mr Ford's. Mr Ford has lost more prisoners than I have lost elections. *[Laughter.]* Some might say that that takes some beating.

On the serious issue of dealing with the upsurge in IRA terrorism, I fear that, in Minister Ford, we have someone who does not really have a notion of how to face it.

The election of Mr Ford, which will inevitably happen today, also underscores something of the inequity of this House. His election, courtesy of those who elect him, will deliver an anti-unionist majority on the Executive. It also achieves the remarkable feat of setting mathematics on its head, as 16 equals one and eight equals two when it comes to the filling of Executive places. That, without elaboration, is a commentary on the gross inequity that lies at the heart of administration in this Province. And so, I will not be able to lend my support to the re-election of someone to the no-unionist-need-apply, gerrymandered post of Justice Minister.

Question put, That Mr David Ford be the Minister of Justice.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 73; Noes 28.

AYES

Nationalist:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Dickson and Ms Lo.

NOES

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Other:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Allister and Mr Eastwood.

Total votes	101	Total Ayes	73	[72.3%]
Nationalist Votes	42	Nationalist Ayes	29	[69.0%]
Unionist Votes	50	Unionist Ayes	36	[72.0%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	8	[88.9%]

The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result: Mr McClarty.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (by parallel consent):

That Mr David Ford be the Minister of Justice.

1.30 pm

Mr Speaker: I now ask Mr Ford to affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Ford: I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr David Ford appointed Minister of Justice.

Mr Speaker: I now confirm that Mr Ford, having affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office, has taken up office as Minister of Justice, in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act 1998. I offer him my congratulations.

As agreed by the Business Committee, I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 1.30 pm.

On resuming —

2.30 pm

Statutory Committees

Mr Speaker: This is a business motion, so there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Orders 46 and 47, this Assembly determines that 12 Statutory Committees shall be established, as follows:

- the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development;*
- the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure;*
- the Committee for Education;*
- the Committee for Employment and Learning;*
- the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment;*
- the Committee for the Environment;*
- the Committee for Finance and Personnel;*
- the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety;*
- the Committee for Justice;*
- the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister;*
- the Committee for Regional Development;*
- the Committee for Social Development.*

Terms of reference, quorum and composition of the Committees shall be as prescribed in Standing Orders 48 and 49. — [Mr P Ramsey.]

Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons

Mr Speaker: I shall ask the nominating officer or acting nominating officer of each political party, in the order required by the formula contained in Standing Order 48, to select an available Statutory Committee and to nominate a person who is a member of his or her party and a Member of the Assembly to be its Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

I shall now call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson, as nominating officer of the party that has the highest figure under the formula, to select an available Statutory Committee and nominate a person who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly to be its Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

Mr P Robinson: I nominate Paul Givan to be Chairperson of the Committee for Justice.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Givan: I am.

Mr Paul Givan appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Justice.

Mr Speaker: I now call on Mr Martin McGuinness to select an available Statutory Committee and to nominate a Member to be its Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

Mr M McGuinness: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Molaim Conor Murphy mar Chathaoirleach. I propose that Conor Murphy be Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Murphy: Glacaim leis an phost. I accept the post.

Mr Conor Murphy appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Mr Speaker: I call again on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I nominate Mervyn Storey to be the Chairperson of the Committee for Education.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Storey: I am willing to take up the position for which I have been nominated, Mr Speaker.

Mr Mervyn Storey appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Education.

Mr Speaker: I call on Mr Elliott to select an available Statutory Committee and to nominate a Member to be its Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

Mr Elliott: I select the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and nominate myself to be Chairperson.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has nominated himself? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Elliott: I should have done it all while I was up, Mr Speaker. I accept.

Mr Tom Elliott appointed Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Speaker: I call again on Mr Martin McGuinness to select an available Statutory Committee and to nominate a Member to be its Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

Mr M McGuinness: Molaim Michelle Gildernew mar Chathaoirleach. I propose that Michelle Gildernew be Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which she has been nominated?

Ms Gildernew: Glacaim leis an phost. I accept the position.

Ms Michelle Gildernew appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Speaker: I call on Ms Margaret Ritchie to select and nominate.

Ms Ritchie: I propose that Alban Maginness chair the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr A Maginness: Yes, Mr Speaker, I am.

Mr Alban Maginness appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Speaker: I call again on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I nominate Paul Frew to be the Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Frew: I am, Mr Speaker.

Mr Paul Frew appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Speaker: I call again on Mr Martin McGuinness to select and nominate.

Mr M McGuinness: Molaim Alex Maskey mar Chathaoirleach. I propose that Alex Maskey be Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr A Maskey: Glacaim leis an phost. I accept the post, Mr Speaker.

Mr Alex Maskey appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development.

Mr Speaker: I call again on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I nominate Michelle McIlveen to be the Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which she has been nominated?

Miss M McIlveen: Yes, Mr Speaker, I am.

Miss Michelle McIlveen appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Mr Speaker: I call on Mr David Ford to select and nominate.

Mr Ford: I nominate Anna Lo as Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which she has been nominated?

Ms Lo: Yes, Mr Speaker, I am.

Ms Anna Lo appointed Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment.

Mr Speaker: I call again on Mr Tom Elliott to select and nominate.

Mr Elliott: I select the Committee for Employment and Learning and nominate Mr Basil McCrea to be Chairperson.

Mr Speaker: I announce the appointment of Basil McCrea as Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Mr Kennedy: Is he going to take it?

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take it?

Mr B McCrea: I am happy to, Mr Speaker. You anticipated correctly.

Mr Speaker: I apologise.

I call again on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I nominate Jimmy Spratt to be Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Spratt: I am.

Mr Jimmy Spratt appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call on Mr Martin McGuinness to select and nominate.

Mr M McGuinness: Molaim Raymond McCartney mar Leas Chathaoirleach. I nominate Raymond McCartney to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Justice.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr McCartney: Glacaim leis an phost. I am.

Mr Raymond McCartney appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Justice.

Mr Speaker: I call again on Ms Margaret Ritchie to select and nominate.

Ms Ritchie: I nominate Mrs Dolores Kelly as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which she has been nominated?

Mrs D Kelly: Yes, I am.

Mrs Dolores Kelly appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I nominate Simon Hamilton to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Hamilton: I am.

Mr Simon Hamilton appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call on Mr Martin McGuinness to select and nominate.

Mr M McGuinness: Molaim Daithí McKay mar LeasChathaoirleach. I nominate Daithí McKay to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr McKay: Glacaim leis an phost, a Cheann Comhairle. I accept.

Mr Daithí McKay appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I nominate Tom Buchanan to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Buchanan: I am.

Mr Thomas Buchanan appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call on Mr Tom Elliott to select and nominate.

Mr Elliott: I select the Deputy Chair of the Committee for Education and nominate Mr David McNarry.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr McNarry: Yes, I am.

Mr David McNarry appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call on Mr Martin McGuinness to select and nominate.

Mr M McGuinness: Molaim Pat Doherty mar LeasChathaoirleach. I nominate Pat Doherty to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Doherty: I accept the appointment, a Cheann Comhairle.

Mr Pat Doherty appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: In his absence due to illness but with his consent, I nominate William Irwin to be Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Mr Speaker: I confirm that I have a letter from Mr William Irwin in which he accepts the position of Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Mr William Irwin appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call on Ms Margaret Ritchie to select and nominate.

Ms Ritchie: I nominate Mr Dominic Bradley as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr D Bradley: Glacaim leis an cheapachán, a Cheann Comhairle. I accept the appointment.

Mr Dominic Bradley appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I nominate Jim Wells to be Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Wells: Yes.

Mr Jim Wells appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

2.45 pm

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call Mr Martin McGuinness to select a nominee.

Mr M McGuinness: Molaim Mickey Brady mar LeasChathaoirleach. I nominate Mickey Brady to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Brady: Glacaim leis an phost, a Cheann Comhairle. I accept.

Mr Mickey Brady appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call Mr David Ford to select a nominee.

Mr Ford: I nominate Chris Lyttle as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Lyttle: Yes, Mr Speaker, I accept.

Mr Chris Lyttle appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Speaker: I thank Members for their patience. That concludes the appointment of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Statutory Committees. I congratulate them and wish them well in their jobs.

Standing Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons

Mr Speaker: The next item of business on the Order Paper is the appointment of Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Standing Committees. I am required to supervise the appointment of a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to each Standing Committee, other than the Business Committee, in accordance with the procedure set out in Standing Order 51. I shall ask the nominating officer or acting nominating officer of each political party, in the order required by the formula contained in Standing Order 51(2), to select an available Standing Committee and nominate a person who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly to be Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of it. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

I shall now call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson, as nominating officer of the party that has the highest figure under the formula laid down in Standing Orders, to select an available Standing Committee and nominate a person who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly to be Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of it.

Mr P Robinson: I select the Assembly and Executive Review Committee and nominate Stephen Moutray as Chairperson.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Moutray: I am, Mr Speaker.

Mr Stephen Moutray appointed Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

Mr Speaker: I now call Mr Martin McGuinness to select an available Standing Committee and nominate a person who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly to be Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of it.

Mr M McGuinness: Molaim Paul Maskey mar Chathaoirleach. I nominate Paul Maskey to be Chair of the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr P Maskey: Glacaim leis an phost, a Cheann Comhairle. I will.

Mr Paul Maskey appointed Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I select the Standards and Privileges Committee and nominate Alastair Ross as Chairman.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Ross: I accept, Mr Speaker.

Mr Alastair Ross appointed Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Mr Speaker: I now call Mr Tom Elliott to select an available Standing Committee and nominate a person who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly to be Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of it.

Mr Elliott: I select the Audit Committee and nominate Mr Danny Kinahan as Chairperson.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Kinahan: I am willing, Mr Speaker.

Mr Danny Kinahan appointed Chairperson of the Audit Committee.

Mr Speaker: I now call Mr Martin McGuinness to select an available Standing Committee and nominate a person who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly to be Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of it.

Mr M McGuinness: Molaim Sue Ramsey mar Chathaoirleach. I nominate Sue Ramsey to be Chair of the Procedures Committee.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which she has been nominated?

Ms S Ramsey: I am, a Cheann Comhairle.

Ms Sue Ramsey appointed Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures.

Mr Speaker: I now call Ms Margaret Ritchie to select a nominee.

Ms Ritchie: I nominate Joe Byrne to be Deputy Chair of the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Byrne: Yes, Mr Speaker, I accept.

Mr Joe Byrne appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr Speaker: I call the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I nominate Trevor Clarke to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr T Clarke: I am.

Mr Trevor Clarke appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call Mr Martin McGuinness to select and nominate.

Mr M McGuinness: Molaim Pat Sheehan mar LeasChathaoirleach. I nominate Pat Sheehan to be Deputy Chair of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Sheehan: Glacaim leis an phost, a Cheann Comhairle. I accept the post.

Mr Pat Sheehan appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I nominate David Hilditch to be Deputy Chairperson of the Audit Committee.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Hilditch: I accept, Mr Speaker.

Mr David Hilditch appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Audit Committee.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call Mr Ford to select and nominate.

Mr Ford: I nominate Kieran McCarthy to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr McCarthy: Yes, Mr Speaker, I am willing to take up the office.

Mr Kieran McCarthy appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the appointment of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Standing Committees.

Private Members' Business

Principal Deputy Speaker

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is a motion on a Principal Deputy Speaker. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour for this debate. The proposer will have five minutes in which to propose the motion and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have three minutes.

Mr Weir: I beg to move

That this Assembly agrees that there shall be a Principal Deputy Speaker and directs the Committee on Procedures, as its first priority, to table the necessary amendments to Standing Orders by 6 June 2011.

I am sure that the motion will capture the headlines tomorrow as, obviously, the key bit of business in the Chamber. I believe that this is a relatively straightforward proposal, so I hope not to detain the House too long in connection with it. It is a proposal that is grounded in a degree of common sense. The position is that, although the principle of having a Principal Deputy Speaker is accepted, the motion essentially sets the ball rolling to establish the role and, in terms of the detail, tasks the Committee on Procedures with tabling the necessary amendments by 6 June.

In addition to you, Mr Speaker, we have three Deputy Speakers who are elected. However, at present, when it comes to either a line of succession or protocol, there is no indication of who should be the principal person who should take your place when you are tied up or away, perhaps on parliamentary business for the Assembly, or when invitations clash, as happened on one occasion.

The motion sets forth a relatively straightforward and simple solution and, in effect, sets up a chain of command to a degree that one of the Deputy Speakers, to be decided by the Assembly, will be the Principal Deputy Speaker. That person is meant, if you like, to fill in on such occasions. From that point of view, I do not envisage that the Principal Deputy Speaker would be given any additional powers. Although that will be a matter on which the Committee on Procedures will deliberate, it is essentially a protocol issue. Similarly, I do not believe that this should lead to any additional expenditure

on behalf of the Assembly. Indeed, I do not think that the Assembly would find favour with that. Therefore, this is a common-sense solution to the issue, so I am happy to propose it to the House.

Mr McCallister: There has not been a great deal of clarity on what we are actually talking about with this issue. I suppose that the Speaker has two main sets of functions: first, those that are categorised by the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and in Standing Orders; and, secondly, broadly representational duties. Mr Weir argued that this would merely clarify protocol. However, one would have to question how we have survived since 1998 without having a Principal Deputy Speaker. So I am not sure that that argument stands up to a great deal of scrutiny.

We have issues. This seems to me very much like part of the carve-up. There will probably not be many surprises as to who the candidate for Principal Deputy Speaker is. I would be surprised if it turns out to be John Dallat.

A Member: So would he.

Mr McCallister: That is right: he would be even more shocked. We have issues with supporting the proposal because of —

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Certainly. It seems purely about continuing the carve-up.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. Obviously, his time is very short, so I will keep this brief. This is done in other jurisdictions. For example, the Mother of Parliaments has, effectively, a Deputy Speaker who is in a position above the other Deputy Speakers. If the Ulster Unionists oppose this, they will not be following the protocol and procedures that apply in the Mother of Parliaments.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

Mr McCallister: I am sure that Mr Weir knows perfectly well that, having got through from 1998 with the arrangements that we have had, particularly in the past term, there were no occasions when it proved hugely problematic for you, Mr Speaker, or the three Deputy Speakers. One imagines that the same will apply in this term. You were elected last Thursday, and there are three Deputy Speakers in post. One wonders why we need to elevate one slightly

above the other two. There is no logic behind Mr Weir's argument that it should be done just because it happens in Westminster. The arrangements are to give confidence to all sides of the House that they will be recognised. The Speaker has been elected from the largest party in this Chamber, with the Deputy Speakers coming from the three next largest parties. That seems to be a sensible way of doing it.

Of course, it causes other problems. If the Speaker is not available, will the Principal Deputy Speaker always represent the Speaker at certain events? On a royal visit, for example, would the Principal Deputy Speaker step into the Speaker's role? That will cause problems, whereas the problem does not arise in the system that we have at the minute of three equal Deputy Speakers. We could be setting ourselves up for a difficulty that need not arise. I question the wisdom of going down that road, which is why we oppose the motion.

Mr P Ramsey: Like John McCallister, the SDLP will resist this. I am afraid, Peter, that I am not sure of your logic in putting forward the motion, other than that it seems to be a two-party carve-up, along with the arrangements, as we all know now, for the rotation of the Speaker in three years and then two. That is the deal in essence, and it creates a hierarchy of Speakers. People talk about equality and an island of equals; in this case the mantra is that Deputy Speakers are equal, but some are more equal than others.

The SDLP is concerned that there will be extra layers of bureaucracy. We do not know, for example, whether it will affect the independence of the Speaker's role and office. When we sat down on our first day to elect a Speaker and three Deputy Speakers, it was the case that the integrity of the office would remain intact. This way now, it clearly will not. It will leave one Deputy Speaker in a principal role. We may as well not have the other two Deputy Speakers; John Dallat and Roy Beggs may pack their bags because, by all accounts, there will be no — *[Interruption.]* Maybe some of the DUP Members are right: they should pack their bags, if that is what they mean.

We are concerned that there is a second-class citizenship now coming into the Deputy Speaker's role. We will resist it now formally in plenary, and we will resist it when it comes to trying to change Standing Orders. Although Peter

Weir made reference to there being no financial arrangements, we need to be absolutely clear that the remuneration and any pension will not change for any principal officer. I will give way if somebody who supports the motion wants to answer that.

We do not need or want this extra layer of bureaucracy, and we will not support it.

3.00 pm

Mr Lunn: We do not have any particular objection at this stage, although perhaps we will wait to see what happens before 6 June, when we will get more detail. However, we assume that the role will be unpaid and that there will be no extra pension benefits, although we wonder whether it will involve extra duties for the individual who is elected Principal Deputy Speaker. Does it follow that the Principal Deputy Speaker will have a better chance of becoming Speaker in the future? It has already been agreed that the Speaker will change in three years' time, and I imagine that the person who is eventually elected Principal Deputy Speaker will follow on from you, Mr Speaker. All that said, we have no objection, but neither would we have brought the matter forward, had we had the option. It seems to be slightly pointless, but we will reserve judgement.

Mr Kinahan: I am pleased to speak on this matter, but I should first congratulate those who have been appointed to their positions today. I feel very sad that I am not the Justice Minister, despite all the support that I got. I reiterate that that selection was not right, and here we have a hint or smell of another deal being done that we do not all know about.

I hoped that, as the Assembly started, consultations and discussions would include all parties. I know that we have a chance to discuss it now, but we will not find out exactly what the role is until later. I hoped that we would see everyone being included at all times, rather than just paying lip service to the idea. I smell jobs for the boys. We would like to know what is behind the deal and what is on the other side of it, if, indeed, there is something on the other side. We have found out that extra things appear all the time from St Andrews, Hillsborough and, indeed, maybe from the beginning of this session. We would like to know what is behind them.

We have three good Deputy Speakers. They are equal, from all parties and can do the role just

as well. We could follow the line of the argument about the Mother of Parliaments, but there are more than 600 people there, and a great deal of different duties and work is needed. I would like a promise that the role will not be paid more and that there are no extra costs, rather than finding out later that other costs have come in. In addition, I would like clarification that, if there were a royal visit or something of that nature and the Speaker was ill or otherwise indisposed — not that I would wish that on you — someone will be here to look after things. That is the point of having three Deputy Speakers: the job can be rotated. We need to know a great deal more. Therefore, the Ulster Unionist Party opposes the proposal, and we want to know more about what money and deals are behind it.

Mr Allister: Last Thursday, when the arrangement was announced that the DUP would keep the Speaker's seat warm for Sinn Féin for three years, I predicted that it was part of a sordid deal. Within an hour, we had the first manifestation of that: this motion was produced. One thing is abundantly clear: there is no practical, logical or rational need for the proposition. For the past four years, the House appears to have functioned, within its limited confines, perfectly adequately with three co-equal Deputy Speakers.
[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: Suddenly, we discover that we need a hierarchy of Speakers and we need a Principal Deputy Speaker. What a slight on the two who will be passed over and are now here merely to make up the numbers. It is quite clear to me who will fill the post. Perhaps Mr Weir gave it away when, in the course of giving the job description, he talked about putting in place a chain of command. I wonder who that would best suit. It is clear that the position is the outworking of an arrangement, a totalitarianism that has begun to hallmark the DUP and Sinn Féin in the House as they share the mantra of "ourselves alone"; create offices for themselves; grasp those offices to themselves; and further bring the House into disrepute by reason of the carve-up of all offices between them. Their inability to tolerate dissent and an alternative view or give the light of day to Members of minor parties is indicative of that totalitarian attitude.

What will be the powers of the Principal Deputy Speaker? Mr Weir tells us that there will be no

powers. What is the point then? That is not what Sinn Féin told the 'Belfast Telegraph'. Last Friday, a Sinn Féin spokesman said:

"It will not be dissimilar to the way it works between the First and Deputy First Minister".

What is the truth? Is this a Principal Deputy Speaker with additional powers? Mr Speaker, will you have to share with him the rulings you are going to make? Will you have to share your official functions with him? Will he become joined to you at the hip, as the First Minister is to the deputy First Minister? Or is Mr Weir right?

Mr Speaker: Will the Member please draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Allister: I conclude by saying this: the constant elevation of Sinn Féin by the DUP within the structures of this House is something that many thought they would never live to see. Of course, many innocent people, like Eric Lutton, never did.

Mr Speaker: I must now insist that the Member bring his remarks to a close.

Mr McClarty: I do not intend to delay the House longer than is necessary. Everything that can be said has been said already in the debate.

Earlier this afternoon, we all witnessed the farce of electing the Justice Minister, the outcome of which was going to be nothing other than that which had already been decided outside the House. The decision regarding this issue has also been made outside the House. I appeal to the House not to try to mend something that is not broken. I speak from experience, having served four years as Deputy Speaker. The Deputy Speakers and the Speaker met every Monday and Tuesday morning at 9.45 am. We looked at the business for the day and arranged which Deputy Speaker should take over from Mr Speaker, if he had other duties to perform that day. That was the right way to go about it because all the Deputy Speakers were equal. By passing this measure and allowing it to happen, we will create a hierarchy that was never intended.

I note that the Procedures Committee has to report by 6 June, which is D-Day, Deputy Speaker day. I oppose the motion.

Mr Agnew: I have yet to hear a compelling reason for the appointment of a Principal Deputy Speaker. Nothing in the running of the

last Assembly highlighted the need for such a position, and there is no public demand for it. I see no way in which the introduction of a position of Principal Deputy Speaker will help the effective and efficient running of the Assembly. As we have just heard from a former Deputy Speaker, it is clear that the current system is working fine.

I can only assume that this post is being proposed as a token gift to the party that takes up the role rather than because of any specific need. I, for one, think we should have more respect for the institutions than to give out token positions. If there is a need for it, fine, but I am yet to be convinced. I agree with Mr McClarty: if it is not broken, there is no reason to fix it. I oppose the motion.

Mr Speaker: I call on Mr Paul Maskey to conclude the debate. He has five minutes.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I will not take the full five minutes; I assure you of that. Nine Members spoke, including me. Although an hour was set aside for the debate, it was over quickly. We have to be thankful for that.

Sinn Féin will support the motion, which is in the names of both the DUP and Sinn Féin. We look at this issue as we do with anything else. When there are Committee Chairpersons, there are also Committee Deputy Chairpersons who are prepared to step in. I know that there are Deputy Speakers; however, we are looking at the Principal Deputy Speaker. We recognise the fact that the job of the Ceann Comhairle, the Speaker of the Assembly, is very busy. He performs many different duties and tasks and attends hundreds of events every year.

A Principal Deputy Speaker is a good sign and will hopefully be a good way for someone to build up further experience when it comes to the possibility of taking on the job of Speaker. It is about leadership and about showing that the Assembly can work together. We are in for power sharing: why not power-share on the job of Speaker by having a Principal Deputy Speaker?

Some of the other parties said that the post is about jobs for the boys and is a carve-up between the two biggest parties. However, when their parties were the two largest in the Chamber, they did not offer too much to anyone else either. So, they are doing a bit of showboating today. I heard Jim Allister going

on about showboating, but that is exactly what he is doing. Many people in the Chamber — certainly me — are already fed up listening to the same rhetoric that we have heard in the past couple of days from the likes of Jim.

Mr Allister: Get used to it.

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr P Maskey: He can chirp all he wants from the sidelines but, at the end of the day, it is a lonely voice in a lonely corner in one part of the Chamber. We are all about moving on collectively and making sure that all the parties in here work collectively to show the people outside this House that we can do this. For far too long, that was not the case. I urge all parties in the Chamber to support the motion today to show the outside world and the people who have put us all into our positions in the Assembly that we can work together.

3.15 pm

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 72; Noes 31.

AYES

Ms M Anderson, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr G Kelly, Mrs Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr S Anderson and Ms S Ramsey.

NOES

*Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs,
Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Copeland, Mr Dallat,
Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott,
Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy,
Mr Kinahan, Mr A Maginness, Mr McCallister,
Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt,
Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt,
Mr McNarry, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend,
Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCallister and
Mrs McKeivitt.*

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

*That this Assembly agrees that there shall be
a Principal Deputy Speaker and directs the
Committee on Procedures, as its first priority, to
table the necessary amendments to Standing
Orders by 6 June 2011.*

Adjourned at 3.24 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 23 May 2011

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matters of the Day

Dr Garret FitzGerald

Mr Speaker: Mr John Dallat has sought leave to make a statement on the death of Dr Garret FitzGerald, a matter that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Mr Dallat to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I will then call a representative from each of the other political parties, as agreed with the Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes in which to speak on the matter. Members know the convention: there will be no opportunity for interventions, questions or a vote on the matter. I will not take any points of order until the item of business is concluded. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Assembly for the opportunity to pay tribute to the late Dr Garret FitzGerald. I had the privilege and pleasure of attending the state funeral for Dr FitzGerald in Dublin yesterday. It provided me with an opportunity to reflect on the critical role he played in encouraging the political developments in the North, which I believe have enabled the Assembly to come into being and begin the process of building new relationships within Northern Ireland, between the North and South, between Ireland and Britain and, indeed, across the European Union.

I was very pleased that the congregation included a large and representative number of people from the North from both traditions and from many walks of life. All of them were there to pay their respects and say their farewells to a man with a great mind and a huge heart; a man of political integrity who spoke with one voice.

I first met Dr FitzGerald in the village of Park, County Derry, many years ago. I knew then, as a much younger person, that this was a man who would help bring peace to this part of Ireland

and help heal the wounds between North and South and between Britain and Ireland. If I was wrong in any way, it was in my underestimation of the huge obstacles that were placed in his way, as the campaign of violence continued and with the then Prime Minister of Britain, Margaret Thatcher's, infamous outburst, "Out. Out. Out." He endured, did not react, and, within a few months, signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which became the foundation stone upon which our political institutions are now built.

At the funeral Mass we were reminded that the Queen's historic visit to Ireland had just finished, and Dr FitzGerald was aware of that before he died. I feel sure that the vision of a new Ireland and a new relationship with Britain that he outlined over a cup of tea in Park all those years ago is now the new dawn that is at long last emerging in relationships between North and South and between Ireland and Britain.

As he was laid to rest, I knew that my first impression of this great man was the correct one. I feel very proud that my party, the SDLP, had the opportunity to work closely with Garret over many decades and to give him the support that he did not always get from others to develop initiatives such as the New Ireland Forum and the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which allowed us to open up new chapters in our history and, ultimately, the democratic institutions that we now enjoy. May he rest in peace.

Mr Campbell: We on this side of the House join in passing our sympathies to the family and friends of the late Garret FitzGerald. He lived a long and interesting life and had a career, both in politics and outside politics, on which many people commented. Now is not the time to elaborate on the differences that we had — Mr Dallat has just outlined some of them — but we found ourselves in agreement on the need to try to reach a political consensus. Of course, the

way in which and the speed with which we would arrive at that consensus took many and varied interpretations down through the years.

He was a Prime Minister of the neighbouring state to ours. He was a colourful figure, and one who was informed about events in our nation state. I am sure that many, both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland, will mourn his passing.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I think that all parties in the Assembly will agree that Garret FitzGerald was a man who, although of modest demeanour, made an enduring contribution to life on this island. He did it in his political contribution, his discussion, his thinking on the economy of the island and his challenging of the many sacred cows of political, social and economic life on this island. He challenged us all to move into the modern world and, on that basis, the representative attendance at his funeral yesterday was in itself an enduring tribute to quite a remarkable man.

Although it is understandable that people will attribute so many subsequent developments in political life to his particular contribution, I am very content to acknowledge that his contribution was always intended to be positive and constructive, and, in many instances, it was. I met him on only one occasion, and I was very impressed with his ability to get to the core of arguments and to give advice about how those issues might be addressed as we move forward.

Reference has been made to the situation arising from the New Ireland Forum and the recommendations of it. That was a discussion from which my party was excluded, and there were lessons to be learned from that experience as well. I found that Dr FitzGerald was prepared to acknowledge that.

The principles of inclusivity and developing a consensus approach to addressing outstanding problems were enunciated and identified and have subsequently been deployed across the political perspectives in this House and in Leinster House, and the island as a whole has benefitted. Let us remember a man who did good and gave service on behalf of us all.

Mr Elliott: I thank Mr Dallat for bringing this matter forward. If someone wanted to describe the lasting legacy of Garret FitzGerald, they would not need to look beyond last week. It was heartening to hear the reports that he survived

just long enough to be informed of the reception that Her Majesty The Queen was receiving in Dublin and throughout the Republic of Ireland.

The sea change in relations between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland can be traced back to the period in which Garret FitzGerald first took the helm. Throughout his long political life, which spanned several decades, he was firmly opposed to acts of violence and to the political representatives who sought to justify that violence. Indeed, during the hunger strikes, when republicans were engaged in an absurd propaganda campaign, rather than falling for their spin, he is remembered for facing down the IRA by laying the blame for that period firmly at its feet and for calling on it to cease unilaterally its terrorist actions. Aside from his political beliefs, he was also known as the leader who had the courage to call time on the unquestioned dominance of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland.

Garret FitzGerald also had roots in Northern Ireland. His mother came from an Ulster-Scots family — the McConnells — who were Presbyterian farmers and lived just south of Belfast. I also understand that Garret FitzGerald was connected to James Craig through a business relationship. That business is now a public bar just behind Queen's University.

The Ulster Unionist Party and I send our sympathies to the family of Garret FitzGerald and to all of his friends.

Mr Ford: Garret FitzGerald was not just a giant of a politician in Ireland; he was someone who had a deep love for humanity across the world. Indeed, as was stated at his funeral yesterday, he was someone who managed to combine a love of humanity with getting on with people, which is not something that politicians always manage.

I had the pleasure of meeting him for the first time at the Corrymeela Community Centre in Ballycastle just after Christmas 1972. Despite the fact that a Dáil election was pending and that there were many things for him to attend to in party headquarters and in his constituency of Dublin South East, he came to speak to a group of fairly opinionated young people. He spent a long day and well into the small hours of the following day discussing his view of the future of Ireland and relations between North and South. Early the next morning, he slipped away quietly

so as not to create any difficulties for those looking after him. That was my first experience of the man, and it was an example that we saw repeated throughout his public life.

We do not need to elaborate on all the work that he did for the peace process, the difficulties that he encountered, or the firm stance that he took to change the Irish state and relationships between North and South and to stand up for what he thought was right in every respect. However, as was pointed out, the fact that he lived to see a state visit to Dublin by the Queen is a fitting summation of his work to promote good relationships across this island and between our two islands. In that respect, he received his reward at the time of his passing. We should all be grateful and recognise the work that he did, which helped to lead to the process of our sitting here as a power-sharing Assembly.

Of course, he was not just a politician; he was also a family man. He was a devoted husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Today, we express our sympathy to those who miss him most.

Maghaberry Prison: Aaron Hogg

Mr Speaker: Mr Raymond McCartney has sought leave to make a statement on the recent death in Maghaberry prison, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Mr McCartney to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I will then call a representative from each of the other political parties, as agreed with the Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. Members know the convention, which is that there will be no opportunity for interventions, questions or a vote on the matter. I will not take any points of order until the item of business is concluded. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom ár gcomhbhrón a dhéanamh le teaghlach Aaron Hogg, a fuair bás i bpríosún Maghaberry inné. First, I express Sinn Féin's condolences to the family of Aaron Hogg, who died in Maghaberry prison yesterday. I also want to echo the words of condolence and empathy spoken by the director general of the Prison Service, Colin McConnell, to all who have to contend with this death.

12.15 pm

However, this is the third death in as many weeks in our prisons. On 5 May, the day of the election, Samuel Carson and Frances McKeown died in Hydebank Wood. I am aware that investigations are under way into all those deaths, and I have absolutely no doubt that they will be carried out in a professional and thorough way. As part of those investigations, we also have to examine whether there are proper resources and training in our prisons, and proper supervision of what are very vulnerable people. Indeed, we have to examine whether we need more mechanisms to ascertain who is vulnerable so that we can avoid such untimely deaths.

Mr Givan: Obviously, I am aware that investigations are taking place into this incident and the two at Hydebank. It is important that where lessons can be learned, the Prison Service implements them.

I, too, share the concerns expressed by Colin McConnell about the welfare of the staff who are having to deal with those incidents. Obviously, they are doing the best job that they can. Often, prison officers get emotionally attached when trying to reform individuals, and

incidents such as these affect them severely too. Our thoughts and prayers are with those staff as well as with the family.

Maghaberry has approximately 920 inmates. There is a very high number of remand prisoners, and this incident involved a remand prisoner. They are a volatile group, and the resources that need to be put in place there have to be made available. I know that the Prison Service is determined that such incidents do not happen again, and I am sure that the Justice Committee will want to look at this further. The Dame Anne Owers team has also been looking at how such incidents can be prevented, and the Committee will want to play its full role in working with the team.

Mr B McCrea: On Saturday last, I attended the funeral of a young man from my constituency who committed suicide. I had to spend some time with that young man and his family, and I understand the absolute tragedy that it is for all who have lost people in such circumstances. It is, therefore, not surprising, but incredibly distressing for all concerned, when we have to rise again to talk about the loss of Aaron Hogg. I also have a lot of sympathy for the staff who have to deal with such circumstances.

These things are but the tip of the iceberg. It is, perhaps, something that we really do need to look at. We need to peel back the onion and see what is going on. Many members of staff in the prison say to me repeatedly that there are occasions of self-harm, near misses, and absolute danger for all concerned. That is not something we can deal with in isolation.

I hope that the Minister of Justice, when he addresses the issue, gets to the bottom of it. Whether it is a lack of resources or having inappropriate people in inappropriate places, and I am not talking about staff but some of the more vulnerable people in those institutions, there is surely something that we can do. We cannot run an institution and have people end up being found dead in cells.

So, I send condolences on behalf of me and my party to the family and urge the Minister of Justice to deal properly and speedily with the matter for the benefit of all concerned.

Mr A Maginness: I also extend our sympathy and condolences to the family of the deceased. The death of any prisoner in custody, whether from natural causes or otherwise, is disturbing.

There have been quite a number of deaths of prisoners in custody over the past year or more, too many of them, unfortunately, as a result of suicide.

That is deeply disturbing, and I am sure that it is deeply disturbing for the Prison Service. Equally, it is disturbing for all of us in this House, and it is right and proper that Mr McCartney should raise the issue in today's business. He is quite right to call for better training, for better supervision and for more resources to prevent the untimely death of prisoners in custody.

It is probably too early to judge what happened in this instance. This case is still under investigation, and it would be premature to come to any conclusions at this point. However, I hope that whatever can be determined from this death is useful in preventing further untimely deaths in custody.

Mr Ford: As Minister and on behalf of my colleagues, I express sympathy to the family of Aaron Hogg on his death in Maghaberry jail and echo the sympathy that was expressed by Colin McConnell, the director general of the Prison Service. I also thank Raymond McCartney and others for their acknowledgement of the trauma and stress that is experienced not just by the family but by those who work in the prisons when such a death occurs.

As other Members have said, investigations are still under way not just into this death but into the other two that were reported earlier, and it is, therefore, inappropriate that we should go into any detail in the discussion.

I will receive further briefings immediately after I leave here, and I will certainly ensure that what can be done is done. However, we have to remember that, tragically, deaths in custody occur in every jurisdiction; they are not unique to our jurisdiction. That does not lessen the tragedy for the family or for the staff who are most closely involved, and we should express our sympathy to all of them this morning.

Assembly Business

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last Monday, at the beginning of proceedings, you gave direction on the use of proper names. In light of that ruling, I invite you to consider the logical and necessary extension of that approach to references in this House to the state of Northern Ireland so that the proper name — namely that of Northern Ireland — is used on all occasions. If it is right to use proper names in respect of parties and what are perceived to be their proper names and in respect of individuals, is it not also necessary to use the proper name “Northern Ireland” rather than the slights and slurs that are used so often? I ask you to consider that and rule upon it.

Mr Speaker: I was absolutely clear last Monday when I spoke on this particular subject, and I am absolutely clear today. It is absolutely clear that I expect Members, when they rise in their places, to call Members by their proper names. I also expect Members, when they are speaking about political parties, to call them by their proper names. On the other issues that the Member mentioned, let me take them away, consider them and come back to the Member.

Suspension of Standing Orders

Mr Dickson: I beg to move

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 23 May 2011.

Mr Speaker: Before I put the Question, I remind Members that the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 23 May 2011.

Ministerial Statement

Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety that he wishes to make a statement to the House.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I want to make a statement concerning the proposed establishment of a radiotherapy centre at the Altnagelvin Area Hospital site in Londonderry.

The Assembly will be aware that it was announced just prior to the dissolving of the last Assembly that funding was not available to allow for the proposed radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin to proceed as scheduled. One of the first things that I did on my appointment as Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety was to review all aspects of the proposal. On 17 May 2011, which was my second day in office, I visited the Altnagelvin Hospital site and met officials and staff of the Western Health and Social Care Trust, as well as patients, to gain a clearer understanding of the issue.

On Thursday 19 May, I visited the Belfast City Hospital cancer centre to identify how Northern Ireland's cancer needs are being met. Some 8,500 new cases of cancer are diagnosed each year in Northern Ireland, and, with an ageing population, that number is likely to increase. By the age of 75, one in three of us will have cancer.

Cancer is not something about which we can be complacent. Everyone in the Chamber will know someone, whether it is a family member, a friend, or, indeed, themselves, who has been affected by cancer. For some people, cancer is a life-threatening condition, but owing to medical advancements, good care and support, survival rates have improved. At present, approximately 60,000 people are living with cancer. However, we must do more to respond to the challenge of the condition. It is a challenge in terms of the resources required to treat and combat it and in terms of the sheer number of people affected by it. Although it is important to take every step that we can to encourage behaviours that reduce the risk of cancer, we need to ensure that we have the full range of effective treatments to tackle it.

Radiotherapy is one of the most effective means of beating cancer. Although the cancer centre at the Belfast City Hospital was designed to provide sufficient radiotherapy capacity for Northern Ireland up until 2015, measures are in place to ensure that sufficient capacity is available at the centre up until mid-2016, when the Altnagelvin unit was scheduled to open. However, we need to act now to ensure that the Altnagelvin unit proceeds as planned.

Following my consideration of the issues, I have decided that the delivery of the project is a high priority, and I have confirmed that I will make the necessary current and capital funding available. To delay or fail would be to miss a valuable opportunity to improve service provision for future cancer patients.

The proposal will deliver important benefits, not just for people living in the north-west but for Northern Ireland as a whole, as the regional cancer centre in Belfast City Hospital is operating close to its maximum capacity. The Department of Finance and Personnel has been informed and has approved the outline business case, which is known as OBC1. That means that the Western Trust can commence the first phase of the project immediately, which involves design and enabling works. It will also move to OBC2, which is the next stage in the process, during which the detail of the project will be finalised. I anticipate completion of construction of the facility in 2015, with its opening in mid-2016.

When visiting Altnagelvin, I met healthcare professionals and senior management, who made the case for the new unit. However, the most powerful advocates were not the consultants or the nurses but two patients, Pearse and Edna, who were receiving radiotherapy treatment in the Belfast City Hospital. They, by far, made the most powerful case for change. Edna explained how it took seven hours on a cold December day to travel to and from Belfast for 10 minutes' treatment. Clearly, such journeys are not conducive to the recovery process. Of the 14 patients in the ward, only two were well enough to speak to me. We should give thanks to God for good health and show compassion to those who are less fortunate than us.

The establishment of the new facility will mean that 90% of patients in Northern Ireland will be within one hour's travelling time of a radiotherapy service. That will greatly ease the

burden of travel on already ill and often frail patients. The location of the new centre in the north-west also provides the opportunity for genuine, sustainable and meaningful cross-border co-operation. It has the potential to deliver real mutual benefits to both jurisdictions.

12.30 pm

My primary responsibility is and always will be to ensure high-quality, sustainable health services for the people of Northern Ireland. The authorities in the Republic of Ireland have given firm assurances that they will fully fund their share of the costs so that there can be no question of detriment to the patients of Northern Ireland in terms of resources or access to services.

The proposed unit at Altnagelvin provides a significant opportunity to enhance the radiotherapy capacity in Northern Ireland and to make those services more accessible to cancer sufferers. It provides another vital piece of armoury to fight the illness.

On Saturday, I was with some incredibly brave people whose motto is "faugh a ballagh". This statement will "faugh a ballagh", or clear the way, for the radiotherapy centre to proceed. I intend to move forward with the project with all the urgency it so clearly warrants. I commend this statement to the Assembly.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Michelle Gildernew, Chair of the Committee, I remind the whole House, especially new Members, that Chairs of Committees have some latitude when putting a question to the various Ministers. This morning, Michelle Gildernew, as Chair of the Health Committee, will have some latitude before she develops her question. However, after that, I expect all other Members to ask the Minister just one question, which must relate to his statement. I do not expect other statements to be made. We have already had the Minister's statement.

Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As Chair of the Health Committee, I welcome the Minister's announcement this morning that he is giving the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Area Hospital the green light. I know that his decision will be greeted with enthusiasm and relief by the people of the north-west, who have campaigned long and

hard on the issue. I have spoken to the Pink Ladies a number of times, and I spoke to them when they were down here last week. It will also get a great welcome from the MLAs whose constituents are affected. As a result of the Minister's decision, cancer patients living in the north-west will no longer have to travel to Belfast for treatment, and we are all very aware of the burden that that has put on people who are seriously ill and have to undertake a 160-mile round trip, often three or four times a week.

I also want to make the point that this is good news not just for those living in Derry, Donegal, Tyrone etc but for everyone across the North as it will free up services and capacity for people receiving treatment in the Belfast area.

I also welcome the co-operation and the fact that the Irish Government are contributing financially. That is very much the way forward — we should be working together and joining up services so that our people get better value for money and we get better outcomes from the Health Service.

However, the success of the new unit at Altnagelvin will be predicated on its being staffed by experienced cancer specialists. I am aware that there have been recruitment problems in the Western Trust area with regard to attracting the staff required to run the unit. Will the Minister give an assurance that he will review the relevant recruitment policies as a matter of urgency?

Mr Poots: It is concerning that, on occasions, the Royal Colleges decide when a hospital stays open or closes and what services are provided to various hospitals. That issue is more significant in the west of the Province and is something that I wish to discuss with them at an early point to ensure that we are not left in the same situation as happened in mid-Ulster, where a hospital unit — an accident and emergency unit — was closed overnight, putting huge pressure on another accident and emergency unit. I do not believe that that was in the best interests of the people involved. We need to have better liaison with the Royal Colleges to ensure that our hospitals are properly manned and well enough equipped with the personnel to deal with the issues that those hospitals are supposed to provide care for.

Mr Wells: I am sure that the entire community will welcome this excellent announcement. No longer will the cancer patients of the north-west

be treated like political footballs. They will get the care that they need and deserve.

The previous Minister indicated that there was some doubt over the funding from the Irish Republic, whereas the Minister seems to be suggesting that it is copper-fastened. We have heard rumours that there may be a reduction in funding from the Irish Republic for the A5 project. Can the Minister give a categorical assurance that the funding from the Republic is guaranteed in this instance?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. The Irish Republic agreed to provide €19 million in capital funding for the project. They put that to us in writing, and I reaffirmed that matter with the Republic of Ireland's Minister for Health this morning. He indicated that he is happy for the project to proceed, refreshed the commitment to the €19 million funding and stood over the contents of the previous letter.

Mr Gardiner: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I, too, welcome the Minister's statement. It is good news, and I am pleased to hear that, at last, the Government of the Irish Republic have come up with their share of the funding. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Gardiner: Will the go-ahead for this worthy cause, this hospital, mean cuts to any other department in the Health Service?

Mr Poots: I will clarify that for the Member: the written confirmation received from the Republic of Ireland was sent to my predecessor, Mr McGimpsey. As I indicated, it was reaffirmed this morning during a telephone conversation that I had with Minister Reilly, but Minister McGimpsey had received written confirmation that the Irish Republic were putting €19 million into the project.

The Member asked about a detrimental effect on other services. In the first instance, we have to recognise that dealing with cancer is a priority. You cannot have waiting lists for cancer care; you need to be able to respond immediately to people's needs when they have cancer. Therefore, were that to be detrimental to something else, it would still be a priority.

We are looking at a budget of well over £4 billion and a recurrent cost of £3 million each year, which apparently could not be met. That equates to 0.075% of my budget. I believe that I can find £3 million without causing detriment

to any other areas of healthcare. In fact, we are looking at potentially identifying a further £30 million in savings on generic drugs. That will not have a negative impact on any patient. The greatest pressures that I have are the larger financial pressures of having to find £200 million this year, but the establishment of this facility will not have, and never would have had, a detrimental impact on any other health service.

Mr Durkan: On behalf of the SDLP, I welcome the Minister's statement and congratulate him on making it. I know that you, Mr Speaker, will also welcome the fact that this news will be warmly received in our constituency. Today's announcement from the Minister can be viewed only as a victory, not for any political party, for Derry or for any geographical area, but for common sense.

Although everyone will welcome the Minister's commitment of capital and current resources, it will be rendered meaningless without having the necessary human resources in place to ensure the smooth and effective running of the unit, as the Chair of the Committee mentioned. Will the Minister detail the exact staffing requirements of the proposed unit?

Mr Poots: One key element of the proposal is the need for adequate training of staff in the first instance. That is where quite a bit of the required recurrent funding over the next five years will go. I have already had direct correspondence from radiographers who are looking for work in Northern Ireland. It will be good news for them that we will be getting an extra line put into Belfast City Hospital this year and a further line there next year. That will enable us to train the staff who will ultimately provide that service at Altnagelvin Area Hospital.

Mr McCarthy: What a difference an election can make. The Alliance Party wholeheartedly supports and welcomes the very positive statement that the Minister made today.

We welcome the joint contribution to this vital service and facility. I know that it is early days yet, but will the Minister advise the House on whether there are any cross-border health initiatives that could provide a better service for everyone in Northern Ireland and savings for the Health Service?

Mr Poots: As the Member knows, there are pressures on the Health Service: we have an

older population because people are living longer, and that population has new and fresh demands. We have to make best use of the resources that we have. I will seek to ensure that we take forward anything that is of benefit to our country. If there are other services that can provide a better Health Service at a reduced cost to the Northern Ireland public, I am prepared to look at all of them.

Ms P Bradley: I also welcome the Minister's decision to proceed with the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin. The Minister said in his statement that the most powerful case for change was his interaction with some of the service users. I welcome the fact that the decision was based on the most important factor of all: patient need. When is work likely to begin on the site?

Mr Poots: We are moving to the second outline business case. As regards work on the site, we will be able to lodge planning applications that will allow us to remove a number of elements that currently exist at the hospital. For example, we will re-route underground services. I know that they sometimes re-route things in that part of the world, and on this occasion it will be underground services. We will also be relocating the combined heat and power plant as well as relocating and putting in place new provision for the mortuary, the body store and some temporary offices.

That element will take place in the first instance, and all the work should be completed by 2013. In that case, we can start the development of the new radiotherapy unit, which should be completed by autumn 2015. The machinery will then be installed and commissioned and should be up and running by mid-2016. There is a significant course of work to achieve all that, and it will have to be carried out with some urgency. That is why I was keen to address the issue as quickly as possible, because time is not on our side in the delivery of those radiotherapy services. It is critical for all of Northern Ireland that this be in place for mid-2016.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, thank the Minister for his statement and welcome the decision expressed today. As someone who visited the Belfast City Hospital cancer centre last year as a member of the Committee for Social Development, I saw many examples of good practice, one of which was the one-stop shop. It deals with

people's benefits and goes a long way to relieve the trauma and stress experienced by cancer patients. Does the Minister envisage a similar situation prevailing at Altnagelvin when the unit opens?

Mr Poots: A lot of those issues will be dealt with in OBC2. For example, the requirement for a hostel — whether or not one is required — and the provision of further additional chemotherapy services over and above what is already provided for at Altnagelvin will all be looked at in the second business case. We are quite happy to look at all of the issues and to see how many of those services can be provided at the Altnagelvin site to ensure that as few people as possible have to travel to Belfast for them.

Mr Buchanan: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement in the House this morning and for his commitment to the development of the new cancer unit at Altnagelvin. The Minister will know that the development of services in the entire west of Northern Ireland lies very close to my heart. How will this decision impact on other planned capital projects? I am, of course, thinking about the new local enhanced hospital in Omagh.

12.45 pm

Mr Poots: The decision was part of the capital programme. The funding had been set aside for the project. It will not dislocate any other project in the capital programme.

Mr Hussey: I, too, welcome the Minister's announcement. Having been a member of the health council in west Tyrone and the western area for many years, I am also aware of the concerns of many cancer patients. Thomas Buchanan stole my thunder by asking a similar question, so I will not waste the House's time by asking a further question. I welcome the Minister's decision.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas agus as a chinneadh. I welcome the Minister's statement this afternoon and, indeed, his decision. It is one that will have wholehearted support, particularly from the people who campaigned long and hard. I noted that the Minister said that the unit will proceed as planned. Some rumours were floating about over the weekend that the unit might be

reduced. Can the Minister confirm that it will proceed as planned?

Mr Poots: The case that I was dealing with is OBC1, which is for the full unit. I have not sought any reduction whatsoever. If there was some notion from the Western Health and Social Services Board that it does not need as large a unit, that is a matter for the board. There is nothing in my tray to suggest that that is the case.

Mr P Ramsey: I must say that this is the most welcome of statements to come to the House. Considering that we sat here six weeks ago and heard the last statement in the House in which the previous Minister gave that awful news that the centre was not going ahead, it is most refreshing that a Minister coming into the position can so rapidly bring a positive news story to so many people across Northern Ireland and in the border regions who will have access to the centre. We are talking about 1,000 patients from the north-west and 350 patients in the border areas, from Donegal right down to Sligo. In welcoming this tremendous good news story today, I also ask the Minister to outline to the House the total capital moneys involved and the total revenue moneys involved to manage and run the centre.

Mr Poots: The capital moneys involved are some £56 million, and the Republic is providing €19 million. Up until the point of opening, the revenue costs are £14.5 million over the five years. Subsequent to opening, revenue costs are £9.5 million.

Mr I McCrea: I join everyone else around the Chamber and, indeed, Northern Ireland in welcoming the Minister's decision and his statement this afternoon. The Minister has just referred to the €19 million that the Republic of Ireland Government will put into the project. Has he any idea whether that funding will be front-loaded or portioned out during the scheme to ensure that the money comes through and that the Northern Ireland Executive do not have to cover the cost and then recoup it?

Mr Poots: Money from the Republic of Ireland will come in years two, three and four of the project. It is a five-year project, and no moneys will come from the Republic in either year one or year five.

Ms M Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. I congratulate the Minister, particularly on making

his first statement in the Chamber on the cancer unit at Altnagelvin. It will be well received not just across the north-west but across the 32 counties of Ireland, but particularly the North of Ireland. Will the Minister continue engagement with groups and organisations such as the Pink Ladies, who have fought a mighty campaign over the past six weeks? They are listening to your every word as you speak in the Chamber. They were watching and hoping that you would make this kind of announcement. They would appreciate ongoing engagement with you and others on the developmental stage and particularly on what you said about the design and about work starting immediately.

Mr Poots: The Member is right on this occasion to say that it is not just a solution for the north-west, nor indeed is it just a solution for Northern Ireland. On this occasion, it is actually a solution for the north of Ireland, because it includes people from Carlingford to Malin Head. A north of Ireland solution is appropriate on this particular occasion.

I will engage, time permitting, with as many people as possible on healthcare provision in Northern Ireland. Healthcare is not just about what the managers, the consultants or the hospital staff say. It is also about the needs of the public. The patients' voices were very clear when I visited the north-west. It was clear when I met a person who was on oxygen and had to travel to Belfast that day, taking four hours' travel time to get 10 minutes of radiotherapy.

If we are going to be of any use to the public, we need to have a caring attitude to people who are less fortunate than ourselves. When we go to hospitals and see the needs that are there, we need to identify with the patients. We, in this House, need to be patient-focused. We must ensure that the provisions that we make for the people of Northern Ireland mean that patients get high-quality care and that we achieve clinical excellence. As we deal with all the difficult financial issues, we must never lose sight of the priority issue, which is the patient.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the Minister for his excellent statement on cancer services in Altnagelvin Hospital. Can he confirm that the finances for his Department are the same today as they were prior to the Assembly elections? Will his decision reduce waiting times for cancer sufferers in the north-west and the cost of travel

for hard-pressed families and individuals in the present economic circumstances?

Mr Poots: First, I can confirm that there is no change to the budget. At this time, I am not looking for more money from the Finance Minister. I am not saying that that will not be the case over the course of this year. However, I intend to look very thoroughly at where we can make realistic savings and deliver our services more efficiently. If I come looking for money from the Finance Minister, he will come looking for money from every other Department. There is no more money in the purse, so if I need more money for health, it must come from the Department of Education, the Department of the Environment, the Department for Regional Development and everywhere else. It is important that I attempt to live within my means. If I need more money, I will certainly ask for it, but we will try to identify savings first.

In determining the need for provision, it is critical that cancer services receive a number one priority, because cancer patients cannot wait. Belfast City Hospital is currently operating at over 90% capacity. We will be putting a new line in the budget this year that will ensure that we will be able to maintain provision of services as the public need them. As a result of this decision, we will be putting a further line in next year. We can use the lines more extensively in the run-up to 2016, when the new provision will be enabled at the Altnagelvin site. There will be no difficulty, as a result of this decision, in ensuring that, as soon as cancer patients are diagnosed and have gone through all the various set-up procedures, which can normally take up to a month, people will get treatment immediately.

Mr Dickson: I add my words of thanks to the Minister for the speedy way in which he has come to his decision on this matter. However, 2016 will seem a very long way away to someone who may be diagnosed with cancer today and for whom radiotherapy is the appropriate treatment. Can the Minister assure the House that, if it is practical and possible, all necessary efforts will be made to ensure that this project not only comes in on time but can be expedited and achieved in less time?

Mr Poots: I absolutely appreciate where the Member is coming from. I am certain that large numbers of people in the north-west of our Province will be diagnosed with cancer between

now and that date. It is unfortunate that we cannot have the unit earlier than is proposed. It is a challenging timetable, but if we can shave months off it, we will be happy to do that and provide the service earlier to people, if it is at all possible.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister has spoken most eloquently about the need for this centre, but that need was never in doubt: it was agreed by all. What was in doubt was whether there was money to run it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister has outlined the capital expenditure and the contribution from the Republic of Ireland. However, in a previous answer, he also said that it would take some £14 million in recurrent funding, and another £9.5 million. Will the Minister confirm what share of that recurrent expenditure will come from the Republic of Ireland and whether he has that commitment in writing? Furthermore, will the Minister outline when he will be in a position, because he is not at the moment, to tell us whether he will require more money for the Health Service?

Mr Poots: Well, the Member could just have started by saying sorry, but he chose not to.

We are looking at treating 360 patients from the Republic of Ireland, and the funding from the Republic of Ireland will pay for every one of those patients. Should there be more patients, we will look at getting further funding from the Republic, and that is to be negotiated. The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have a reciprocal arrangement: when people from Northern Ireland are treated in the Republic, Northern Ireland pays for that, and when people from the Republic are treated in Northern Ireland, the Republic pays for that.

However, in this instance, although the fine detail has to be negotiated, we would like to establish the centre on the basis that 360 patients will come to it from the Republic of Ireland, and if patients over and above that figure are sent, the Republic will also pay for that. We will establish the unit on the basis of treating 1,020 patients from Northern Ireland and 360 patients from the Republic of Ireland.

Earlier, I made it clear to the House that the funding involved equated to 0.075% of

my budget and that savings can be made in areas without impacting on front line services. However, I also make it clear that, leaving this decision to one side, we live in challenging financial times. Although the health budget did as well as could have been expected from the allocation that Northern Ireland got from Mr McCrea's Conservative friends at Westminster, we will have to make difficult decisions in the months and years ahead.

Today's is a positive news story; on other days, I am sure that I will be lambasted by quite a number of Members because I will be taking decisions that affect services somewhere. However, all my decisions will be based on the need to ensure that clinical excellence is maintained at all times, and no decisions that will undermine clinical excellence will be taken based on finance. We will seek to ensure that we drive through efficiencies in this Department that others have previously failed to attempt to drive through.

Mr Givan: I thank the Minister for removing the despair and despondency that was inflicted on those who suffer from cancer by the Ulster Unionist Party in the form of its former Health Minister. What a contrast from the statement that he made to the House on his last day in office, in which he cynically used such people for political purposes, to today, when this Minister, in his first statement to the House, is able to put right the wrong inflicted by that party on those people.

Is the decision announced by the Minister today based on the same information and the same recommendations that were available to the former Health Minister?

Mr Poots: The Member is probably aware that I am not privy to the information that was provided to the previous Health Minister, but, without any pressure being applied, the case was made very clearly by my civil servants that the centre should proceed without equivocation, so I suspect that the same case was made to the previous Minister.

1.00 pm

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The question that I intended to ask has already been covered. On behalf of my constituents in Strabane and wider west Tyrone, I welcome the statement. It is much anticipated for a lot of people in the Strabane

and Donegal area that I represent. I have been working closely in the past number of weeks with the Daisychain foundation in Strabane, which has been working along with the Pink Ladies. I commend them for the work in which they were involved in lobbying you, Minister, and the petition with which they provided you on your first day as Minister.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the statement. The Minister has reacted to what has been a very widespread issue of public concern in the north-west area. It bodes well for the new Executive that there has been a response by the political system here to the genuine needs of the people. I welcome the statement about cross-border co-operation. Will the mechanisms be in place to make sure that no bottlenecks or difficulties arise in relation to the implementation of that cross-border development?

Mr Poots: I am confident that we can deal with the issues and ensure that there are no bottlenecks. Our civil servants have been engaging and will continue to do so to ensure that we can efficiently provide those services.

When I visited Belfast City Hospital on Thursday, the first patient I met was a lady from Donegal who had travelled down to receive the services in our radiotherapy unit. It does not really make any difference to me what religious faith the person is or where they come from: if they require medical help, they require medical help. It is incumbent on us to ensure that that is provided. We will engage positively with the Government in the Republic of Ireland to ensure that the services that we have in place can help people in the Republic of Ireland as well as Northern Ireland and that the services that they have in place can help people from Northern Ireland because, ultimately, health crosses all barriers.

Mrs Lewis: I welcome the statement today as it will not only provide a service for the people of the north-west but relieve pressures on the east of the Province and ensure that cancer patients receive prompt treatment. Is the Minister aware of the pressures on Antrim Area Hospital? Will he endeavour to address the problem there?

Mr Poots: I am very well aware of the problems in Antrim Area Hospital. I made reference previously to the Royal Colleges. That was the specific hospital that I was referring to as being put under a huge pressure and undue burden

that it should not have had to face as a result of decisions made by the royal colleges to withdraw services from the Mid-Ulster Hospital without preparation in Antrim. It was not in the best interests of Antrim hospital or the people who previously used the Mid-Ulster Hospital or Antrim hospital as their key services for accident and emergency. I will look at the situation in Antrim hospital. We cannot continue to pile services on a particular unit without putting in place the necessary resources, as has been the case heretofore.

Mr Allister: The Minister has a finite budget. It was the same budget before the election as it is after it. The Minister, in response to Mr Gardiner, made some observations. I invite him to be more specific and give a cast-iron assurance that, in making the necessary decision, there is no adverse consequence, for example, for the Ballymena health and care centre, which was given the green light by his predecessor, and that capital and resource expenditure will proceed for that irrespective of the necessary decision that affects Londonderry. Can we have that assurance? In respect of his answer about the funding from the Irish Republic, the Minister said 360 patients would be funded. As regards the resource expenditure before the opening of the centre, what is the arrangement with the Irish Republic for paying a funding contribution to that?

Mr Poots: I suspect that the Member was not listening to all the questions and answers, because, when a Member asked about capital projects, I indicated that this project was part of the previous capital budget stream and would have no impact on any other capital projects in that stream. Therefore, in case the Member did not hear the first time, I trust that, on this occasion, he has absolute clarity.

A considerable amount of the recurrent expenditure for services to be provided will involve training, which will be carried out at the Belfast City Hospital regional cancer unit. Radiographers will be trained in the service, which they will provide to a range of people from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. As I indicated, the Republic of Ireland will make a contribution for each patient, and, therefore, we will receive funding in that respect.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I join others in commending the Minister on his statement. It is a clear indication

of a hands-on approach from the Minister, which is very welcome. In view of that, will he review the situation at the Mid-Ulster Hospital? Installing a mechanism or system there would provide a continuous service for the people of Mid Ulster and take pressure off the Antrim Area Hospital.

Mr Poots: I will meet all the trusts, hopefully over the course of this week, and I expect that the Mid-Ulster Hospital will be discussed at some length. I have already received letters from the Save the Mid group. I cannot give any guarantees as to what services will be provided at the Mid-Ulster Hospital in the future. All that I will guarantee is that I will listen to the issues of people in the local community who use the hospital and will discuss our ability to provide the level of care that people might expect. Our ability to do that will not always meet public expectations. Nonetheless, we are prepared to listen to the issues and see how we can best address them.

Mr McClarty: This issue is much too important to play petty party politics. At this stage, of course, the Minister has addressed the questions that I wished to pose. Nevertheless, on behalf of my constituents, I put on record my deep gratitude for this morning's wonderful news.

Mr Speaker: That ends —

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Speaker —

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker —

Mr Speaker: Lord Morrow.

Mr Wells: Just because he is a lord. *[Laughter.]*

Lord Morrow: It has been the practice in the House that when a Member is speaking, he or she is given due courtesy to do so. It has been noted this morning that at least two Members deliberately passed in front of Members who were on their feet. I would like you to take a look at that situation and make a ruling on it.

Mr Wells: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. We had quite disgraceful behaviour this morning. We had a situation in which the Member for East Antrim Mr Dickson was, in effect, making his maiden speech and a very experienced Member, who has been here for many years, deliberately walked in front of him. That person is a former Minister. Then we had a situation in which the Member for North Antrim Mr Allister was making an interjection and

another Member, who is now a junior Minister, walked in front of him. That was disgraceful and totally unacceptable. You have ruled on this point on several occasions, and I think that people need to be called to book, because there is nothing as off-putting as someone deliberately walking in front of you when you are making your maiden speech.

Mr Speaker: I appreciate the points of order from Lord Morrow and Mr Wells. They were exactly right in what they said. I will not allow that to happen in the House.

I know that we have only come back from an election, but once again I remind the whole House that when a Member is on his or her feet, speaking in the House, other Members should not cross in front of that Member. That issue was raised in the last Assembly and it has arisen on this occasion. Any Member who does that deliberately will not be called to speak in the House for some time. I make that absolutely clear. In the last mandate, several warnings were given to a number of Members who were deliberately discourteous to other Members while they were speaking. From now on, any Member who deliberately walks in front of another Member who is speaking will not be called to speak in the House, as I have said, for some time.

I thank Lord Morrow and Mr Wells for their points of order. It is not easy for me to watch everything in this House, but if a Member feels that that has happened to him, I am happy for him to raise the issue there and then. On this occasion, the Members have rightly raised the issue after the conclusion of the discussion on the ministerial statement. I take on board what both Members have said.

Ms M Anderson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to inform you that my action was completely unintentional. I apologise to the House for it.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for standing up and apologising to the whole House. That is what I expect all Members to do if, for whatever reason, they do wrong. I think far more of a Member who apologises to the House.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: Let us move on. All the motions on today's Order Paper relate to Assembly Business, including appointments to the Assembly Commission and Committees in accordance with Standing Order 12(7). Therefore, there will be no debate on any of those motions.

Assembly Commission: Membership

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that Standing Orders require that such motions be approved with cross-community support.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That, in accordance with Standing Order 79, the following shall be appointed to be members of the Assembly Commission: The Speaker (Ex officio); Mr P Weir; Mr B McElduff; Mr L Cree; Mr P Ramsey; Mrs J Cochrane. — [Mr Weir]

Statutory Committees: Membership

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 49(3), the membership of the Statutory Committees as detailed in NIA 1/11-15R be approved. — [Mr P Maskey]

The membership of the Statutory Committees as detailed in NIA 1/11-15R is as follows:

Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development: Mr Paul Frew (Chairperson); Mrs Dolores Kelly (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Thomas Buchanan; Mr Trevor Clarke; Mr Willie Clarke; Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson; Mr William Irwin; Mr Kieran McCarthy; Mr Conor Murphy; Mr Oliver McMullan; Mr Robin Swann.

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure: Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson); Mr William Irwin (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Dominic Bradley; Mrs Brenda Hale; Mr David Hilditch; Mr Gerry Kelly; Mr Michael McGimpsey; Mrs Karen McKeivitt; Mr Cathal Ó hOisín; Mr Pat Sheehan; Mr Robin Swann.

Committee for Education: Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson); Mr David McNarry (Deputy Chairperson); Ms Michaela Boyle; Mr Jonathan Craig; Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson; Mr Phil Flanagan; Mrs Brenda Hale; Mr Trevor Lunn; Mr Conall McDevitt; Miss Michelle McIlveen; Mr Daithí McKay.

Committee for Employment and Learning: Mr Basil McCrea (Chairperson); Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Jim Allister; Mr Sammy Douglas; Ms Michelle Gildernew; Mr Chris Lyttle; Mr Barry McElduff; Mr David McIlveen; Mrs Sandra Overend; Mr Pat Ramsey; Mr Alastair Ross.

Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Mr Alban Maginness (Chairperson); Mr Daithí McKay (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Steven Agnew; Mr Gordon Dunne; Mr Phil Flanagan; Mr David McIlveen; Dr Alasdair McDonnell; Mr Stephen Moutray; Mr Mike Nesbitt; Mr Robin Newton; Ms Sue Ramsey.

Committee for the Environment: Ms Anna Lo (Chairperson); Mr Simon Hamilton (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Cathal Boylan; Ms Paula Bradley; Mr Willie Clarke; Mr John Dallat; Mr Danny Kinahan; Mr Patsy McGlone; Mr Francie Molloy; Lord Morrow; Mr Peter Weir.

Committee for Finance and Personnel: Mr Conor Murphy (Chairperson); Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson); Mrs Judith Cochrane; Mr Leslie Cree; Mr Paul Girvan; Mr David Hilditch; Mr William Humphrey; Mr Ross Hussey; Mr Mitchel McLaughlin; Mr Adrian McQuillan; Ms Caitríona Ruane.

Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Ms Michelle Gildernew (Chairperson); Mr Jim Wells (Deputy Chairperson); Ms Michaela Boyle; Ms Paula Bradley; Mr Mickey Brady; Mr Gordon Dunne; Mr Mark H Durkan; Mr Sam Gardiner; Mrs Pam Lewis; Mr John McCallister; Mr Kieran McCarthy.

Committee for Justice: Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson); Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Sydney Anderson; Mr Stewart Dickson; Mr Colum Eastwood; Mr Seán Lynch; Ms Jennifer McCann; Mr Basil McCrea; Mr Alban Maginness; Mr Peter Weir; Mr Jim Wells.

Committee for the Office of the First and deputy First Minister: Mr Tom Elliott (Chairperson); Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Trevor Clarke; Mr Colum Eastwood; Mr William Humphrey; Mr Alex Maskey; Mr Francie Molloy; Mrs Sandra Overend; Mr George Robinson; Ms Caitríona Ruane; Mr Jimmy Spratt.

Committee for Regional Development: Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairperson); Mr Pat Doherty (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Roy Beggs; Mr Joe Byrne; Mrs Dolores Kelly; Mr Trevor Lunn; Mr Seán Lynch; Mr Ian McCrea; Mr Stephen Moutray; Mr Mike Nesbitt; Mr Cathal Ó hOisín.

Committee for Social Development: Mr Alex Maskey (Chairperson); Mr Mickey Brady (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Gregory Campbell; Mrs Judith Cochrane; Mr Michael Copeland; Mr Sammy Douglas; Mr Mark H Durkan; Mr Alex Easton; Mrs Pam Lewis; Mr Fra McCann; Mr David McClarty.

Standing Committees: Membership

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 52(3), the membership of the Standing Committees as detailed in NIA 2/11-15R be approved. — [Mr P Ramsey]

The membership of the Standing Committees as detailed in NIA 2/11-15R is as follows:

Assembly Executive and Review Committee: Mr Stephen Moutray (Chairperson); Mr Pat Sheehan (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Roy Beggs; Mr Gregory Campbell; Mr Stewart Dickson; Mr Paul Givan; Mr Simon Hamilton; Mr Paul Maskey; Mr Raymond McCartney; Mr Conall McDevitt; Mr Mike Nesbitt.

Audit Committee: Mr Danny Kinahan (Chairperson); Mr David Hilditch (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Paul Maskey; Ms Anna Lo; Ms Margaret Ritchie.

Committee on Procedures: Ms Sue Ramsey (Chairperson); Mr Trevor Clarke (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Jim Allister; Mr Sam Gardiner; Mr Gerry Kelly; Mr Chris Lyttle; Mr Oliver McMullan; Mr Alban Maginness; Lord Morrow; Mr George Robinson; Mr Mervyn Storey.

Committee on Standards and Privileges: Mr Alastair Ross (Chairperson); Mr Kieran McCarthy (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Steven Agnew; Mr Cathal Boylan; Ms Paula Bradley; Mr Jonathan Craig; Mr Michael Copeland; Mr Pat Doherty; Mr Fra McCann; Mr Patsy McGlone; Mr David McIlveen.

Public Accounts Committee: Mr Paul Maskey (Chairperson); Mr Joe Byrne (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Sydney Anderson; Mr Michael Copeland; Mr John Dallat; Mr Alex Easton; Mr Paul Frew; Mr Paul Girvan; Mr Ross Hussey; Mr Mitchel McLaughlin; Ms Jennifer McCann.

Business Committee: Membership

Resolved:

That Ms Jennifer McCann replace Ms Carál Ní Chuilín as a member of the Business Committee. — [Mr P Maskey]

Adjourned at 1.14 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 31 May 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. I want to deal with an issue that Mr Allister raised in a point of order last week on the terminology used in the Chamber to refer to Northern Ireland. In a previous ruling on 21 April 2009, I have made it clear already that, for the purposes of clarity and, especially, legal effect, items that are tabled for plenary business should use official titles for places or organisations. Of course, Members' oral contributions in the Chamber are another matter. My ruling about the use of proper names for Members and parties is very much rooted in the clear understanding that debates should be conducted with courtesy, good temper and moderation. Therefore, I will rule out of order any item that I judge to be used to be provocative or offensive in any way to any Member. However, Members from all sides of the House use many different items to refer to Northern Ireland, the UK, Ireland and even other places. I believe that Members have shown that they are mature enough not to take deliberate offence when others use a term for Northern Ireland that they might not use themselves. I certainly do not intend to get to my feet every time an alternative term is used in properly conducted debates. I will always seek to be fair, reasonable and impartial in my rulings, and that is no different from my approach this morning.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it not absurd that due deference is required for the name of Sinn Féin when it can do despite to the proper name of Northern Ireland?

Mr Speaker: Let me say that I am not surprised at the Member's difficulty with what I have said. He was challenging this ruling in the press a week ago, before it was made. My view is clear, and the Member should not challenge it. If we were to go down the road suggested by the Member, I would have had to call him to order

because he has already referred to Northern Ireland as "the Province" in the Chamber.

Let me say this to the Member directly: I know that he has many skills, and he certainly has a contribution to make to the Chamber. There is absolutely no doubt about that. However, he must make that contribution within the procedures, Standing Orders and rulings of the Assembly. He must understand that. If he continually goes down the road that he is going down, I will continually ask the Member to take his seat, and I will move on. Let me make that absolutely clear. That goes for all sides of the House.

There are many different political views in the House. Some of those views are very much shared by some Members, while others have very different political views. I will not stifle those political views. In fact, I say directly to the Member that, irrespective of the political views that Members have in the Chamber, I will work with them. I want to make that clear to the Member. If, as I said, the Member can confine his terminology to the Standing Orders and rules of the House, I might even have a cup of tea with him. I hope that the Member now has a better understanding of the rules, procedures and conventions of the Assembly.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order —

Mr Speaker: I will now move on. I ask the Member to please stay in his seat.

Suspension of Standing Order 20(1)

Mr Weir: I beg to move

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 31 May 2011.

Mr Speaker: Before I proceed to the Question, I remind Members that the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 31 May 2011.

Private Members' Business

Educational Attainment: Working-class Protestants

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Easton: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the comparative lack of post-GCSE educational qualifications held by people from working-class Protestant communities; expresses concern at the effect this may have on the future employability of young people from such areas; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to bring forward a strategy to address this matter.

At the outset, I will let everybody in the Chamber know that we will accept the Ulster Unionist amendment. North Down has long been nicknamed "the Golden Coast". Nevertheless, in north Down, as is the case in many other areas of our Province, a large number of people remain excluded from achievement. Since my election to the House in 2003, I have always sought to work with and assist those who find themselves in that category of exclusion. Much of my work is focused on Kilcooley, Rathgill and Bloomfield and many other working-class communities.

I believe that, for many people, social exclusion starts at school, with a large number of young Protestants leaving school without any GCSEs. I also believe that, due to the impact of the period that is commonly referred to as "the Troubles", we missed a huge opportunity to rebuild and rejuvenate society. Prior to those events, which are largely believed to have started in 1969, we saw the death of our local industries. The shipyard, Shorts and many other noteworthy local industries declined, leaving a huge gap in the labour market. As those industries declined, many Protestants who were traditionally employed in them lost their job and their way with no one to help them.

North Down is home to one of the largest housing estates in Europe, where young people are lost without hope, a future or a job. I refer to Kilcooley, which was built in the 1960s. From speaking day and daily to people on the ground in Kilcooley and across north Down, I know that they want to see change for the better. As a community, they are willing to assist in any way that they can. At this point, I want to mention the tremendous work of the Kilcooley Women's Centre and the Kilcooley Community Forum. Despite their excellent work, they get no funding from the Department for Employment and Learning and rely on funding from the Irish Government, which is unacceptable. Unfortunately for those who live in disadvantaged areas, no single agency is responsible for or tasked with finding a solution. No one seems motivated to find a solution to the problem, as it is deemed far too difficult to solve and no one knows where to start.

The people of Kilcooley and other working-class areas have shown by their actions that they want their areas to achieve and prosper. They want their areas to emerge as attractive, safe and prosperous, where residents enjoy healthy activities and lifestyles. They want to see community, social and physical renewal. In the limited time that I have available, I want to make a number of points that, I hope, will assist decision-makers to help people in working-class communities with similar profiles to realise that vision, which offers a better future, particularly for the many young people who live in working-class communities. Early in the life of the Assembly, the Executive will bring forward important policies and strategies that will fundamentally impact on the lives and futures of residents of those areas. Crucially, they include the new skills strategy; the early years strategy; how to address the problem of educational underachievement; and what to do about young people who are not in education, employment or training. Those are but a few of the key social policies that the House will have to consider.

As a legislative Assembly, we must work to shape those proposals to meet the needs of communities such as Kilcooley. If we want there to be a skilled workforce, logically investment should be made in early years provision and other proven interventions, which are needed most in areas where children's life chances are worse than in affluent areas. Area-based approaches are key. However, they alone will not guarantee success. Joined-up thinking on the

part of policy-makers is as important as joined-up action, if not more so. In times of austerity, we naturally seek to reduce expenditure. However, evidence strongly directs us to invest in early years provision and prevention in order to obtain better social and economic outcomes. Spending money to deal with the symptoms of the problem down the line is reckless. Turning around communities such as Kilcooley takes time and commitment as well as investment. Policy-makers need to listen to communities and support what has worked.

Although recent statistics have shown that school leavers' educational achievement has exceeded expectations, those from disadvantaged areas still score poorly compared with those from more affluent areas. When we consider entitlement to free school meals, we can see that 6.1% of those who are entitled to free school meals leave school without any GCSEs, compared with 2.3% of those who are not entitled to free school meals. Some 55.2% of pupils who are not entitled to free school meals achieved two or more A levels or equivalent qualifications; a much higher figure than the 25% for children who are entitled to free school meals. When we consider pupils' religion, we can see that 38% of Protestant school leavers attend institutions of higher education compared with 46% of Catholic school leavers. The Executive need to address that imbalance, especially the new Minister for Employment and Learning, who happens to hail from north Down. Responsibility largely rests on his shoulders and on those of the Minister of Education.

During the election, I promised that I would raise those issues. I have kept that promise. I now ask the Minister to take those issues seriously and address them.

Mr Beggs: I beg to move the following amendment: At end insert:

“; and further calls on the Minister of Education to address educational underachievement at the earliest stage.”

I thank the proposer for tabling the motion, which highlights educational underachievement post GCSE level and how the issue pertains to Protestant working-class young people in particular. I support the motion as far as it goes. Why have I tabled the amendment? I trained as an engineer. I was always taught to get to the root of a problem, rather than simply dealing with the symptoms. It is widely

acknowledged that getting it right first time in an industrial setting is essential for a company if it is to control its costs and survive global competition.

My amendment highlights the need for the Minister of Education to address educational underachievement at the earliest stage. That is where things are going wrong, and we cannot solve the problem by simply trying to pick up the pieces after our young people have left school. The Employment and Learning Minister will have to address the underachievement of many of our young people who are leaving school with few GCSEs and are unable to gain further qualifications. Again, that is only a symptom; we need to address the problem.

10.45 am

I declare an interest as a governor of Glynn Primary School and as a committee member of Horizon Sure Start, which supports parents and young people in parts of Carrickfergus and Larne. I am very proud to be associated with both organisations, which are trying — successfully, I believe — to enable more of our young people to reach their full potential. For the sake of our young people and our economy, it is vital that our young people gain GCSE qualifications and progress further. So many of our young people should not go through seven years of primary school and a further five years of post-primary school without gaining significant qualifications. Once more I draw Members' attention to the work of Professor James Heckman of the University of Chicago, a Nobel laureate economist, who has advised that investing in disadvantaged young people is good economics and good public policy. Some of the key messages from him are that the economic returns for early investment are high and it is much more costly to have remedial programmes in adolescent and young adult years to produce the same level of skill attainment in adulthood. Let us, therefore, make sure that we get our education system right first time, so that fewer young people and, indeed, adults have to go through further education to get the education and qualifications that, for whatever reason, they did not get at school. We must get things right first time.

In simple, common-sense terms, let us ensure that there is very early intervention, whether at nought-to-four, primary school or, if issues have not been picked up, even in the early years

of post-primary education. It is better for the child; it is better for society; and it is better for our economy. There is little point in asking the Minister for Employment and Learning to simply draw up a strategy to address the comparative lack of GCSE education and qualifications. We must establish why so many are not excelling at school. That is clearly an issue for the Minister of Education.

I pay tribute to the work of former MLA Dawn Purvis. She highlighted the issue in her recent report, 'Educational Disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class: A Call to Action', which she produced with a group of supporting academics. The report contains many profound statements, which are, I might add, backed up by evidence and international research. One such statement is:

"Funding priorities are 'back to front'. Accumulated evidence suggests that the more we invest in young people early, the better the outcome. Proportionately too little is invested in the early years during key stages of a child's development."

I have been saying exactly the same thing for some time. That is why I helped to establish the Carrickfergus children's locality group in my constituency and Horizon Sure Start, which is working in Carrickfergus and Larne and gives additional support to parents and helps children in the nought-to-four age group. I also commend the work of Abbey Sure Start in Monkstown.

It is startling that only one in 10 working-class Protestant pupils goes to university, compared with one in five Catholics from a similar background. However, that is not a new issue that has been highlighted recently. On 24 March 2006, over five years ago, the Northern Ireland Audit Office report, 'Improving Literacy and Numeracy in Schools' highlighted issues in that area. That led to the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee report of November 2006, which identified the discrepancy between results in the comparative controlled and maintained sectors for pupils who were eligible for free school meals. At an evidence session during the PAC inquiry at Westminster on Wednesday 21 June 2006, Dr Mark Browne, finance director and head of finance and strategic planning division of the Department of Education stated:

"There is a particular problem. The levels of achievement are lowest amongst the Protestant working class and that is linked into a whole range of issues around the values placed on education,

the changing industrial structure in many of these Protestant working class areas where the routes to work previously available are no longer there and the whole attitude towards education is different and maybe there is not the same support and emphasis and value on education as there is in other areas."

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I agree with his last point about communities that do or do not value education. Sure Start, which you mentioned, is crucial to getting to the root of the problem, and there has to be a policy right across education from preschool, with Sure Start, to primary school to secondary school. Frankly, a huge amount of money has been invested, but it has not addressed the issue. Does the Member agree that the establishment of educational action zones is the way to address it?

Mr Beggs: I have little knowledge of educational action zones. I have knowledge of Sure Start, and, from what I have seen of it so far, the outcomes are positive. It takes time to collate evidence that we can stand over, but hopefully definitive evidence will come to prove that. However, I am just speaking anecdotally about what I have seen.

The House of Commons report also stated:

"It is clear from the evidence presented to the Committee that, among socially deprived communities in Belfast, significant differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic children exist in GCSE English and Mathematics."

Significantly, the report pointed out that there is a noticeable difference between Belfast and Glasgow and that data provided by the Department show that there is a reasonable degree of consistency between the performance of Catholic schools and non-denominational schools in Glasgow in English and mathematics at Scottish national qualification level; however, that is certainly not the case in Belfast. Here, schools with 40% or more pupils entitled to free school meals do disturbingly less well than their Catholic counterparts and do much less well than their counterparts in Glasgow. That needs to be addressed.

The report contained some frightening figures. At comparable schools, for example, 24% of the Catholic maintained sector attained qualifications in maths, whereas only 4.4% of the controlled sector did. That is a startling difference, and something needs to be done

about it. That PAC report is almost five years old. The Sinn Féin Minister of Education should be here today to tell us what the Department of Education has done about this very real issue. This is not about driving home an ideological dogma about the 11-plus but about addressing educational underachievement in very early years.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I thank the Member for giving way. I am conscious that the Minister for Employment and Learning will formally respond to the debate. There has been some contact between our two Departments. I am more than happy to return to the Chamber when a motion is directed towards my Department and to enter into debate about this important matter at any stage with any Member across the Chamber.

Mr Beggs: Thank you for that. I hope that action will be taken.

It has been five years since the issue was highlighted, and I am not sure what action has been taken to address it in one section of our community. I do not believe that there is a quick fix; however, early years is a start. Indeed, addressing other issues at primary school as well as identifying weaknesses and speech and language difficulties at an early age is vital. There is the evidence from Andy McMorrán of Ashfield Boys' High School, which has shown significantly enhanced performance when compared with other similar schools. There have been successes there, and lessons must be learnt from those successes and widened out.

I would like the Minister of Education to address poor attendance. I draw his attention to a series of Assembly questions that I have asked about that area. If children are not at school, there are not good educational outcomes. That key issue must be addressed.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Beggs: I ask Members' support for the amendment and ask Ministers and Committees to take the issue seriously and to address it.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the motion and the amendment. I welcome the motion as it is the first opportunity to discuss education in the new Assembly term. It is always worth restating that education is related not only to the schools and colleges that children and young adults attend

but to the environment that they are raised in, their socio-economic background, poverty and various community and cultural factors. As elected representatives, we should encourage a more holistic view of education.

It is vital that we reduce the number of young people between the ages of 16 and 19 who are not in education, employment or training and may be at risk of remaining in that position for a long period. Measures can be taken to address that, and Ministers are to be commended for the work that has been done, such as ensuring that major public works contracts include agreements that relate to the number of apprentices to be employed. That needs to be built on. Retaining young people in education, employment and training must be a priority.

Educational disadvantage exists among young people from all backgrounds, and the previous Minister of Education introduced interconnected policies to tackle underachievement, promote equality and raise educational standards. Those policies included Every School a Good School, the entitlement framework and the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry programmes. Good work has been done to address educational underachievement, but more, of course, needs to be done. The new Minister of Education will continue to prioritise the work highlighted in the amendment and the good work undertaken by his predecessor.

The widening participation strategy is a welcome proposal, and the implementation of such a strategy will be key to improving the skills of a future workforce and strengthening the local economy. 'Educational Disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class', a report issued recently by Dawn Purvis, a former MLA for East Belfast, and the working group on educational disadvantage, makes pertinent points. It found that academic selection accentuates social division; the lack of social balance in many schools leads to an unequal distribution of resources and an unfair burden on non-selective schools; and community and cultural factors affect how Protestant families perceive education and participation in schools. There are, undoubtedly, community and cultural factors that affect how families of other religions and none perceive education, and we should not be in any way complacent about education for Catholic pupils or for any other group. However, that should not take away from the fact that, as elected representatives, we should seek to

address whatever barriers Protestant student have to face in education.

Social background remains a factor in educational attainment. The 2009-2010 school leavers' survey shows that 26.7% of school leavers who were entitled to free school meals achieved at least two A levels or equivalent. That is in stark contrast to the figure of 57.9% for those who were not entitled to free school meals. However, there have been improvements in attainment. For example, 59% of school leavers achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C or equivalent, including English and maths, which is up from 52.6% in 2005-06. That level of attainment is vital when it comes to a young person's career.

As other Members have highlighted, the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning must continue to work in tandem to ensure that 14- to 19-year-olds receive a good overall standard of education, along with careers education, advice and guidance, and that those policies are in line with the Executive's overarching economic strategy. In bringing the motion to the Floor and highlighting the lack of educational attainment in the Protestant community, unionist parties should also recognise that it has been proven beyond any doubt through departmental statistics and the recent report on the Protestant working class that their political stance on selection is making educational attainment problems for Protestant working-class communities worse, not better.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the motion and thank Alex Easton for proposing it. The issue is important to many of my constituents and, perhaps, it is not tackled as well as it should be. I should first make reference, as the previous Member did, to Dawn Purvis, who, unfortunately, was not returned to the House to represent East Belfast. She contributed greatly to this and many other topics that affected the community that she represented. I speak from greater knowledge about the subject due to the work that she undertook in her report, 'A Call to Action'.

11.00 am

The wider issues of lower educational achievement and the corresponding economic effects on the labour market are being considered from many different angles, especially with the young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) strategy overview and its outputs. That

strategy was undertaken by our Committee, the Committee for Employment and Learning. I am glad that this community-specific motion has focused our attention on this important subject.

The report that I mentioned previously makes it clear that Protestant boys are at a huge disadvantage. The demise of heavy industries such as shipbuilding and other related key employers in Protestant working-class areas has left many with a legacy of redundant skill sets. Many Protestant areas were reliant on such industries, and when they were replaced by new qualification-based jobs and industries, many people in Protestant working-class areas were left behind. They were unable to access or adapt to the new labour market to which they were clearly not accustomed.

The report states that:

“The collapse of established, long-term inter-generational labour markets led to some aiming for new skills but many merely feeling ‘out of sync’ with contemporary requirements.”

We must decipher whether the issue lies in the educational framework, which is included in the report, or whether it is a purely local labour market issue. I am glad that the amendment has been tabled to take account of the responsibility of the Department of Education as well as the Department for Employment and Learning, and I welcome both Ministers in the House.

An overarching quote given by Dawn Purvis at the time of the report's publication was that one in 10 young Protestants from a socially disadvantaged background attending school have the opportunity to go to university, compared with one in five Catholics of a similar background. The 'A Call to Action' report notes that there is an unmistakable link between underachievement and socio-economic deprivation. We know this to be true, yet we are still duplicating services and provisions to deal with the problem. I believe that we must take a holistic approach in addressing the very valid concerns raised by the motion and by Members about the social and educational factors that are contributing to this particular problem.

We must act to ensure that early years education, where children are nurtured and taught about the social aspects of education, is accessible to people from Protestant working-class backgrounds. In Northern Ireland as a whole,

almost 50% more Catholic children are enrolled in nursery and early years centres than their Protestant counterparts. Carrying that approach through to primary school will open education to greater family involvement and greater community provision so that the real inequality and problems facing educational attainment in the Protestant community can be addressed.

A more general approach to education in the Protestant community outside the classroom must be a target for any future joined-up strategy between both Departments. In my constituency and yours, Mr Speaker, residents of the Fountain area avail themselves of a number of training programmes. We must seek to emulate this as a pilot project, and a good one.

We should not forget that the university sector is also affected by this issue. A high proportion of Protestant students leaves these shores for Britain and does not return, and we have a very segregated and closed university system. Take Magee campus in my constituency as an example: I have worked for many years to try to address the shocking lack of Protestant students despite the large Protestant community still living in the city.

Mr Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr P Ramsey: That needs to be included in a cross-departmental holistic approach in which both Ministers should be involved.

Mr Lyttle: I, too, welcome the debate today, not least because this Assembly has to deliver on issues that matter to local people if it is to be regarded as meaningful by those people. There can be few more meaningful issues than providing world-class and inclusive education, training and employment opportunities for all in Northern Ireland.

Providing local people with first-class education and relevant skills is vital not only for their individual health and well-being, but for the economic and social well-being of this region. It is therefore vital to the delivery of the Programme for Government and to building a shared and better future for all.

Although the current system delivers excellent results for some local people, it fails a significant number of others every year. That is particularly the case with the most disadvantaged young people, of whom only 31% achieved five or more

good GCSEs, including English and maths, in 2009. Such underachievement is a problem for disadvantaged communities across Northern Ireland. However, young males from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds are particularly under-represented in higher education and make up only 10% of students. Indeed, males from a perceived Protestant background made up only 3.7% of enrolments in 2008-09.

Members from the DUP have called on the Minister for Employment and Learning to respond to the debate. However, it is abundantly clear from all today's contributions that we require the Executive, Departments, educational institutions and community and voluntary sectors to work together in a joined-up manner to tackle the problem of educational underachievement. I am glad that a Minister from the Alliance Party is able to play a significant role in improving the education and learning system in Northern Ireland. I am sure that he will detail a number of existing policies and strategies on which he will lead to deliver change on the issue for local people and the local economy.

As a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning, it is my privilege to continue to contribute to this important task. I worked on the inquiry that Mr Ramsey mentioned, which contributed to the production of the Department for Employment and Learning's draft strategy 'Pathways to Success'. That draft strategy aims to keep young people in education, training and employment opportunities, regardless of their background. However, many policies and strategies will be required to address social disadvantage and exclusion at post-GCSE level. The Department will work on the widening participation and NEETs strategies, but cross-departmental co-operation is also required if we are to deliver an improved outcome for local people.

We also require OFMDFM to deliver the child poverty strategy, which was to be laid before the previous Assembly. As mentioned, we also require vastly improved early years provision, not least because the most significant developmental stage of a person's life is the first three years. We need to find an end to the post-primary transfer debacle. A compromise must be given immediate and serious consideration, and there must be wider education reform. I join colleagues in paying tribute to and recognising the work undertaken by Dawn Purvis in this field, particularly in my constituency of East

Belfast, and I acknowledge the call to action that she and her working group have made to the policymakers.

It is clear that Departments, including the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education, must work together to ensure that local people receive quality and equal opportunities in education and training, so that they can gain meaningful employment. That is essential for the individual, the economy and the building of a shared and better future for all in Northern Ireland.

Mr Campbell: I also support the motion and the amendment tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party. As other Members said, thousands of young people across Northern Ireland leave school with very few or no qualifications. As one or two Members mentioned, there is a 1960s-style post-education sentiment in working-class areas of Northern Ireland that is totally irrelevant in 2011. Many young people still work on the premise that because their fathers and grandfathers did not go on to further or higher education, similarly, that is sufficient for them.

A number of Members referred to their work in working-class estates, and I concur that we all need to do that. However, I draw a distinction between doing so regularly and simply going into working-class estates four weeks before an election, because that can lead to disdain and, on occasions, contempt. I prefer to work in those estates for 50 or 52 weeks of the year. In fact, I was on the doorsteps in those areas last week and the week before. When people asked me whether the election was still on, I told them that it was not and that I am in working-class estates every week of the year.

It is only when people see that politicians relate to the working-class people that they, in turn, will relate to us. Many in the working-class estates feel marginalised and excluded. Some of them, if they are in employment at all, are in part-time employment, and some of that is only temporary. So we should, as politicians, be working in those areas to try to address the disillusionment and hopelessness that is sometimes the hallmark of people who live in the estates.

If we are absolutely frank, political life, communal life, elections and systems of education are totally and utterly irrelevant for many people in those large estates. They do not make any difference to their day, week, month or year. We

have to try to address the disillusionment that exists in that community. That is exceptionally difficult. I know that some councils, including Coleraine Borough Council in my constituency, are starting to address that issue. I am working in concert with that council after a very successful public meeting that was designed to address these issues.

Unfortunately, it is the case, and we heard it alluded to, that some individuals and political parties try to politicise the issue by again raising the comprehensive/grammar debate. I will not compound that, except to say that there are many indications in GB in areas with a substantial comprehensive education system that there are still significant problems in trying to get young people through further or higher education.

However, there are political and community issues that need to be addressed, and, like others, I welcome —

Mr Beggs: Does the Member agree that there is clear evidence of low levels of educational attendance in some of these working-class areas and that, if a child is not at school, guess what, it is not going to perform very well? Statistics show that that poor attendance starts even at primary-school level before the 11-plus is done. So the issue is wider than simply pinning everything on to the 11-plus.

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added to his time.

Mr Campbell: Thank you, Mr Speaker; that is good. I will give way again if I get another minute. The Member is absolutely right, and that is a point that comes into play for children between the ages of four and 10, which is the time before the debate about post-primary begins. So he is accurate, and I am glad that he drew that to our attention again.

There are communal problems that we all encounter, and, hopefully, each Member will be aware of that. There are welfare dependency issues. I think one Member alluded to the fact that we need to ensure that educational establishments do not provide a cold house for young Protestants. For example, Magee College had a difficulty with a careers issue that concerned the Army coming to the campus and the young people there who wanted to attend that event, and I had occasion to deal with that. There was a problem with that issue. So we

have to make sure that there are no cold-house issues for young people from the Protestant community.

I welcome the debate, and, hopefully, we can take it forward, with the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Education addressing the core issues and not repeating the mantra of “every school a good school”.

Mr Speaker: Members will know that this is the first debate in the Assembly in which we will hear from Mr Phil Flanagan. I remind the House that the convention is that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to make my maiden speech on educational underachievement, an issue that has a huge impact on the lives of so many people and on our society as a whole. I support the motion and the amendment, and I thank the proposers for the opportunity to speak. For some years now, Sinn Féin has been highlighting the fact that working-class Protestant boys are the demographic most failed by the educational arrangements that the majority of unionist representatives have fought vigorously to retain.

11.15 am

Sinn Féin has begun the process of bringing about meaningful change in our education system by putting an end to the discriminatory 11-plus exam. Academic selection is a failed system, socially and educationally. It creates and sustains injustice and inequality, and it is fundamentally immoral. It has no place in a modern, progressive and enlightened society. In truth, state-sponsored academic selection was academic rejection for the majority of our children.

Just last week, we saw the publication of the most up-to-date figures on the qualifications of school leavers. They show a continuing improvement in the number of students leaving school with at least five good GCSEs, including English and maths, and a more substantial increase in the number of students leaving school with at least two A levels. That positive development reflects much of the good work that has been carried out across the education system over the past number of years and the hard work that has been put in by students and

teachers across the North. However, we cannot merely accept that continuing improvement, and we must not become complacent. We must do much more to raise standards for all of our young people, particularly those who are being left behind. We need to drive out inequalities that still exist in the system. Much good work has been done in recent years to raise standards. If we are to equip young people with the skills and the qualifications that they need to find meaningful employment and to help drive the local economy, that work must be built on and continued.

When I attended school, not all that long ago, performing well and trying hard was thought to be insufficiently masculine by a very small number of my peers. However, that attitude was and remains much more prevalent in working-class areas than in more affluent ones. That attitude needs to change, and it will take positive role models and leadership to achieve that.

The motion calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to bring forward a strategy to address the level of educational attainment in working-class Protestant areas. The amendment calls on the Education Minister to address the problem at the earliest possible stage. I largely welcome those calls, but I also impress on the Employment Minister the need to resist any potential increase in third-level tuition fees. University fees of any kind are a huge disincentive to people from a working-class background, who are forced to take out loans to cover those fees and to cover their accommodation and living costs during their time at university. Accommodation costs are a huge barrier for those who live far away from a university in constituencies like mine.

I come from a working-class family and know all too well the difficulties that young people in deprived areas face when pursuing a decent education. I welcome any measures that can be put in place to reduce and potentially remove those difficulties. Drawing up a strategy and simply ignoring the attitudinal problems that exist in our society will not address any of the issues that we have discussed. The recent report commissioned by Dawn Purvis highlighted the broad factors that impact directly on the educational and vocational development of our young people. It also recognised that our education system alone cannot solve all of those problems.

Good leadership and great teaching in a school can and often does make a positive difference, but much more needs to be done in communities to support the work of schools, encourage young people and their families to have aspirations for their futures, and send out clear signals about the value and importance of a good education. That positive leadership must stem from the political system.

There is an old Irish proverb: “Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí.” That means, “Praise the youth and they will prosper.” I am confident that, if Members from all sides of the House can work constructively together, we will see continued improvement.

Mr Speaker: As with the previous Member, this will be the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Mr David McIlveen. Once again, I remind the House of the convention that there are no interruptions during a maiden speech.

Mr D McIlveen: I am possibly going to produce a first for a member of the Democratic Unionist Party by dedicating my victory in the election to an Irish republican. Before Mr Allister picks up the phone to Darwin Templeton or has a heart attack, I will qualify what I mean by that. Evelyn Margaret McIlveen was born in Bailieborough in 1918 and passed away in January 2010. She moved to Belfast because of the economic deprivation in the Irish Republic and found herself in a prosperous part of Northern Ireland. She yearned for the reunification of Ireland. She gave birth to a Free Presbyterian minister, an RUC officer and a member of the Ulster Unionist Party, so she never had a lot of influence on her children, or her grandchildren for that matter.

Although she longed for the reunification of Ireland, she taught me by her arguments what an erroneous path that was, and I am very glad that I can be found on this side of the House. I dedicate my election victory to someone who taught me what political debate is all about, and that although we do not agree on certain issues — or many issues, as the case may be — the place to have those arguments is in an environment such as this. I dedicate my victory to that great woman, who had a profound influence on my life, and who, I greatly regret, did not get the opportunity to witness this maiden speech.

I, too, welcome the motion. Those of us who canvassed, particularly in working-class unionist areas, know that this issue is right at the top

of the agenda. However, we have to accept that although this is a debate that circles around education, the education aspect of it is really just the tip of the iceberg. I have spoken to many people who work in the education sector, particularly in working-class areas, and it is very clear that the debate spans other Departments, such as the Department for Social Development, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. In fact, it really goes right to the very moral fibre of Northern Ireland.

Whether we like it or not, in our schools and working-class estates, particularly in Protestant areas, there is a lack of parental guidance, pastoral guidance and principled guidance. That is the biggest issue in working-class Protestant areas at the moment. When Queen's University was opened it was branded as one of Pitt's "godless colleges" and, unfortunately, our schools have followed that example. That is where we find the biggest breakdown. It is a breakdown of families and of moral guidance in the home.

I was told by a teacher in my constituency of two 12-year-old girls who were arrested due to taking too much alcohol one weekend. The racket made on the back seat of the police car was so riotous — that is probably the best description for it — that the police control centre actually asked the officers if they needed assistance. That was two 12-year-old girls. We have to realise that we have a much deeper problem than what is happening in the schools.

During the last election, David Cameron, our Prime Minister, fought on the basis of "broken Britain". I sincerely believe that we have a case of "broken Ulster" in this society at the moment, and it is incumbent on everybody in the House to do what they can to ensure that "broken Ulster" is fixed.

What is the solution? I believe the solution that we have to look at is how we can inspire those young people to better places. We have to get away from the 'X Factor'-like principle that everybody can be a star. The fact is that everybody cannot be a star. Everybody can work to be the best that they possibly can, but, with the Education Minister, we need to refocus our efforts to putting pupils into courses that have employability at the end of them.

Mr Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr D McIlveen: I ask the Minister to look at that as a matter of urgency.

Mr Copeland: I am not quite sure if I am a maiden today or not. I have been here before; I was away for four years, and now I am back. It strikes me as somewhat strange — *[Interruption.]* I trust that I will be defended from interruptions. It strikes me as somewhat strange that the last time I stood here in this corner, on 16 January 2007, I was speaking on social disadvantage and educational underachievement. At that stage we had not quite narrowed it down to members of the Protestant working-class community. In some ways, it highlights thoughts that I have had and harboured through the last four years.

The first time that I was here, we did not really talk about very much. In fact, I think that there were only two occasions on which everyone was in the Chamber. Such was the dispensation at that time, I said that the settled will of everyone who was here could not, had it wished to, occasion the changing of a light bulb in the chandelier in the Great Hall. It seems that things have improved to a degree in my absence. Yet we are still confronted —

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Copeland: No, I will not, sir.

We are still confronted with the same difficulties. Just before that date, 16 January 2007, I held an event in the Senate Chamber with Holy Cross Boys' Primary School of west Belfast and Beechfield Primary School of east Belfast. Mr Speaker, it was hosted by your predecessor, Mrs Bell, who was the Speaker at that time. The proceedings of the debate were recorded in Hansard, and the kids did well. The problem is that Beechfield Primary School is now closed and the library 120 yards from where that school was located is now closed. Every single waking day people in that community wake up and see further evidence of a state withdrawal of service provision in the districts in which they live — and we wonder why there are rumblings of discontent.

Without a shadow of doubt, somewhere in this Province, a child will have been born on 16 January 2007. Without a shadow of doubt, somewhere in this Province, a child will be born today. It is a sad fact that any of us could take the date and time of that child's birth, write the postcode of its birth on a piece of paper and

from that postcode, which will be specific to 30 or 40 addresses, write, with a fair degree of certainty, the education that that child will avail itself of and its future employment prospects or prospects of going to university. That situation is no different today from what it was four or five years ago. I hope that, at the end of this mandate, this House, through the corporate actions of us all, will have done something to redress the imbalance in our society and the lottery with which the postcode of their birth ladders or saddles children.

Much has been made of under-attendance at school, and that is a fact. There is also an imbalance between the funding of nursery schools, primary schools and secondary schools. It is probably self-evident to everyone in the Chamber that I never received the benefit of a university education. My grandfather, who was a formative character in my life, was firmly of the view that a university education was useful if you were going to work for somebody else. Since he had not figured working for someone else into his or my future, I did not go to university.

My son, however, was slightly different. He went to a good state school. When he was eight or nine years of age, we were told that he would never be able to read and write. Consequently, we did not put him through the horrors of the 11-plus. He went to Lagan College, which, at that stage, was unusual for someone of our background. He progressed through that school well, going in at the bottom and coming out pretty close to the top. He got his first degree and is now on target for a second degree, which brings a slightly different set of problems. Had he been born in a different postcode and not benefited from the attention, advice and guidance, most particularly of my wife —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Copeland: — his course through life would have been entirely different.

Sir, I will say this: this House will be judged. I hope that we will be judged favourably by ensuring that our children and grandchildren do not become for ever the prisoners of what we have done but the inheritors of what we will do.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a chur in iúl don rún agus don leasú. I support the motion and the amendment. Following on from

Mr McIlveen's maiden speech, I cannot help but think that Granny McIlveen and Granny McGurk would have got on well, given the views that she obviously held. I hope to get on just as well with Mr McIlveen in the time ahead.

Mr Storey: *[Interruption.]*

Mr McElduff: You are keeping well, Mervyn?

Undoubtedly, there is an issue. The DUP MLAs have done us some service by tabling the motion. I feel that it has been prompted, in part, by Dawn Purvis's work, 'Educational Disadvantage and the Protestant Working Class: A Call to Action'.

11.30 am

Mr Weir: On a point of accuracy, I think I am right in saying that my colleague initially tabled this motion during the previous term, before Dawn Purvis produced her report. It has not been inspired by anyone, and credit should be given to my colleague for putting it forward before Dawn Purvis lost her seat.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute added to his time.

Mr McElduff: I will reiterate the point. I think that it was prompted, at least in part, by the work of Dawn Purvis and her team. It is good to see the main unionist political parties —

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way again?

Mr McElduff: OK, go on ahead, Peter.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. It seems that the former Member for East Belfast has been elevated to a form of sainthood today. I wonder, if she was doing such a brilliant job, as seems to have been so universally acknowledged, why she managed to get so few votes.

Mr McElduff: We should try to concentrate on educational disadvantage. We should put young people's education at the heart of this debate, although Dawn is young enough herself. It is good to see the main unionist parties concerned about working-class Protestants and their education. That is a very welcome development. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be allowed to continue.

Mr McElduff: In the previous mandate, on very many occasions, the Minister of Education made

that point. I will quote Caitríona Ruane, the Minister of Education in the previous Assembly. She said:

“Educational disadvantage exists among Protestants and Catholics, boys and girls, children of no religion and children from our ethnic minority communities.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 59, p138, col 1].

She said that there are:

“interconnected policies to tackle underachievement, promote equality and raise educational standards. Those policies include Every School a Good School, the revised curriculum, the review of special education needs and inclusion, the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry programmes, the entitlement framework and the literacy and numeracy strategy”. — [Official Report, Bound Volume 59, p138, col 1].

Obviously, the Department of Education and the new Minister of Education, with the Minister for Employment and Learning, will have a lot to do to continue that work and the very many programmes that both Departments have initiated.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Member for giving way. When he is outlining the commitment of the previous Minister of Education from Sinn Féin, he might also talk about the previous previous Minister of Education from Sinn Féin. I wonder whether he could update us on what progress has been made on tackling this issue?

Mr McElduff: I welcome the fact that both Ministers are here for the debate, in the form of Dr Stephen Farry and John O’Dowd. John has said that he will spell out how the Department of Education is going to deal with the matter in an ongoing way. There are many issues for the Department for Employment and Learning, and this is definitely one of them.

There are other areas that I am concerned about and which require attention. For example, the construction industry, particularly west of the Bann, is in very serious decline. As well as taking forward the crucial area of work that is spelled out in the motion, monetary resources that are held by the Department for Employment and Learning need to be awarded to and invested in the further education colleges to ensure that young people and people already in the construction industry can diversify, upskill and reskill. I am taking this opportunity, with the Minister for Employment and Learning present,

to make a call for that area to be addressed as well.

An interdepartmental strategy is required. If Members read Dawn Purvis’s report, they will see that, for example, it is very important to have greater involvement of parents and local communities, particularly in socially deprived areas. There is a need for a more flexible curriculum and more flexible learning styles. In rural areas, I suggest that poor transportation and poor broadband access stand in the way of young people achieving in education and leaving themselves that bit more employable. I again emphasise that there is an interdepartmental aspect to this work. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for example, has work to do to improve broadband access. By and large, Sinn Féin is positive towards the motion and the amendment. It is pleased that the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Education have been present and looks forward to this issue being taken forward.

Mr Speaker: The Member’s time is up.

Mr McElduff: Thank you.

Mr McDevitt: It is a great honour to take up the role of the SDLP’s education spokesperson. It is particularly important that any of us who seeks to speak on this topic in the next four to five years should be given the opportunity to do so today on an important issue that goes to the heart of one of the true inequalities still present in our society, which, as the motion rightly illustrates, impacts on those who have less from a Protestant faith background. Nonetheless, it impacts on those who have less in every community in this region. In the Chamber and elsewhere, we often get carried away talking about only one apparent inequality in our society, when the truth is that this issue is arguably the greatest shame that should hang on all our shoulders.

We have managed to construct an education system that relies heavily on class to define success and also relies on external support and parental pushing. It nearly assumes that we send our children home from school at the end of the day to a stable household where mum and dad are available to help with the homework, where work will be rewarded and where a school lunch will be prepared, and a child will be sent back to school the next morning ready and able to learn. However,

that is not the North in which we live. It is not the reality in many parts of my constituency. It is not the reality in many parts of all our constituencies.

There is a further historical lesson, to which many colleagues referred throughout the debate. It is ironic that we should debate this topic on the 100th anniversary of the cutting of the ropes of the Titanic. That is so because, in some ways, when we think about this great centenary of engineering prowess and great human achievements that we will celebrate, we must also reflect on how little we have done in the century between then and now to understand that the changes going on all around us — not political, but socio-economic and industrial changes — required a response from government. Throughout the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and in our generation, the required response from government was that we understand that education must start earlier and not, in a formal sense, so early and that we must invest from the earliest possible moment in vulnerable parents and their children.

We must invest. A son of our own city, Dr Simon Field, the head of education and research at the OECD, pointed out recently in a seminal report that if we do not redress the inequality in how we fund our education system, we will continue to have a system in which the elephant in the classroom will be the class of the children who predominantly make up that classroom.

Therefore, it is fine that the new Minister for Employment and Learning is here to respond to the debate. I wish him well not just today but in the job ahead, but the truth is that we are debating only the symptoms, which is why I welcome the amendment as an honest attempt to go to the cause. The question that we must all pose as we set out on the new mandate is: are we serious about tackling the fundamental inequality in education? Are we serious about understanding that, although we have all too conveniently thrown our children on ideological bonfires in the past century, we will have to understand, in the years ahead, that we cannot run at the pace of the slowest if we do nothing to pick up that pace?

Mr Storey: I appreciate the Member's giving way. I have listened carefully to what he is saying. I go back to a point that I made in the House before the last mandate came to an end.

It is the challenge for us all in the House and particularly for the Ministers. It is regrettable that we have a situation in the House today in which we have two Ministers who did not really know who was to respond to the motion. That shows the huge problem that we have in relation to a joined-up approach to education. I refer again to my father, who was educated in a small, rural country school. His writing and spelling is exceptional. He did not achieve huge grades in the then examination system, but the system then, with all its poverty, challenges and difficulties, gave him a good education. There is an issue with the way in which we teach our children in our schools. We have followed so many new theories, which have not worked, and then we go back to another brand of new theories. However, we always come back to the traditional methods, which still produce the goods.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

Mr McDevitt: That added 30 seconds on to my time, Mr Speaker. In those brief 30 seconds, I will not pick up Mr Storey's challenge. However, I make this commitment to him and every other colleague in the House: I will come here every day with an open mind about what we must do to improve the lot.

I leave us with words that I have used in the Chamber before. They should be our guiding principle and what defines how we tackle this issue: if you think that education is expensive — if you think that it costs too much — just try ignorance.

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I congratulate the movers of the motion and the amendment. I am very happy to follow through on what has been said. I also thank all of the Members who have spoken today on this issue. It has clearly stimulated a lot of thought and interest in the Chamber. I also acknowledge the Members who are making their maiden speeches today. I suppose that I am one of them, albeit in a different guise.

Addressing underachievement, wherever and however it manifests itself, will be one of my top priorities. However, I stress that my Department is not just a Department of higher education. As we will no doubt be discussing challenging issues regarding higher education funding over coming weeks and months, we must also be mindful of the broader skills and employment responsibilities of my Department. Every

decision and reprioritisation that we will seek to discuss over coming weeks will have knock-on consequences within the context of a finite budget. Members must be mindful of that.

Undoubtedly, there are particular issues that disproportionately relate to Protestants, just as there are with Catholics and other sections of the community. Regardless of whether problems relate to unemployment, low skills or the poor acquisition of qualifications, my Department's policies, strategies and programmes are designed to meet the needs of individuals, irrespective of their background. That is not to say that programmes and services cannot be targeted to ensure maximum impact. I have no doubt that when we come to agree our new Programme for Government, the priority will remain to grow a dynamic and innovative economy. A skilled workforce equipped with the competencies and attitudes that are required by employers is absolutely key to future economic success. That is essential not only for the economy but to unlock talent and enable people to meet their aspirations.

Last week, I launched the skills strategy 'Success Through Skills — Transforming Futures'. Following on from the first skills strategy, the approach considers our current skills base, examines the skills that we will need in the future and highlights a number of areas for action. By aiming to meet the needs of all learners, my Department's education, training and employment programmes are designed to widen access and raise standards of educational achievement, including in working-class Protestant communities. There is a well-established pattern of low academic achievement in deprived communities generally. By deprived areas, I mean those super output areas that are ranked in the lowest quintile by Northern Ireland's multiple deprivation measure. A predominantly Protestant area is one in which 80% or more of people have a Protestant background.

There have been a number of initiatives over the past decade or more to address issues in areas of multiple deprivation. There was the task force on Protestant working-class areas that operated in the early part of the past decade. There was also the west Belfast and greater Shankill task forces, which were established in 2001 by the then Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Minister for Social Development. The vast majority of the areas

that were targeted by the task forces were subsequently designated as neighbourhood renewal areas. There are six that are considered to be predominantly Protestant, including Rathcoole; south, inner south and inner east Belfast; Tullycarnet; and Ligoniel. My Department, through its delivery organisations, has been a significant partner in those various initiatives. One example of that is the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) programme. LEMIS is a community-based outreach and mentoring service designed to engage with those who are furthest from the labour market and to encourage them to move towards and into work.

11.45 am

Educational underachievement does not just materialise when young people leave school. The factors contributing to underachievement are many and varied, and a number of points have been made about that today, including those about early years. Factors include socio-economic background, parental influence, aspirations, readiness for schooling and a variety of in-school factors, to name but a few. We could also talk about leadership in the community and what happens through the Assembly and the Executive. Therefore, I recognise the intent behind the amendment, and I am grateful to my colleague, the Minister of Education, for information on what his Department is doing to address educational underachievement in the school system. I recognise that it is a crossover issue. As in many other areas, over the coming months and years, we will have to work together across Departments and in the Executive.

In education, however, the 2009-2010 school leavers survey showed that young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, as measured by entitlement to free school meals, were less likely to achieve good outcomes. For example, 25% of leavers with free school meals achieved three or more A levels at grades A* to C, compared to 56% of leavers without free school meals. An important indicator for the Department of Education is the percentage of leavers achieving five or more GCSE grades at A* to C or equivalent, including English and maths, as that is the level often sought by employers. Overall in 2009-2010, 59% of leavers achieved that level. However, among leavers with free school meals, the level dropped to 31%, compared to 64.3% of leavers

without free school meals. Ambitious targets have been set to increase the number of young people achieving good GCSEs.

Underachievement is a problem for Protestant and Catholic communities, especially the most disadvantaged. The issue remains the need to tackle underachievement wherever it exists to improve the life chances of all young people. Every School a Good School is the overarching policy for raising standards and tackling underachievement wherever it exists. Many young people need additional support to ensure that they can attend school regularly and achieve their full potential. For example, they may have special or additional educational needs or they may come from a very disadvantaged background.

Literacy, numeracy and ICT are at the core of the curriculum. Therefore, the new strategy, Count, Read: Succeed, sets out a renewed focus on improving literacy and numeracy standards and on closing existing achievement gaps. Of course, we want to make sure that young people get the support that they need to make informed and appropriate choices. That is why the Department of Education and my Department are working together to ensure that young people's choices are underpinned by a coherent programme of careers education, advice, information and guidance from primary school onwards.

As part of Further Education Means Business, the strategy for further education in Northern Ireland, previous Education and Employment and Learning Ministers agreed that we should work together to agree how best to deliver provision to 14- to 19-year-olds. Therefore, an important strand of our joint work on 14- to 19-year-olds is to ensure that the entitlement framework is implemented in its entirety and that a stimulating curriculum comprising an appropriate mix of vocational and academic subjects is made available to all schoolchildren. It is my view that it is essential to engage young people in study programmes that inspire, motivate and, at the same time, challenge them and lead to qualifications that are recognised by employers and that prepare them for the world of work.

The motion expresses concern about the effect that educational underachievement may have on the future employability of young people. That is why the Department's programmes have

such a strong focus on removing barriers to participating in learning, widening participation, addressing the deep-seated problem of literacy and numeracy and raising the qualifications and skill levels of those in work and those seeking employment. It is also why we place such a strong emphasis on working with unemployed people and why we are increasingly assisting those who are economically inactive. It is worth stressing that we have the highest levels of economic inactivity in the entire United Kingdom.

On behalf of the Executive, my Department is taking on the development of a draft cross-cutting strategy specifically for young people who are not in education, employment or training, frequently called NEETs. The draft strategy, Pathways to Success, is currently out for consultation, with a closing date of 30 June, and I look forward greatly to the responses to it. They will help in the development of a strategy, which, subject to Executive endorsement, will lead to a concerted effort to tackle related issues.

Another key area is widening participation in higher education. To achieve that, it is essential to raise aspirations and attainment levels while young people are still in school. In the 2010-11 academic year, my Department has allocated £2.5 million to various widening-participation funding mechanisms for under-represented sections of the community. Both Queen's University and the University of Ulster have their own programmes for that.

Protestant working-class boys are among the most under-represented groups in higher education. Under-representation of this group is much more marked for students from low-participation areas and for those entitled to free school meals. My Department is leading on the development of a new integrated regional strategy for widening participation in higher education, and, again, the consultation process will draw to a close in early June. It is interesting to note that, in the 2009-2010 academic year, there were almost 900 enrolments in Northern Ireland's higher education institutions from deprived areas that are predominantly Protestant. That shows an increase of 7% in higher education participation from those areas in the three years through to 2009-2010. Of course, although much more needs to be done, it is nevertheless a very encouraging trend.

The six further education colleges offer a wide and varied curriculum through their main campuses,

and they have a very wide network of community outreach centres. Although this is not exclusive to Protestant working-class communities, my Department has developed and implemented the learner access and engagement programme. That programme, which is currently being piloted, allows FE colleges to contract with third-party organisations to provide learner support and mentoring for hard-to-reach or disengaged adult learners. To date, the programme has been successful in engaging with leavers from areas of deprivation. Through the programme, individuals are encouraged to enrol in and successfully complete a course. Hopefully, that will be their first step on the lifelong learning ladder. It is interesting to note that, in the academic year 2009-2010, there were over 9,600 enrolments in our further education colleges from deprived areas that are predominantly Protestant. That shows a significant increase in participation from those areas over the past three years, showing an increase of 10% from 2007-08 through to 2009-2010.

Raising the level of competence in the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT is also immensely important. In 2009-2010 alone, there were almost 3,800 essential-skills enrolments from these areas. That shows a substantial increase in participation over the past three years, with an increase of 71% from 2007-08 to 2009-2010. Between the commencement of the essential skills strategy in 2002 and 31 March this year, there have been around 224,000 enrolments. Some 85% of students completed their course, of whom 68% achieved the qualification. Although much more remains to be done, this programme has delivered crucial help to a large number of people.

My Department's Training for Success programme provides a guarantee of a training place to all school leavers aged 16 and 17. As of 25 May, there were 6,714 young people on Training for Success. It meets the needs of a wide variety of young people and enables participants to progress to higher-level training, further education or employment. It is currently delivered under the following three strands: first, Skills for your Life, which aims to address the personal development needs of young people who have disengaged from learning and/or have significant obstacles, with the aim of preparing them for working life; secondly, Skills for Work, which aims to help young people to gain skills and a vocationally related qualification at level

1 and provides the opportunity to progress to level 2 training through an apprenticeship or further education; and thirdly, programmed apprenticeships, which were introduced in September 2009 as an intervention measure during the economic downturn, as it was unlikely that young people wishing to be apprentices would secure employment at the outset. Even within that framework, through the introduction of the Working Rite pilot to inform future provision, the Department is looking at more innovative ways to target young people who are disadvantaged.

My Department is also the managing authority for the Northern Ireland European social fund, which aims to reduce unemployment and economic inactivity and to improve the skills of those currently in work. In particular, priority 1 of the programme, "Helping people into sustainable employment", aims to extend the employment opportunities of unemployed and inactive people by helping them to enter, remain in and make progress in sustained employment. The programme does not reserve funding for any particular group of participants, but focuses on disadvantaged people, including those with disabilities and health conditions; lone parents; older workers; young people not in education, employment or training; women; and people with low or no qualifications. One of the programme's targets is to assist 45,000 individuals under priority 1 during the programming period. The programme results in overall funding for those purposes of some €414 million, of which 40% is contributed by the European Union, 25% by the Department and 35% by other Departments and public bodies.

In some respects, careers guidance is the glue that holds together many of those initiatives. In January 2009, my Department, together with the Department of Education, launched Preparing for Success, our all-age career strategy. Its overall aim is that young people and adults develop the skills and confidence to make the most of their life choices. My Department's Careers Service works in partnership with post-primary schools and alternative education providers to help young people to articulate their career goals and to support them in the career planning process.

I have enjoyed listening to the debate, and I am very grateful for all the comments and suggestions made by Members. We have made a note of all the comments, and we will follow through on that. I will consider carefully what I

have heard and take forward these and other issues over the coming months as part of the ongoing work of the Department. Again, I stress that it will involve cross-cutting work across Departments in the Executive and strong leadership from our communities and at a political level.

Mr B McCrea: I rise as Chair of the Committee for Employment and Learning, but, as the Committee has not yet met, I think that it is appropriate that I make these comments on a personal basis. However, I will talk briefly about what I think the Committee may wish to consider.

According to Chris Lyttle, there are few more important issues that the House will consider. It is also the case that the proposer of the motion, Mr Easton, made a commitment on the matter during the election campaign, and he has, rightly, brought it to the House for immediate consideration. That raises the matter of whether we are asking the right question of the right person, which is why I am very grateful to my colleague Roy Beggs for tabling the amendment that draws in the Minister of Education. A number of issues come forward on that as we seek to start a fresh mandate. There has been much talk about the work of Dawn Purvis, and I have to say that I have some sympathy with the position of Mervyn Storey as Chair of the Committee for Education because that Committee carried out a proper and thorough investigation into the causes of and concerns raised by educational underachievement.

When talking about education, the party to my right quite often says that we should not be having discussions outside the accepted norms of the Assembly.

Mr McElduff: Does the Member accept that we may be positioned on your right, but, ideologically, we are on your left?

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute added to his time.

Mr B McCrea: I doubt that an extra minute will be sufficient for me to consider where that party is actually positioned, given that there has been a very significant change in its attitude to this place over the past number of weeks. We shall consider that further, but I make the point that, when it comes to causal effects, early education is accepted as the way forward. We have had a number of Ministers of Education, mainly from

the same party, who, thus far, have failed to address the issue.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member and his party for tabling the amendment and highlighting to the House that it is an issue that goes beyond just the Department for Employment and Learning. However, will he agree with me that if we are going to talk about tackling early years, we have to take it beyond the Department of Education and bring in the Health Minister? In fact, what we need is a cross-departmental early years strategy and not an early years strategy that sits in the silo of the Department of Education.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Member. I will take no more interventions because of time. The Member pre-empted what I was going to say towards the end of my speech, but I will say it now to ensure that it comes out. This is not just an issue for the Executive.

This is an issue for all Committees that provide oversight. Therefore, I will make an offer now to each and every other Chair of a Committee — the Committee for Education, the Committee for Social Development, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister or the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety — that we take a cross-Committee approach to educational attainment. There is no point in dealing with the issue in silos. If Committees are to prove their worth in this institution, it is right that they hold Members, Ministers and the Executive to account. Proper scrutiny is looking at what has been done until now and what has been said in the debate. The effectiveness of that action must then be evaluated in the months and years to come.

12.00 noon

Mr Beggs repeatedly brought up the work of Professor Heckman, whose influence on early years intervention is known to all in the Assembly. I think that it was Daithí McKay who said that there was an imbalance in the number of children going to nursery school. If tackling that imbalance is the solution, we should ensure that there is universal, teacher-led provision for all the children of Northern Ireland.

Some really interesting issues came up in the debate. I do not say this often, but Gregory Campbell made a real contribution when he said that this debate and debates on other issues have no impact in the estates. People there

listen to what goes on but are not interested and do not find elections or anything else relevant. That brings me to another point. There was a bit of a spat earlier when someone asked, "If Dawn Purvis made such a big contribution, how come she is no longer here?". I like Dawn. I think that she made a great contribution, and I think that we all do. However, do you know what her absence really says? It reinforces Mr Campbell's point. Despite her doing the good work and getting the message across, it made little impact on the electorate, the people whom we are trying to serve. That is the challenge that we all have to meet.

No amount of hand wringing or exhortation will make a difference unless we get down to doing something. I look forward to working with the Minister. We have already talked about other issues. I look forward to engaging with the Minister of Education, and I repeat my invitation to all Committee Chairs who have an interest in the matter to come together to deal with it so that the Committee for Employment and Learning can actually do something. The Committee for Employment and Learning should be first, not last.

Mr Weir: At the end of what has been quite a good-natured debate — there has been a bit of banter, but, broadly speaking, there has been a consensual position — there has been a recognition across the Chamber that there is a problem out there that needs to be solved and a determination from all parties to solve it.

I acknowledge all who contributed to the debate, particularly Members who made their maiden speech. Moreover, particularly as this is the first occasion on which I have had the opportunity to do so, I congratulate my colleague from North Down Mr Farry on his elevation to high office. He highlighted, as did Michael Copeland, the fact that a lot of good work has been done. No one is trying to deny that, and it would be churlish if we did. Mr Copeland said that things had improved greatly in his absence. It would also be churlish of me to say that there is any causal connection between the two. Nevertheless, he made one of the central points, which is that we in the Assembly, be it on this issue or others, will ultimately be judged on what we do rather than on what we say. We will be judged on the practical differences that we make to society.

Despite all the good work that has been done, it is undoubtedly the case that much good

work remains to be done. The statistics on the differences in levels of success for those from a lower economic background and the statistics on the differences in the level of university attainment between those from working-class Protestant communities and those from working-class Catholic communities show that there is a genuine problem out there. A number of Members provided some historical background. The traditional dependence on manufacturing and on heavy industry in principally working-class areas is no longer the case. We have moved from that situation. As a society, we have perhaps failed to deal with the problem caused by that gap, which has been there for a considerable time.

Undoubtedly, the issue cuts across Departments and, indeed, goes beyond Departments. Therefore, I welcome the Ulster Unionist Party amendment, which deals with an early years strategy. Our party highlighted that strongly in its manifesto. Although the issue of academic selection at 11 is important, we have, at times, got into a degree of trench warfare on that. One of the problems with that debate is that issues such as low academic achievement of people from Protestant working-class areas and the lack of investment and focus on early years education have tended to be ignored. Consequently, it is important that that key debate is engaged in also.

Pat Ramsey provided statistics on the disparities in nursery school placements, and that is a long-term social problem that is perhaps not being tackled as it should be. Nearly 15 years ago, I was part of the Education Committee in the old Northern Ireland Forum. I suppose that I am one of the few survivors from that body. It looked at nursery education and highlighted the need to move to universal coverage. We are still struggling with that.

Other issues were raised in the debate. Clearly, there is work to be done to reach out to very young people in particular. Much of the focus has been on educational systems, but, as a number of Members said, the issue goes well beyond that. For example, Daithí McKay talked about a holistic view and a need to look at environment and poverty, culture and community. The issue goes beyond education systems. There are things that we can provide in schools to provide that support, and there have been initiatives such as breakfast clubs, homework clubs and a range of things that we need to look at. It goes beyond that. It includes

support for parents, and, indeed, we need to address the different aspirations and levels of push among many parents. We also need to look at who the role models are, particularly in working-class areas. Unfortunately, for many years during the Troubles, those from a criminal background were seen as the role models. Why go out and achieve and get a job? Why not aspire to be seen as the local big man or the local hood? Changing the culture of aspiration, which goes beyond simply the education systems, is vital.

The proposer highlighted the fact that, although it is important to look at early years and, indeed, at the periods of schooling and GCSEs, we need to be much more widely focused and recognise that people whom the system has failed or who have gone through the system without qualifications have an opportunity to be helped at a later stage. The proposer highlighted the good work of the women's education group in Kilcooley in our constituency. In many ways, that shows that, at times, thinking outside the box is needed. Although what is provided by the universities and further education colleges is good, it should be seen not as the end solution but as part of the solution, and there is work to be done in the communities. Good work is also being done in mentoring. For instance, in east Belfast, the Glentoran Community Trust, which plans to expand into greater educational work, has realised the value of mentoring young people, and that is important.

I regard some of the remarks as a little discordant. Not surprisingly, the party opposite said that the answer to all our ills was to end academic selection. I said earlier that there was a degree of distraction with that issue, and ending academic selection would have a counter effect. If it were removed, it would reinforce class and social divisions and would take away at least one of the ladders from people in those communities. We need to look at solutions that provide more ladders to people, not fewer. Of late, many commentators have highlighted the example of what has happened in England with the comprehensive system, where you get more and more sink estates and less and less social mobility. We ought to look at solutions that provide greater social mobility.

It is about dealing with a problem that clearly affects society. Indeed, the previous Employment and Learning Committee did an in-depth study of the issue of NEETs, which is a by-

product of the lack of educational attainment. It creates great problems for society, with people not contributing financially or economically to society, and it leads to increased crime and increased health problems. However, leaving aside the major problems that low academic achievement creates for society, such failure is, above all, a tragedy for those individuals. We, as an Assembly, need to address that. As Gregory Campbell highlighted, it is about getting in among the communities and dealing with disillusionment and hopelessness, and that means getting real solutions on the ground.

I look forward to seeing the strategy that the Employment and Learning Minister has put forward and, indeed, to working with his counterparts. The strategy has to be multiagency in nature and has to be built with the communities as a whole to address those problems. There is good practice in Northern Ireland and beyond, and we need to look at how we introduce that in our communities to ensure that there is community buy-in and we start to see real progress on the ground. There is a wide range of issues, including parenting and welfare dependency issues, and it will take a co-ordinated approach at Executive level and beyond to tackle those problems.

I do not want to incur the wrath of the Speaker by not using the term "Northern Ireland", but, to use David McIlveen's phrase, we have a "broken Ulster" in many of our communities, which, over the past 15 years, have perhaps been left behind by many of the advances that have happened. It is important that we move away from some of the arguments about education and drill down into the issues so that we can have a situation that benefits and lifts those communities and in which education is seen as a way to improve those communities. That is why I welcome the support from around the Chamber and why I was glad that the motion was the first issue debated in this Assembly term. It is an important issue. It is important that the Executive go forward with a unified voice, determined to tackle it. I commend the motion and the amendment to the House.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the comparative lack of post-GCSE educational qualifications held by people from working-class Protestant communities; expresses concern at the effect this may have on the future employability of young people from such areas; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to bring forward a strategy to address this matter; and further calls on the Minister of Education to address educational underachievement at the earliest stage.

Special Needs: Services for Young People and Adults

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Ms J McCann: I beg to move

That this Assembly supports a review of the community services, including respite services, that are currently available for young people and adults with special needs after they leave school.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Most people in the Chamber will agree that leaving school and moving into adult life is a difficult and daunting experience for most young people and their families. However, we can imagine the added pressures on young people with special needs.

Children with moderate learning difficulties usually leave school at 16 unless they have a severe disability, in which case they stay on until 19. They, their parents and their carers need to be aware of the choices that are available to them because, more often than not, when parents see the poor choices that are available, they feel extremely anxious about what the future holds for their child. We have to remember that the children come from a school environment where they have been able to access the support of teachers and school services. However, parents then face uncertainty about where their child will go and about what support services are available for them and their children. It is vital that parents and their children have those options, to make that transition as smooth as possible for everyone. There is no doubt that good services and practices exist in different organisations. However, it is clear that a lot more needs to be done for people with special needs who face that decision.

12.15 pm

It is vital that that transition is carried out in a planned fashion. It needs to involve all the agencies that will play a major role during the post-school years. The transfer of relevant information should ensure that young people receive any necessary specialist help and support during their continuing education and

training after leaving school or any additional specialist help that they may need.

In a report on the ability of further education colleges to, for instance, provide the necessary services for adults who choose to go there, it was discovered that there were several problems, which ranged from mobility access to lack of training for staff and lack of specialist equipment in those colleges. The necessary support mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that the right of people with special needs to independent living and participation in all aspects of life, including community life, is respected.

The report suggested clearly that an umbrella organisation is needed to develop that partnership approach to the problem. The need for a cross-departmental approach was mentioned in the previous debate and is mentioned frequently in debates in the Chamber. Clearly, there is a need for all Departments to work together on such issues instead of in silos, as sometimes happens.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the provision of services should be aimed at achieving the fullest possible integration and individual development of each disabled child. The convention applies to children. However, when a child becomes 18 years of age, it is almost as though all of the work that has been done is thrown away. It is not continued to support the young person's integration into life as a young adult.

Ms M Anderson: I received an e-mail at the weekend from a single parent who is the mother of a 19-year-old daughter with severe mental and physical impairment. Her daughter is totally dependent on help and assistance because she cannot walk or talk. She needs 24/7 care. With regard to the Member's point about transition from childhood into adulthood and the wrap-around services that need to be in place, I was concerned when that mother told me that, because of budget cuts, her daughter would not now find a place in Maybrook Adult Training Centre. That mother cannot understand how support that was available to her daughter during childhood can be withdrawn in adulthood. I am sure that the Member would agree that the Minister should take a robust attitude towards examining and exploring that matter further.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for that intervention. I agree strongly. For day services,

in particular, there is clearly more demand than there are places available. I am sure that most Members have found that in their constituency certain families approach them regularly about that issue.

Problems also arise because young adults are often placed with much older people in some day centres. That is not good for them either. There is also an issue with transport. Often, many of those young adults cannot get to centres because they have no access to transport. With regard to employment opportunities, although there has been considerable growth in supported employment schemes in the North and better access to mainstream employment programmes for people with special needs, again, lack of mainstream funding means that access can be limited and that only a certain number of people can access those services.

I want to concentrate on respite services. I want to make it clear that, when we talk about this issue, we are talking not about statistics but about real people with families. In my constituency, access to respite facilities is a big issue for some families I have dealt with. Many families, carers and adults with disabilities experience a great deal of stress due to their situation. Respite care is an extremely important part of their needs. It can offer a break in the circumstances for parents, carers and family members and for the person who has the disability or special needs. It provides opportunities for them to interact with their peers and to enjoy relationships outside the family circle. That cuts down the social exclusion that they sometimes feel. It can also provide them with a sense of independence. It is important that respite should not be viewed as simply a break; it should be seen as a positive experience, one that should be integrated into any plan for transition from school into adult life. I do not think that there has been a comprehensive study of current respite facilities, but, in my experience and in the experience of some of the families I have dealt with, the families of some young people with severe disabilities and severe special needs are finding it difficult to access respite services.

We tabled the motion because we wanted to ensure that the need for proper provision for people with special needs is recognised and that everyone who needs services is given them

as of right. I find it extremely difficult to watch families having to fight tooth and nail for what is a basic human right: access to services for the family and the young person. Families should not have to do that. That is why there needs to be a review. People need to know what is available, but they also need to have access to opportunity and to be able to access the services that are available.

The transition from school to adult life needs to be planned in partnership with the young person and the parents, but the responsible agencies should also get together to look at how they can plan the transition for that person. The people in our communities, the constituents and the families who come to us for help, are looking for us to open doors for them to access those services.

I appeal to Members to support the motion, which asks for a review to make sure that enough services are freely available. As I said, those services are a right for those people. They are not services for which families should be fighting with organisations and Departments; they are services that the young person and the family should be receiving as of right.

Mr G Robinson: I have spoken on this issue on a number of occasions in the Chamber, and I am happy to do so again. It is an area of vital importance and one in which much can be done to benefit very vulnerable young people and adults. The term "special needs" covers a wide spectrum, and many unseen conditions must be remembered in the context of the debate.

I firmly believe that we must give those who have special needs the greatest possible chance of maximising their quality of life. Realistically, that can only be done with specialist services aimed specifically at addressing an individual's needs. It must also be remembered that we are in a period of severe financial restraint, and all decisions have to be made in that context. I hope that more services can be supplied to individuals with special needs, but, first, it may be prudent to review the services we have and see whether they can be used more effectively. Once we know what services are in place and how they are used, whether there is a possibility for greater use and whether they are overstretched and need to be strengthened, we need to ask whether additional targeted services can be considered. I use the word "targeted" because

services have to be targeted to ensure that they are effective and provide value for money. I will support any measures that fulfil those criteria. I am sure that the Minister will provide whatever services he can afford or sees as essential so that people with special needs have the greatest possible opportunity of maximising their quality of life and attainment.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I therefore propose to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. As we are having some problems with the public address system today, Members may have trouble hearing the announcement at 1.55 pm. I, therefore, suggest that they keep their eyes on the clock, so that they are back here at 2.00 pm. As I said, the sitting is, by leave, suspended until 2.00 pm, when the next Member to speak will be Mr Basil McCrea.

The sitting was suspended at 12.25 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is now 2.00 pm, so we will return to the debate on services for young people and adults with special needs. The next Member to speak is Mr Basil McCrea.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wish you all the very best in your new role. I shall treat you with the utmost respect from now on, both here and in other places.

Mr Dallat: That is a change.

Mr B McCrea: Yes, it is something of a change, I agree, Mr Dallat. Congratulations, nevertheless.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. The proposer raised a number of vital points, particularly about the importance of respite for people who have to care for and support those who are less fortunate than ourselves. During the election period, I think that many of us came across people about whom we can say only that they are magnificent in the way that they look after others who face huge challenges in their lives. If the situation were reversed, I wonder whether we would be up to the challenge to provide the level of service that those people give at home. Many of them say that even an hour of respite makes all the difference — even the ability to have a shower or whatever, free from the constant attention of those for whom they care. There is an issue, in that we have to look to respite services. They are not a luxury, and they are not an add-on: frankly, they are absolutely essential.

A number of other points are worthy of consideration, and perhaps the Minister will be able to look at those in the fullness of time. There are particular issues with employment, particularly at the age of 18. I heard an intervention from Ms Anderson about the difficulty of getting services for people up to the age of 18, but after that age they all seem to disappear. One of the more frequent comments that I hear is about how we ensure that those who have disabilities or other challenges in their lives get into some form of employment that makes use of their skills and values them as members of our society. In that regard, it is important to have places in a college of further education or some other appropriate

establishment that provides people with the appropriate skills to move forward in their lives.

This is not meant to be a criticism in any way, but there is a feeling that we do an awful lot but do not really get to the core of the problem. It is only when you live with the problem that you understand the challenges that are put forward. I was particularly struck by the fact that the proposer mentioned that people who go to day centres are quite often in with children and adults of different ages. It can be difficult to provide some form of respite and engagement for people with a wide variety of needs. Of course, I realise that there are particular challenges in the financial circumstances that we face, but, again, that is something that we have to look at.

In conclusion, when talking about the challenges that many people in our society face, I will say that this is a broad arena. I recently attended a conference on ME, and I was struck by the difficulties that those folk face, largely unassisted by anybody else. They soldier on with family and friends trying to get the services and the support that they deserve, regardless of the cause of the illness. There are real challenges in our society with neuro-dysfunctional diseases, including dementia, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, and we will have to reformulate the type of support that we give, not only to those folk but to the people who are trying to care for them.

I realise that this is a significant issue, and I have no doubt that the Minister and his colleagues will look at it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr B McCrea: I am happy to support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Mark Durkan, I remind the House that the convention is that there should be no interruption during his maiden speech.

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. On behalf of the SDLP, I fully support the motion. I also take the opportunity to thank the people of Foyle who elected me to the House. I am honoured that they have put their faith in me to represent them and I will do so to the very best of my ability. I aspire to serve Derry with the same vigour as John Hume, the same diligence

— and name — as Mark Durkan and the same compassion as Mary Bradley.

At some stage, most of us here will have been contacted by families and carers of people with special needs who are desperate for our help. As services are cut in some places and non-existent in others, many families are at breaking point. They are physically and mentally exhausted. The pressures on carers, who are often parents, increase as their children grow up. The role becomes more physically demanding as carers grow older. Parents, increasingly aware of their own mortality, fear for how their son or daughter will cope after they have gone. That is compounded by the withdrawal of statutory support when school-leaving age is reached. Those young people need structure in their lives. The slightest change to a routine can cause huge disruption.

Day care centres provide an excellent service and are staffed by industrious, dedicated and caring individuals; I am thinking of the Evergreen and Oak Tree centres in my constituency. However, the demand for places in those centres is growing and cannot be met.

The most important issue at present is respite. Current respite services are quite simply not good enough. Respite gives carers a chance to switch off and recharge their batteries, and it is essential if a high standard of care is to be maintained. It is also important for clients to get respite from their carers. Health trusts and education boards have so far been easily able to defend failures to provide for those with special needs. We have no statutory obligation, but this House has a moral obligation. Are we not the legislators?

The SDLP wants a policy to be adopted for children with special needs that is not a postcode lottery, and we want it as a matter of urgency. Our goal is to have an education system in which children, young people, parents and carers work as partners with schools and education authorities to secure the best educational outcomes for young people with special needs. There should be a statutory obligation on the two main Departments — Education and Health — to plan for those over school-leaving age, and assess the options for post-19 care provision, including the number of places available in day care centres. That will be a fundamental step towards providing carers

with the support they need and giving people with special needs the service they deserve.

The Autism Act, championed by my colleague Dominic Bradley, is a recent and relevant example of cross-departmental collaboration intended to improve the quality of life for vulnerable citizens here. Therefore, it is surely not beyond us to emulate its success and make a positive change for people with special needs and their families. We can make that change. We must make that change. We will make that change.

Mr McCarthy: Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker, and I congratulate you on your appointment. I thank the Members who tabled the motion, Jennifer McCann and Sue Ramsey, for bringing this very important subject to the Floor of the Assembly yet again. The motion calls for:

“a review of the community services, including respite services...for young people and adults with special needs after they leave school.”

Members of the Alliance Party can and will support an exercise in that area. We hope that the outcome of the review will be acknowledged by the Departments, and, more importantly, will be acted on.

As someone who has first-hand experience of the needs and expectations of a family member with severe learning difficulties, I know that it is imperative that provision is made for the health and well-being of individuals. However, educational and social opportunities are also of paramount importance, and that was recognised by Jennifer in her speech earlier today. I welcome the new Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to the debate today. However, I would impress on the House that this is not just a cause for one Minister and that a joined-up approach is required.

I and my party have been fully supportive of the content of the Bamford review, which, way back in 2005, carried out a thorough review of mental health and learning disabilities in Northern Ireland. Included in that review was a document entitled ‘Equal Lives,’ which is a truly comprehensive document and which took contributions from people at the grassroots who knew exactly what the needs were. Primarily, there is a need for joined-up government, with, as I said earlier, all the Departments working together to provide the best for all those with learning disabilities.

Respite services have already been mentioned. For parents, carers and individuals with learning disabilities those services have been scarce for a long time, and that was highlighted in 'Equal Lives' as something that must be addressed without delay. Again, as someone who has hands-on, 24-hours-a-day experience of working with someone with a learning disability, I know that it is a very demanding job, and, for the benefit of all concerned, respite services are absolutely essential and must be expanded. Of that, there is no doubt.

'Equal Lives' details everything that needs to be done. In some cases, progress seems to have been slow, but if all — and I mean all — the Departments concentrate on what needs to be done, I am convinced that services, at all levels, can and will be provided.

Objective 3 of 'Equal Lives' was:

"To ensure that the move into adulthood for young people with a learning disability supports their access to equal opportunities for continuing education, employment and training and that they and their families receive continuity of support during the transition period."

Objective 4 of 'Equal Lives' was:

"To enable people with a learning disability to lead full and meaningful lives in their neighbourhoods, have access to a wide range of social, work and leisure opportunities and form and maintain friendships and relationships."

Those are very important.

Following on from 'Equal Lives,' the Executive published a document entitled 'Delivering the Bamford Vision' in 2009. Contained in that document was an action plan for 2009-2011, progress on which was to be reviewed by the ministerial group on mental health and learning disability in 2011 and an updated rolling action plan published. We are now almost halfway through 2011, and I am unsure where that report is. Perhaps the Minister or someone else could enlighten us, as it would be interesting to see what progress has been made to date. In the meantime, the Alliance Party fully supports the motion and is grateful to the Members who brought it to the Assembly.

2.15 pm

Mr Craig: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and congratulations on your appointment.

I support the motion. Since the publication of the Bamford review in 2007, we have seen significant changes take place, with the expansion of community care for those with learning disabilities. Many of the recommendations in the Bamford review, especially with regard to the transition to adulthood for those with a learning disability, were overlooked and merely glossed over by the former Health Minister.

The Bamford review found serious inadequacies in the provision of care of young adults who had left school. Much of that related to the insignificant planning that was left to the later years of school, and, unfortunately, adequate help was not there. A number of objectives for those suffering from a learning disability were set in the Bamford review. The first was to ensure that, in the move into adulthood, young people with a learning disability have access to equal opportunities for continuing education, employment and training, and that they and their families receive continuity of support during that transition period. The second was to enable people with a learning disability to lead full and meaningful lives in their neighbourhoods, having access to a wide range of social, work and leisure opportunities, and form and maintain friendships and relationships.

Prior to the development of community care, people with special needs were merely cast aside and locked up in institutions. Northern Ireland was the last of the regions of the United Kingdom to treat many of those people with dignity and respect. The mechanisms put in place in the wake of the publication of this report to ease that transition have proven wholly inadequate and confusing, with little resources being placed where they are most needed.

We have, essentially, seen young men and women suffering from learning disabilities live in the community without much help or hope. There has been an absence of a joined-up strategy to help those with special needs to lead normal and prosperous lives. That stretches across more than one Department: the Health Department, the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning each has a role to play. I hope that in this new mandate there will be more joined-up thinking.

I want to highlight two organisations in my constituency, which I believe the Minister is familiar with, that offer a model for success. I

have worked closely with the Lisburn and Down Gateway. The gateway is mainly comprised of volunteers, chiefly parents and relatives of those with a learning disability. It represents a fine example of a voluntary organisation working in partnership with carers and sufferers. That organisation represents a champion for those with special needs and their carers.

Another is Stepping Stones, based a mere 100 m from my constituency office in Lisburn. It is an organisation in receipt of European funding and has been operating successfully for a number of years. It employs people with special needs, providing training, hope and a job for many of those young adults. It, too, offers a model that we should all be aspiring to, a model that is, unfortunately, lacking in our communities. To put it in perspective, the difference it makes to the lives of those with learning disabilities is enormous: they are given purpose and hope through those organisations, something that they are entitled to and something that government should be aspiring to and aiming for. With that in mind, I support the motion.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and may I, too, congratulate you on your position?

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion, and I thank Jennifer McCann and Sue Ramsey for tabling this motion for discussion.

The Ulster Unionist Party firmly believes that everyone, regardless of individual circumstance, should be provided with a service that meets their needs and makes the most of the opportunities available to them. It is important that all — I say that again: all — the Executive Departments meet the needs of young people and adults with disabilities. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that the state could and should have a greater role to play in supporting families and carers.

The motion refers to respite services. The majority of school leavers from special needs schools are placed in day centres that are commissioned by the local trust. Over time, those day centres have evolved in that they now also provide vital social and life skills. In Antrim, I have seen them running their own centres and training people to speak in public.

Many parents and carers welcome the opportunity for a period of respite, which day centres and particularly schools provide. When young people finish their schooling, they often

find that day care provision is inadequate or inappropriate to their needs. Carers, especially those at home, find themselves facing upheaval, not least in financial and emotional terms.

Day centres provide a vital opportunity for the carers of young people and adults with special needs to experience a well-deserved period of respite. Unfortunately, services such as day centres are still not working as well as they should. The needs of two distinct groups must be paramount. First, there are the needs of the participants themselves, who require high-quality tailored activities, which will help them to reach their potential. Secondly, there are the needs of carers, who can be parents, foster parents, guardians, friends, neighbours, etc. They need regular and dependable respite.

Unfortunately, we all know that respite services have not always been given the attention or resources that they deserve, so we ask for a review. Also, it is widely acknowledged that the modernisation of day centres will require significant resources in both physical infrastructure and human skills. Even though the Ulster Unionist Party no longer holds the Health Ministry, we still have significant concerns about its ability to deliver the existing rate of services over the next four years. Unfortunately, that also means that it is unlikely that the necessary capital will be found to modernise the day centres across Northern Ireland.

The Ulster Unionist Party is fully committed to implementing the Bamford report, which includes a number of important recommendations. Not all of those recommendations will be easy to implement or be cost free, but, nevertheless, they are necessary. Will the new Health Minister give a commitment to follow through with the recommendations? The Bamford report recommended a radical reconfiguration of the existing day service. The potential exists for day centres to be used for complementary community activities, thereby optimising local resources.

The Ulster Unionist Party was also extremely concerned about some of the measures from the previous Sinn Féin Regional Development Minister in relation to transport arrangements for people with special needs. Affordable transport for children and young people has been identified as essential in allowing them to participate in a range of activities and in reducing isolation and exclusion. Even more worrying is the proposal to cut the transport programme for people with

disabilities. That will further add to the isolation and exclusion of some of the most vulnerable children and young people.

I am confident that the new Minister will be much more receptive and flexible and, ultimately, will take the right decision not just for the public purse but for the vulnerable in our community. Although public transport should be affordable, it also needs to be accessible. The Ulster Unionist Party supports the motion and looks forward to all Departments being part of the review and the Bamford recommendations being included.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish you well in your new role, Mr Deputy Speaker. It has been pretty easy today thus far, and I suspect that I will not make it any worse for you. Maybe I will give you more cause for concern another time, but I will give you an easy ride today.

I am grateful for Members' views on this issue. In the first instance, I wish to make it clear that I am committed to providing the best possible services to those who need them most.

I should declare an interest: I was actively engaged in the support group for Lisburn Adult Resource Centre for a number of years. We succeeded in having a superb building put in place for people from the learning disabled community; it carries out its job very effectively, although there is always more that can be done. I will discuss some of the problems and issues later in my speech.

We need to use our resources effectively and efficiently to ensure that we can provide the best services. As Mr Kinahan rightly pointed out, the pot of money is not endless, and we must ensure that what we have is spent in ways that enhance the lives of those in need of our support. That is most keenly true of our social care and community services, particularly those provided to the most vulnerable members of society, such as those with learning disability or other special needs.

I am not convinced that initiating another review is necessarily the most effective use of resources at this time, because over the past number of years we have had quite a number of reviews. In fact, some previous Ministers seemed to think that reviews were always the solution, without actually ever coming to any decisions. I prefer to come to decisions than put

in place reviews that do not actually lead to an awful lot. For example, we have had the health and social care trusts fully engaged in delivering plans arising from the reviews, and it is vital that we see the outcome of their work.

That is not to say that we should not continually look at how we deliver our services and, where money is short we must always strive to get more for the same amount. We must look at new and different approaches, such as more involvement of the private and independent sectors in providing both residential and home-based care while, wherever possible, improving the quality of the service provided and using community-based organisations that can provide significant support on mental health issues.

Let me set out the reviews that we have completed and where we are with their implementation. I will deal first with Bamford. A significant review was carried out in 2008, and we consulted on the response to the Bamford review, which covered the whole spectrum of services for those with mental ill health or learning disability. That review took some five years to complete, and the action plan published in October 2009 in response to the review had almost 150 actions, 80 of which were specifically about mental health, and a further 70 of which were targeted towards learning disability.

The action plan brought a requirement for positive cross-sectoral working in government and recognised the need to engage with service users, their families and carers to ensure that services were fit for purpose. An inter-ministerial group chaired by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety was established to oversee the work. In addition, a number of subgroups were established, most notably an interdepartmental subgroup on children and young people. All relevant Departments participate in that group, looking mainly at improving the transition from childhood to adulthood and on into education, training, leisure and social pursuits and employment. The subgroup has its own action plan. In order to support the implementation of that action plan, my Department allocated additional service development moneys, specifically for learning disabled, of an additional £12.5 million recurrent from April 2010-11.

The Bamford action plan has been in place for three years, from 2008 until 2011, and officials from my Department, in collaboration with other

Departments and with the boards and trusts, are now evaluating implementation of the plan. I expect to see a report of that evaluation in the autumn of this year. In the meantime, the action plan remains a template for monitoring, reporting and improving community and social care services in mental health and learning disability for the foreseeable future.

2.30 pm

The Bamford review recognised transition from childhood to adulthood as a particularly fraught issue for those with additional needs such as learning disability. In recognition of the difficult issues, a separate interdepartmental subgroup on transitions was established, with its own implementation plan. The group looks at certain aspects of transition from children's to adults' health and social care services and from school to further education or training and then employment. I am pleased to say that a regional group on transitions is chaired by the Health and Social Care Board and that trusts and other relevant Departments and agencies play a full part in the work of that group. As with all other aspects of the Bamford action plan, this will also be subject to detailed evaluation. Appropriate adjustments and amendments will be made as necessary.

I understand Members' concerns in relation to the provision of respite care. We can quite easily set out strong economic and efficiency arguments for supporting carers, but it is also crucial that we properly recognise the equality perspective and the fundamental human rights of individual carers. Carers have told us that one of the most important services for them is the provision of respite care. Members have made that quite clear today. Carers have a right to life outside caring. Respite gives them the opportunity to have a break from their caring duties and time to take part in other activities that those without caring responsibilities often take for granted. Sometimes they need help to do that, and that is where we must step in. All carers are individuals with their own needs. They care for people with a huge range of needs and abilities in what can be very complex and emotionally charged relationships. One solution will not fit all: carers need real choices based on their individual circumstances.

Mr Wells: The Member has outlined the Bamford action plan. Many Members are very keen to know when the huge raft of legislation

that will be tabled as a result of the Bamford review will come before the House. The previous Minister indicated his hope that it would be done in this mandate, but many of us hope that it can in fact be done, or at least introduced, in this calendar year. Will the Member give us any indication of when he believes that that legislation will be forthcoming?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. I will deal with it in the course of my speech, and I ask for his patience in that respect. However, he raises a key point.

We know that carers' needs may vary from flexible and responsive support services, advice and information and maintaining their own health and well-being to time for rest, relaxation and a social life through the provision of flexible respite care. I am aware that the level and type of respite care available has been an issue over the past few years. In recognition of that, last year, my Department commissioned the Health and Social Care Board to provide a comprehensive report on respite provision. That report, which contains six very practical recommendations, has now been received and approved by the Department and is currently being implemented. The key aims will be to deliver consistency across Northern Ireland in assessing, measuring and monitoring respite and to significantly widen the range of respite services provided. It has been a key piece of work. Implementation of the recommendations will give us targets, inform us of our current performance and help us to better target resources in the future.

Autism is another area of the service that was the subject of an extensive and independent review, completed in 2009. In response to that review, my Department published an ASD strategic action plan. That plan sets out in detail the improvements that we need to make and the timescale over which those will be completed. To ensure that the improvements are replicated equally across Northern Ireland, a regional autistic spectrum disorder network group was established. That network is multidisciplinary and multi-agency and includes input from our colleagues in the education services.

The network has already delivered significant improvements in the service. Despite increased referrals — almost 40% in 2010 — there has been a big reduction in the number of children waiting more than 13 weeks for assessment.

The majority of trusts are already meeting that target. It is expected that, by March 2010, no child in Northern Ireland will be more than 13 weeks from an assessment.

The network includes a reference group, facilitating the involvement of 30 parents, service users and carers and 10 voluntary organisations in the design and planning of autism services. Those best placed to know where improvements are necessary are now in a position to influence that change. Many parents, carers and those who use our social care services have expressed strong support for that approach.

As well as establishing that infrastructure, we have invested significant additional money to support the action plan. From March this year, an additional £1.6 million recurrent is available for autism services. That will support the network in completing the excellent work that it has begun and allow it to identify and begin work on other priority areas, particularly those on adult services. I am also aware that the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 recently received Royal Assent, and my officials are now discussing the best way to take forward the development of the autism strategy that is required under that legislation.

We plan to consult later this year on the learning disability service framework (LDSF), which aims to improve the health and well-being of people with learning disabilities, as well as that of their carers and families, by promoting social inclusion, reducing inequalities in health and social well-being and improving the quality of HSC services and support. The framework will set standards for communication and involvement in planning the delivery of services; children and young people entering adulthood; inclusion in community life; meeting general physical and mental health needs; meeting complex physical and mental health needs at home and in the community; and ageing well. The LDSF is initially for a three-year period from 2012 to 2015. As you will see, the framework will largely pull together all the other good work that is ongoing across the trusts.

My Department is currently developing a draft physical and sensory disability strategy and action plan that aims to improve outcomes, services and support for people of all ages, including young people and adults in Northern Ireland who have a physical, communication or

sensory disability. The key policy principles that are relevant to young people and adults that are being promoted in the strategy include family and person-centred care and more integrated working between and across Departments, health and social care organisations and the voluntary and community sector. The strategy includes the following recommendations: more personalised services should be commissioned and provided that are appropriate to the needs of individuals and that promote independence; appropriate short-break and respite services should be available to meet the needs of individuals and their parents and carers; good practice models of transitions should be developed; and existing statutory day-support services should be reviewed to refocus commissioning on models of day opportunities that promote independence and inclusion and that meet the needs of disabled people, including those with complex needs.

In the time that is allotted to me, I will briefly cover some of the issues that were raised. Mr Wells's question was not dealt with adequately. It is proposed that the relevant legislation will come before the Assembly in spring 2012, with a plan to have it in place in 2013. Mr Craig raised the issue of supported employment for people with special needs. There is a wide range of provision across trust areas, including training, education and employment placements in social firms. Access to those services is decided by individual assessment and, where possible, choice. I fully understand the benefits for that particular group of people, and I wish that they were more widely available. I agree with Mr Craig that Stepping Stones carries out a wonderful service and would be a good model for others to look at.

Mr Durkan raised the issue of increased pressures as children and their parents get older. That is something that I recognise very clearly, particularly as people with learning disabilities tend to live longer now. The Health and Social Care Board is looking at the services for older carers with a view to supporting family arrangements to remain in place. The board has included a research project by the University of Ulster, and it should be in a position to report by autumn this year.

Ms Anderson raised a constituent's issue. Obviously, we cannot —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Minister to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Poots: We cannot deal with individual issues.

In conclusion, I am minded not to impose further reviews on the service. I would like us to act on the reviews that have taken place.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I invite Michaela Boyle to make a winding-up speech. As this is the first debate in which we will hear from Michaela Boyle, I remind Members of the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate you on your position.

There has been a lot of debate here this afternoon and before lunchtime on this very emotive issue, which is a clear recognition of support from right across the Floor. I have a number of observations to make. Parents need more choice and more respite care, particularly for children who come from an environment in which they were supported until the age of 18. It has been widely acknowledged that there is good practice, but there is still a long way to go in the provision of specialised equipment and training of specialised nurses to meet the needs of individuals. There needs to be cross-departmental support, with the Health Department, the Education Department and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) involved with such young adults from age 18 onwards.

Martina Anderson intervened in the debate with the concerns of a mother who found it difficult to move her child from Foyle View School to Maybrook Adult Training Centre in Derry. The constraints put in place for that mother were unbearable for her. Obviously, there were budget issues there. However, in terms of section 75 — we support equality of opportunity across the spectrum — I wonder just where this family's rights were. People are fighting for the basic human rights that they are entitled to, and they should not have to go through this fight for them.

There was talk earlier about stimulation for these young adults, particularly around day centres and what they entail. Although we acknowledge that day centres provide good care for our young adults, the needs of individuals need to be recognised. It is paramount that that happens. There was also talk about the Bamford report and the need for structured

reviews to be carried out on all services across the spectrum. That needs to be reviewed as a matter of importance. There was also talk about the transitional period for families. Families find it difficult because they are not aware of the care plan once their child reaches the age of 18. Obviously, there are communication barriers there also. The anomalies in the transition period, during which no resources or information are made available to the family, are, in my view, totally inadequate. There needs to be a joined-up approach across the Health Department, the Education Department and DEL.

It was widely acknowledged that young people with special needs, like any other child, need to live their lives to the full. There have been examples of different providers in various areas. Again, although we discussed day centres and the good job that they do, capital is needed to ensure that they continue to provide adequate services, and Mr Kinahan referred to that.

It was also mentioned that cuts in the transport programme are hitting the most vulnerable in our society. Families need to have more confidence in this service. Parents need to have more flexibility, more respite and more choices when caring for their child and the rest of their family.

There is an issue around the location of providers for families, particularly those in rural areas. In my Strabane constituency, we feel that there is a postcode lottery. I want to give a brief example of a family in my constituency whose child has specific and intensive needs. They require a specialist nurse to come in to PEG-feed (percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy) their child if they want a day out shopping or to attend a family funeral or wedding. That support is not available to them because they have been told that no specialist nurse is available to go into the community and that it has to be done in a hospital setting. So, the family are left without that support. The family's eldest sibling is a daughter with moderate learning difficulties, and all too often she is left to provide that care when the parents have to leave. The family informed me that they were never given any specialised training in that area, but they provide care anyway out of the love that they have for their daughter.

2.45 pm

In 2008, Claire McGill and I met the then Minister for Employment and Learning, Reg Empey, to discuss the respite and community

services for young people with special needs once they reach the age of 18. The meeting came about after a number of my constituents came to us with concerns about that. The children were coming out of a special care setting to which they were accustomed up to the age of 18. There was no care plan or anything to meet their needs. Most of the children had been left at home to regress, and that is the unfortunate situation that we are faced with. It should not be allowed to happen. After meeting the Minister, we spoke of a possible interdepartmental co-ordinated approach to future provision. A lot of assurances and promises were given to us at that meeting, but nothing has ever come to fruition. In my constituency, Beltany House in Omagh is facing uncertainty. Parents need to be better informed about what is happening there. As I said earlier, the needs outweigh the places that are available to young people with special needs.

I support the motion that my party has brought to the House, and I believe that there is cross-party support for it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly supports a review of the community services, including respite services, that are currently available for young people and adults with special needs after they leave school.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members should take their ease for a few moments while we change the Chair.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair)

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

A2: East Antrim

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately six minutes.

Mr Ross: It would have been more appropriate had Mr Beggs said that he was changing the Chair and emptying the Chamber, although there are more Members here than perhaps we are used to at Adjournment debates.

I congratulate Mr Danny Kennedy on his appointment as Minister for Regional Development. The Assembly found him to be a Minister who worked well with his Committee and this Chamber in his previous post. We hope that that continues, and we hope that he will be the bearer of some good news, particularly for those of us in east Antrim, at the end of this debate. We appreciate his attendance in the Chamber this afternoon. He will have many important decisions to take during this mandate, a number of which will be about road infrastructure. He has to take decisions on the controversial A5 project, which may be affected by the availability of finance from the Irish Republic. He has decisions to take on the A8 project in Larne, which is also in my constituency of East Antrim and which we are looking forward to seeing completed. He has some decisions to take on road improvements in north Antrim as well. Some of my colleagues have been saying that it is important that those are not forgotten about either.

Of course, there will also be decisions to take on the future of Northern Ireland Water — that is a huge piece of work for which he will have responsibility — and gritting policy. We do not want to see the same sorts of problems that we saw previously. However, I argue that the small 2.5 km stretch of road along the A2 should be high on his agenda as he takes over as Minister.

Not only is it an issue on which we need to see action taken — indeed, the upgrade is

desperately needed — but it is wanted by local representatives, residents and businesses and by anyone who has an interest in building better links to and from Carrickfergus. As a route leading to the glens that is used by tourists, it is strategically important for Northern Ireland. The A2 is a link between two large urban areas — Belfast and Carrickfergus — and many individuals use it to travel to and from work, so it is important for business and for those who work in Belfast and Carrickfergus. Of course, as the Minister will be aware, the bottleneck occurs when two lanes go into one and then back into two, creating all sorts of traffic chaos along that stretch of road. On particularly bad days, people are often caught in traffic delays for half an hour or 45 minutes, which, in the longer term, is not sustainable.

Only a month ago, we were drawing towards the end of what had been a long and intensive election campaign, and I am quite sure that candidates from all political parties who stood in East Antrim, particularly those who canvassed around Carrickfergus, Greenisland and Newtownabbey, had the A2 issue raised with them on numerous occasions and were asked to ensure that the Assembly took urgent action on the matter in the new mandate. In addition, before the election, Carrickfergus Borough Council launched a petition, which was signed by just under 3,000 people, calling for the A2 scheme to proceed immediately, and a collective from the council met the previous Minister on 14 March.

In earlier debates, I listened to people talking about manifesto pledges and about how they wanted to raise them at an early stage. For the DUP's part, we included this issue in our election literature for East Antrim, making sure that people knew that we had pledged our support for the scheme and would raise the matter at the earliest possible opportunity with the new Minister for Regional Development, whoever that might be. That is why I felt that it was important to secure this afternoon's Adjournment debate.

Of course, the debate about the upgrade has been ongoing for much longer than the election campaign, and I recall that the former Member for East Antrim, Mr Dickson's predecessor Sean Neeson, said that it was an issue when he was first elected to Carrickfergus Borough Council in the 1970s. I recall that, in the last mandate, Mr Robinson and Mr Hilditch described how King

Billy had had difficulty on the route, although the previous Minister was perhaps less appreciative of that story.

It is important to note that, since this was an issue with Carrickfergus Borough Council in the 1970s, the populations around Carrickfergus, Greenisland and Jordanstown have grown significantly and, therefore, traffic along that stretch of road has also grown significantly, to upwards of 30,000 vehicular movements a day. Consequently, what was a problem 30 or 40 years ago has since become a nightmare for commuters along the A2, particularly for those who use it early in the morning or after 5.00 pm.

There are problems associated with other roads. As commuters try to find an alternative route to avoid the bottleneck on the A2, traffic on Station Road and other smaller roads that were not built to deal with such volumes has increased. There is also increased pressure on the Doagh Road, Monkstown Road and Upper Road as a result of tailbacks on the A2 and people trying to find an alternative route, not to mention the fumes in Greenisland, where the tailbacks occur.

During the last mandate, orders were published and a public consultation was undertaken, and it is fair to say that there was an expectation among people in East Antrim that progress on the A2 upgrade was imminent. Sadly, people, particularly the MLAs, who were united on the issue, felt very let down because progress was not made. Constituents and businesses situated along the road or in business parks nearby that rely on the road to get to them want to see work begin and the project completed as soon as possible.

As I said, the Minister and the Department for Regional Development (DRD) are well aware of the issues surrounding the A2. I believe that they have plans in place, and they have already spent significant sums on the project. It seems to me that the problem in the last mandate was not so much whether the scheme was needed or, indeed, whether money was available for it; it was, rather, a political decision taken by the Minister, who decided for political reasons that he did not want to pursue the project. I hope that the new Minister will look closely at the project and decide whether it is needed based on need rather than on political reasoning.

It was interesting to note that, at the end of the previous mandate when a Budget settlement was reached, the Department for Regional

Development did significantly well. The Minister may disagree, but most observers think that the Department did well. Indeed, it was allocated an additional £107 million in the final settlement, and that seems to be more than enough money to complete the project. That is what we want to see.

I ask the Minister to detail the latest figure he has for the number of people who use the road, and how it compares to other schemes that are high on his agenda; the amount of money spent on the project to date in vesting land and everything else; and the amount of money that he believes it will take to complete the project over the mandate. I also ask him whether there are any other projects of this scale that he believes to be more significant or important than the A2 project.

I thank the Minister for his attendance this afternoon. I hope that he can provide us with some encouragement in his closing words. I hope that he understands the importance of this project for people in East Antrim and, in a wider context, across Northern Ireland, and that he shows a willingness to deliver the scheme for all of us.

Mr Beggs: I thank my fellow East Antrim MLA for raising this matter. The A2 widening scheme has been in the pipeline for decades. Carrickfergus has been one of the fastest growing towns in Northern Ireland over the past 30 years. However, the A2 between Carrickfergus and Belfast has not been completed to deal with the increased traffic.

There are four lanes of traffic for most of the route between Carrickfergus and Belfast. However, in the middle, there is a section of two lanes at Greenisland, which causes daily bottlenecks. Several decades ago, there were even plans to extend the M5 motorway to Carrickfergus, but that was replaced by early and unsuccessful attempts to gain planning permission for a four-lane road.

Removing the two-lane bottleneck at Greenisland was identified as one of the top five priorities in the Belfast metropolitan area plan. At present, the four-lane carriageway traffic merges into a single lane in each direction for the short section from the University of Ulster to Seapark. That affects commuters, businesses, tourists and all who travel from Belfast to Greenisland, Carrickfergus or Whitehead. Even Ballycarry and Islandmagee people use that route on occasions.

However, the need to upgrade the A2 is even more important than that. I have frequently seen emergency vehicles delayed and having to weave in and out of traffic congestion. That delay increases ambulance response times. The upgrade is even more important now that the local accident and emergency unit at Whiteabbey has closed and patients have to travel further to units either in Belfast or Antrim. The Carrickfergus PSNI response officers are now based in Newtownabbey. When police officers are caught up in congestion, it reduces their presence in Carrickfergus. If additional backup is required, there is a potential for delay, which could be critical.

Following the public inquiry into the present A2 widening scheme, DRD published its direction order and notice of intention to proceed in October 2008. Since that time, homes have been blighted and the Department has been forced to purchase some £12 million of property, perhaps even more by now. Drive along the A2 and you will see some homes boarded up. However, people must continue to live among that blighted property. In short, a sort of no-man's-land has been created by the Department, which indicated that it would proceed with building the road. Having served its direction order and notice of intention to proceed, there is surely an onus on the Department to go ahead. Indications had been made that the scheme would be completed during the 2011-15 period but, in January this year, the former Minister, Conor Murphy, announced his intention to put the project on hold. He favours the diversion of over 50% of DRD's capital roads budget to another road, the A5, which has not even gained planning permission.

Worse still, in a meeting with Carrickfergus Borough Council, which I attended, he even suggested that, because of the delay, property might be put on the market again or sold back. That is not good value for money. Surely the A2 scheme should be completed so that the £4 million spent on design and the £12 million spent on property purchase is not wasted.

3.00 pm

In the most recent Budget, which the Ulster Unionist Party voted against, the A2 upgrade was overlooked in favour of the A5. The A5 from Aghnacloy to Ballygawley carries 6,800 vehicles a day compared to the A2, which carries some 30,000 vehicles a day. The A2 has

four times the level of traffic; therefore it should receive the investment.

There is some confusion over the A2 funding. The Finance Minister said that he has given the funding for the A2 scheme, yet officials advised the Regional Development Committee last week that the A5 expenditure was ring-fenced in the Budget and no budget line was provided for the A2. I ask the Minister to clarify that issue. Is there a flexible budget line that allows the scheme to proceed by altering its priorities? I understand that it is one of the few schemes that has completed the planning process and which is ready to commence as soon as the Department gives approval.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Mr Stewart Dickson, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mr Dickson: I thank Mr Alastair Ross for providing us with the opportunity to have this Adjournment debate, and I note that the Minister is present to hear Members' comments. This reminds me of a meeting of Carrickfergus Borough Council because a number of its former and current members are in the Chamber, and we have heard many of the arguments many times over. However, perhaps some will be heard for the first time in this place.

Some of my colleagues referred to the last 25 years, but I can take the House back to 1964 when a previous Minister of Home Affairs stood, I presume, in this place and announced the extension of the M5 to Carrickfergus. However, it still has not happened, nor has the A2 or the downgraded proposal from 1969 to provide a dual carriageway. In fact, the M5 extension is partly why I stand here today because it was one of the many reasons that brought me into community activism. It was proposed that the M5 would cut Greenisland estate in two, but that plan, which was rather ill conceived, fell by the wayside.

We urgently need the development of the A2 for all the reasons that colleagues mentioned and for others that I will outline to the Assembly today. By 1969, the road was downgraded from a motorway to a dual carriageway. It is important that this road be developed for us in the East Antrim area.

I pay tribute to my colleague Sean Neeson and to other Members from East Antrim who spent many years campaigning for the road and for money to be put in place for the road to be constructed.

A miserable blow was dealt to the people of East Antrim earlier this year when the previous Minister Conor Murphy decided that he would not proceed with the development of the route. I look forward to the Minister giving us the up-to-date figures for the cost of the road, but some £16 million and rising has been spent on fees, on the purchase of properties and on development to date. That does not take into account previous attempts to widen the road and previous amounts of money having been spent on the development by predecessor Departments.

The benefits of the road have been widely set out; nevertheless, the House needs to be reminded of them. Mr Beggs referred to Whiteabbey Hospital.

With the downgrading of accident and emergency services in the area, speedy access through Carrickfergus, Greenisland, Jordanstown and beyond, primarily to either the Belfast or Antrim hospitals, is essential for residents and citizens. To date, we have had some 25 years of frustration and money wasted on the project. It would be a shame if the Minister did not proceed with the expenditure as soon as possible.

The route continues to hold back business development in that part of East Antrim. It thwarts the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, and I find that disgraceful. Moreover, and there are figures to back this up, it has, despite the economic downturn, added further pressures to domestic prices in the greater Carrickfergus and Jordanstown areas and beyond. Quite simply, people have determined that they do not wish to live in the area because of the regular misery of the morning commute, either to get children to school or to take people to work and beyond.

The wider tourist impact on the route must also be considered. The A2 forms the gateway to the Antrim coast and glens, the Giant's Causeway and beyond. It takes people past Carrickfergus Castle.

All the aforementioned are being held back because of the Department's failure so far to give the green light to upgrading the route.

Public transport in the area must also be mentioned. It is not, for example, possible to maximise and optimise express bus services. Many towns in Northern Ireland from which people commute into Belfast daily have good express bus services, but a bus cannot be expressed through a bottleneck. There is no alternative. If the road were to be widened, it would be possible to maximise bus services in the area. Members may say, "Why not use the trains?", but the trains are maxed out. Park-and-ride facilities are overflowing, and people regularly stand in trains. It is important that the route be developed as quickly as possible.

I invite the Minister to come and join me and colleagues from East Antrim on a section of the A2 between 7.30 am and 10.00 am or between 3.30 pm and 7.00 pm. If he does, he will see for himself the absolute gridlock that is caused from the University of Ulster right through to Seapark, Carrickfergus and beyond. I urge the Minister to reconsider his predecessor's decision and put in place the finance to develop the road for the benefit of all citizens, not only of East Antrim but much further afield.

Mr Hilditch: If Stewart is right about 3.30 pm, we are all going to be stuck on the road tonight again, so I may push on.

I thank Mr Ross for tabling the topic and securing the Adjournment debate. I also welcome the Minister along to provide his input. Unfortunately, the Adjournment debate does not reflect some new topic or subject but raises once again the very frustrating and, for some, very controversial issue of the A2. That is the Seapark to Silverstream section on the Shore Road between Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey.

Notwithstanding the issue of King Billy, which formed part of the debate last year, it is frustrating for the many users who have to endure the difficult commute twice a day, as they make their way to work and back, and for visitors to the area, who really cannot believe that their journey has been brought to a standstill, having already negotiated the city and all that that brings.

It is frustrating, too, for the local politicians who have raised the matter regularly through debates, meetings, questions, Committee meetings and delegations here in Stormont since devolution, or indeed for the many delegations that have been to see devolved and direct rule Ministers over the past 40 to 50 years.

The A2 has now entered the realms of controversy. There have been a number of false dawns in recent years, and it sometimes seems that, after making a number of forward steps, we are suddenly placed in reverse mode, which may depend on a new Minister's outlook or on new circumstances beyond our control. The A2 is also controversial because we have spent £16 million to date on planning costs, compensation, public inquiries, geotechnical investigations and archaeological digs, all to be in a state of readiness to go. We have uprooted a whole community in preparation to proceed, with many homes now vacated and boarded up on that particular section of the A2.

How must former residents feel as they pass their previous homes? Indeed, how does it look to the many visitors who are guided on to the Causeway coastal route from the M2? What impression does it create as visitors begin their journey on what is being promoted as the world-famous coastal route only to be met with the blight of dereliction caused by a Department bringing a halt to the process?

The former Sinn Féin Minister may have had a different political agenda and set of priorities, though he assured us that he would return to the A2 at some stage. Today, because of the state of readiness of the project and the difficulties facing other schemes, that stage must now be reached. Once again, we have come through an election. From canvassing at doorsteps and meetings, I know that the one issue that unites all of us in East Antrim is the A2. Other topics were raised, but the A2 is the one that stands out above all others. Given that records indicate that there are in the region of 30,000 vehicular movements in the two-way traffic flow on the road daily, that does not come as much of a surprise.

There are other areas of infrastructure that affect people's lives and should impact on joined-up government as well as decision-making. When local people are being told that they must use hospitals outside the area, that Whiteabbey police station is the nearest full-time police station, that ambulance journey times are being reviewed and when it is rumoured that third-level education is to be relocated to Belfast, the A2 enters the overall equation. Central government cannot have their cake and eat it. When those services are relocated to other areas, the infrastructure — in this case, roads — must be improved to help

with the impact that those decisions have on people's lives. Hopefully, on this occasion, DRD can step up to the mark.

The A2 in its current state affects people from the local communities who go to work in the greater Belfast area and also has an impact on local businesses, as was outlined by Mr Dickson. The opportunity to promote investment in the area is also hampered by this major infrastructure issue. It is right up there when decisions are taken on future investment. We recently lost a major freight company from the area, and, although the A2 was not the primary reason, it was a continual problem for that company and made its decision to move outside East Antrim much easier.

Minister, as we enter the new mandate, let us give the people of East Antrim some hope. In previous mandates, that community has been very tolerant on the issue. However, people have had their hopes built up and let down again. Although there appear to be difficulties with other previously prioritised schemes in Northern Ireland, let us also be mindful of the construction industry, which sees a scheme prepared and ready to go. This should be a quick win for everyone. Again, I thank the Member for the opportunity of the Adjournment debate, and I look forward to the Minister's response, having noted answers to tabled questions already.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Mr Jim Allister, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mr Allister: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am very grateful for your protection. As a wholly non-controversial and inoffensive person, I probably do not need that protection but am grateful for it nonetheless. On reflection, if I could bank it for another occasion, it might be of more benefit to me.

The A2 is one of those issues that has a ramification way beyond East Antrim. I have been familiar with the issue for many years, going back to when I was first in this House between 1982 and 1986. I remember it being debated and the case being made vehemently for it. I did not know until today, however, that we can thank Mr Dickson for the fact that we do not have a motorway to Carrickfergus. I did not know that his political activism destroyed that prospect in the 1960s.

For decade upon decade, the case for the extension and, effectively, the completion of a dual carriageway from Carrickfergus has been made logically, objectively and necessarily. From the time that I represented that town as part of the greater North Antrim constituency in the 1980s until now, that need has gone unmet and encountered so many disappointments that it is unbelievable. Judged by the objective criteria of volume of traffic, hazards created, delays imposed and the sheer misery through which users are put, there can hardly be a more deserving road scheme in the whole of Northern Ireland than the A2. Well, almost hardly: there is the A26, and maybe in a moment I will return to that, if I am permitted.

3.15 pm

However, the A2 is one of those schemes that, when one looks at it, it is impossible to contrive of reasons and arguments why it has not been concluded. That makes all the worse the fact that it has to be raised again. Of course, it has to be raised again because, in the previous Assembly, we had one of the most outrageous political decisions — not a roads decision by any stretch of the imagination — to prioritise all the substantive expenditure on roads into a political project, the A5, and thereby starve and strangle projects such as the A2 and the A26.

If Minister Kennedy does nothing else in office, he needs to redress and reverse that iniquitous decision that was taken by his predecessor. He needs to very swiftly put down a marker that decisions on road schemes in this Province will be made on the basis of need, not of politics, and will be decided on the basis of meeting infrastructural needs, community needs, health needs and road objective figures needs, not by a desire to build some sort of motorway from Donegal to Dublin to make a political infrastructural point. If the Minister wants to go down in history as a Minister who made his mark and was prepared to make solid, reliable and defensible decisions, he needs to grasp the nettle of the A5 and face the fact that it is an unsustainable project. There is no point in perpetuating it through ongoing public inquiries that will tighten the noose on the public purse. He needs to address the issue of the A5, and, in doing so, he will free the money that is necessary to deal with the A2 and with the other deserving cause, namely the development of the dualling of the A26 north of Glarryford. In comparative terms, the traffic volume figures

are unanswerable, yet a cruel political decision was taken to park that project, just as was taken with the A2.

So, my message to the Minister is to grasp those nettles and, in doing so, show himself to be worthy of the office that he holds. Let us see a reversal and a return to the making of those decisions on a proper and defensible basis. With that plea, I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Mr Oliver McMullan, I remind the House that it is convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. This may go down as one of the shortest maiden speeches that you have heard; I do not intend to go on for as long as some other Members. I totally agree that we need to get the money for the A2. However, since I came in to the Chamber, I have not heard any mention of the 40% deficit in the budget. I look forward to what the Minister has to say about how we can find that money.

I totally agree with other Members that the road needs to be upgraded because of all the relevant benefits to health, education, the emergency services and tourism. The area that I represent on the Antrim coast road was promised money in the past for tourism. We never got it and it is still in abeyance. That road needs to be upgraded so that we get our fair share of tourism. Also, the industry needs to be brought back into the East Antrim area. So, Minister, I look forward to what you have to say. I cannot say any more except that I support all that has been said in here today, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I am grateful for the opportunity in what is — I hope that I am correct — the first Adjournment debate of the new mandate to respond to Members on the possible upgrading of the A2 in East Antrim. I thank Mr Ross and, indeed, all contributors to the debate. I notice the attendance of the Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development. I welcome Mr Spratt to his place.

We have had an interesting debate. By my reckoning, Mr Speaker, we had three maidens, all of whom were male. There was reference to, and a degree of blame towards, the old

Stormont of the 1960s or, as some Members remembered, King William, who processed in those very parts. As I am not from East Antrim, I know more about King William at Scarva and, indeed, when he stopped at a watering hole in Newry on his way to a memorable victory. However, it is important that we bring things up to date.

I note Members' comments. I welcome the opportunity to debate issues that relate to proposed improvement works on the A2 between Belfast and Carrickfergus at Shore Road, Greenisland. As Members will know from the previous mandate, the matter was the topic of an Adjournment debate almost a year ago on 8 June 2010. In addition to remarks that I will make, I have asked my officials to take note and to study the Hansard report, so that if I do not pick up on particular points, I can write to Members following the debate.

The A2 between Belfast and Carrickfergus is an important link between those two urban centres, and it varies considerably in standards and characteristics along its length. In particular, there is a 2.5 km section of single carriageway at Greenisland between Jordanstown and Seapark, which is inconsistent with the otherwise continuous provision of two lanes in each direction between Carrickfergus and the M5 at Whiteabbey. That section has limited provision for pedestrians, with parts of the footway less than 1m wide at particular points.

That section carries approximately 26,000 vehicles each day; that answers one point that was raised by Mr Hilditch and Mr Beggs. It is a source of significant delays during peak hours in the mornings and evenings. As I said, although I am not from the area, I listen to Radio Ulster's traffic reports and hear that section of road mentioned almost daily.

The Belfast metropolitan transport plan, published in November 2004, identified the Greenisland section of the A2 as a bottleneck on the Belfast metropolitan area's strategic network. The regional transport strategy, published in 2002, affirmed the need to address bottlenecks on strategic highways as one of its priorities. In response, Roads Service has developed proposals for a new dual carriageway on the A2 at the Shore Road, Greenisland, between the Shore Avenue access to the University of Ulster at Jordanstown and Seapark. The scheme includes the online

widening of the existing road between Shore Avenue and Station Road, Greenisland, to create an urban dual carriageway with a new offline dual carriageway from Station Road to Seapark. The scheme also provides for improved junctions at Shore Avenue, the access to the university, and at Shorelands, Station Road and Seapark. Access to individual properties will be on a left-in/left-out only basis with turning facilities provided at the new junctions.

The design of the scheme has been under way since 2005, when consultants were appointed to develop and progress a preferred scheme through statutory procedures. Throughout the course of the scheme development, my Department has sought to ensure that those who are directly affected by the scheme, the general public and elected representatives have been kept fully informed of progress. A public inquiry was held in October 2007 with the inspector's report into the public inquiry published in September 2008.

On consideration of the inspector's recommendations, my Department published the direction order and notice of intention to proceed in October 2008. Since then, work has continued on the scheme development. A detailed geotechnical investigation contract to determine the ground conditions was completed in 2009, and an advance archaeological investigation contract was completed in 2010. No significant archaeological finds were uncovered, even in relation to King William.

Consultations with affected landowners to finalise and agree accommodation works were also substantially completed in 2010. My Department is, therefore, in a position to complete the final statutory vesting order as soon as finance becomes available. The compulsory purchase of land for the scheme is currently valued at £17 million. My Department's Road Service has acquired 25 residential properties under blight legislation. A number of those properties have been demolished in order that they do not become derelict and vandalised. Any surplus land or property not required for the scheme will be declared surplus and disposed of on the open market. That is normally carried out upon completion of the scheme. However, my Department's Road Service is considering early disposal of some properties in order to minimise security and maintenance issues associated with them. In

the meantime, every effort is being made to secure and maintain all acquired properties.

In 2010, tender contract documents were drawn up. The pre-qualification competition was carried out, and, in December 2010, a select list of contractors was identified. However, on consideration of the 2011-15 budget, the procurement process was stopped.

Mr Ross made reference to my Department's budget allocation and appeared to indicate that I had, perhaps, shedloads of money. As we enter this new term in office, I recognise that we are all faced with the challenges that a reduction of two fifths in the Executive's overall capital funding brings. I believe that that is especially so for my Department in relation to infrastructure investment. Initial impressions may suggest to you that Roads Service has received a significant capital allocation, with just under £1.2 billion allocated to capital spend over the four-year Budget 2010 period. However, two thirds of that, almost £800 million, as Members have indicated, is at present allocated to two major road schemes, namely the A5 Londonderry to Aghnacloy road and the A8 Belfast to Larne dual carriageway.

Members will be aware that the public inquiry into the A5 proposals is in progress. On receipt of the independent inspector's report and recommendations, I propose to examine planned expenditure on the A5 and the A8, together with a range of other projects across the strategic roads programme.

Of the remaining capital funding in the four-year period, only minimal levels of funding are available for other schemes, particularly in the middle two years. That makes it particularly difficult to start any other scheme until near the end of the Budget period. In fact, only relatively minor upgrades of the A32 to improve access to the new hospital at Enniskillen are possible prior to that time.

Following the draft Budget consultation, over £60 million of additional funding was received for major road projects in year 4 of the Budget period. That has not been ring-fenced and will be considered for a range of competing priorities. However, commencement of schemes in this year will be dependent on funding made available beyond the current Budget period. Schemes such as the A2 Shore Road tend to take more than one year in construction, and funding in year 5, and possibly beyond, would

be required before I could give approval for construction to commence. The funding in those years will not become clearer until further work has been completed to develop the third edition of the investment strategy for Northern Ireland, which, I understand, is due to conclude later this year.

I have also received numerous invitations to meet a wide range of bodies and elected members interested in progressing strategic road improvement schemes across Northern Ireland. I will use those as an opportunity to listen to opinions from across the Province before forming a view on the way forward.

That will coincide with the work being undertaken to develop the investment strategy beyond this Budget period.

3.30 pm

I will turn briefly to Members' comments. I understand the strength of feeling on this issue, which is, I think, shared by all the political representatives for East Antrim and, indeed, wider afield, as we heard. I understand the economic benefits that such a scheme would provide. I want to look closely at my Department's spending priorities. Reference has been made to the A5, which will be the subject of an Assembly debate early next week that will undoubtedly attract interest. I listened to the representations made here today, particularly the strong advice from the Member for North Antrim Mr Allister.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Minister bring his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Kennedy: I am content to carefully consider all of the issues. I would like to see improvements across the strategic road network to enhance safety, to reduce journey times and to provide value for money. I will give active consideration to the exploration of opportunities for bringing forward schemes such as the A2 project at Shore Road/Greenisland.

Adjourned at 3.32 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 6 June 2011

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Speaker's Business

Mr Speaker: Order. Before we begin today's business, I wish to notify Members that I will be absent from the House tomorrow on official duties.

Assembly Business

Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill

Mr Speaker: I wish to advise the House on matters relating to the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill. In my statement to the House on 16 May 2011, I informed the Assembly that the Attorney General for Northern Ireland had asked the Supreme Court to determine whether clause 3 and clause 4(2) of the Bill would be within the legislative competence of this Assembly. The reference was made on 13 April 2011. On 27 May 2011, at the request of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, the Supreme Court ordered that the reference be withdrawn. I have, therefore, written to the Secretary of State to advise him of the withdrawal and to request that he arranges for the Bill to receive Royal Assent.

I said that I would keep the House informed as we proceeded with the issue, and that is exactly what I am doing.

Public Petition: Down Community Transport

Mr Speaker: Mr Kieran McCarthy has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22.

Mr McCarthy: Mr Speaker, I wish to thank you for giving me the opportunity, on behalf of the Strangford constituents, to present to you a petition signed by nearly 800 people, asking us all to save their rural community transport.

Down Community Transport recently informed its clients that the Department for Regional Development (DRD) was cutting a massive 50% from the rural transport fund, resulting in many dependent individuals — elderly, disabled and isolated people and those with learning difficulties — and others having no transport. They plead with us all here in Stormont and with the Minister for Regional Development in particular to have this vital service and the rural community transport fund fully reinstated as soon as possible.

Mr McCarthy moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I am glad to see the Minister for Regional Development in the House. I will forward a copy of the petition to him, and I will send a copy to the Chair of the Committee for Regional Development.

Committee Business

Statutory Committee Membership: Committee for Regional Development

Mr Speaker: As with similar motions, the motion on Statutory Committee membership will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Stewart Dickson replace Mr Trevor Lunn as a member of the Committee for Regional Development. — [Ms Lo.]

Private Members' Business

Domestic Violence

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

This is the first debate in the Assembly in which we will hear from Mrs Pam Lewis. I remind the House that the convention is that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mrs Lewis: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to ensure that addressing domestic violence is a priority for his Department; and that all the agreed processes and protocols in place are focused on protecting those most at risk.

I welcome the opportunity to make my maiden speech to the House today, and I thank the people of South Antrim for putting their trust in me in electing me to the Assembly.

We heard a clear message on the doorsteps during the election campaign. People wanted us to move forward, address the issues that matter to them and ensure that we deliver in the best interests of Northern Ireland. However, it gives me no joy to bring to the attention of Members an issue that affects many people in Northern Ireland. Within the next hour, before this debate concludes, another three victims and families will be affected by this scourge on our society. I refer to domestic violence.

The motion calls on the Minister to ensure that addressing domestic violence is a priority for his Department. Some people may be sceptical of such wording and believe that other criminal justice issues merit higher priority. Unfortunately, domestic violence is not viewed by some as one of the most high-profile problems in Northern Ireland today. Sadly, it is prevalent and on the increase. It takes place behind closed doors.

The research is startling. One in four women and one in seven men are affected by domestic violence in their lifetime. Last year in Northern Ireland, seven women were killed as a direct result of domestic violence. That figure does not include the many others who have died as a result

of suicide, drug and alcohol misuse or long-term illness or chronic disabilities acquired as a result of their experiences of violence and abuse.

In 2009-2010, the PSNI responded to 24,482 incidents of domestic abuse. That is almost 70 a day. That is the magnitude of the problem that domestic violence is in Northern Ireland. That is why this must be a priority for the Justice Minister and this Assembly. We must remember that only around 25% of women ever report their worst assault to the police, and, on average, a victim is assaulted 35 times before reporting the incident or seeking support. In reality, we do not know the full extent of the problem.

Another consideration is the effect that domestic violence has on children. Children are the hidden victims of domestic violence. In 90% of violent incidents, children are in the same or next room. They witness the attack and often feel compelled to intervene. The statistics that cover domestic violence in Northern Ireland for the past year are startling, with more than 100,000 children affected; 1,077 women and 854 children accommodated in refuges; 2,938 women and 3,617 children supported to remain in their home in the community; and an astounding 32,349 calls made to the domestic violence helpline, which is a 17% increase on the previous year. Therefore, the issue affects many people, both male and female, not to mention many thousands of children and entire family circles.

There are also the economic costs. Domestic violence undermines our economic output owing to victims' absence from work because of injury or disability, and it impacts on the time taken by criminal justice agencies and support agencies to seek alternative housing, financial and schooling solutions for victims and their children. Those are just a few of the critical realities and choices that victims face when they seek to escape or address violence and abuse in their own home.

Domestic violence also significantly impacts on the cost to our Health Service and our policing and justice system, and it is estimated that the cost to the Northern Ireland economy is £180 million. That is not insignificant, nor can it be ignored, particularly at a time of budgetary cuts and economic recession. It is clear that that is a significant sum of money and another reason, if one is needed, why it is important for the issue to be a priority for the Minister of Justice.

It should be stressed, however, that the primary reason for dealing with this blight on our society should be to end the nightmare. We must support the victims and bring to justice those who are responsible for this crime, because a crime is exactly what it is. In a recent PSNI circular, 'What do you want most from your police service?', it was revealed that the number of arrests for domestic violence was second only to those for drink-driving and that it ranked far above the number for antisocial behaviour and burglary. That demonstrates that, although it may be something that is not openly spoken about, domestic violence is an issue that people want dealt with.

At this time, it would be remiss of me not to mention the work of Women's Aid. During the past year, I had the honour of being Antrim's first female mayor. One of my chosen charities was Women's Aid, and I had the opportunity to see at first hand the fantastic work that it does. It is right and proper that the House should pay tribute to Women's Aid today and thank it for the work that it does. It is at the forefront of providing care and support to the victims of domestic violence, who must be at the centre of all that we do in that area. It is the victims who need to be protected and supported, and I call on the Minister to ensure that victims and those who are at risk are at the centre of all that he does as the Minister of Justice.

I am well aware that the problems cannot be solved overnight. Addressing the issue of domestic violence will not be easy, and it will require a great deal of hard work and co-operation. However, I hope that the motion before the House today and the debate that we will have on it will send the clear message to people in Northern Ireland that domestic violence is never acceptable. It is my sincere desire that those who are suffering abuse will realise that the Assembly takes the matter seriously and that we will use the powers available to us to ensure that those who are at risk are protected, so that those who are guilty of the crime will have no hiding place in this society.

12.15 pm

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Táimid ag tabhairt tacaíochta don rún.

I commend Pam on her maiden speech, and I am very pleased that this motion is before the House. For too long, our society has tolerated

and excused violence, whether emotional, sexual or physical, against women and children. For too long, we have heard the excuses: "He only does it when he has a few drinks", "He was driven to it", "For better, for worse, she made her bed, let her lie in it", or "We cannot interfere — they're neighbours. Let someone else deal with it".

Ar feadh ró-fhada, chuir ár sóchaí suas leis bhforéigean agus rinne leithscéal ar a shon, "ní dhéanann sé é ach nuair a bhíonn braon istigh aige", "Tugadh air é a dhéanamh", "Le maith nó le holc," "Chóirigh sí a leaba, luíodh sí uirthi", "Níor chóir dúinn ár ladar a chur isteach."

Violence against women, children and men is always about power. It is about the abuse of power, whether it happens in the home or on the streets and whether it is emotional, sexual or physical.

Bíonn sé i gcónaí faoi chumhacht agus faoi mhí-úsáid cumhachta, cuma cé acu a tharlaíonn sé sa bhaile nó ar na sráideanna agus cuma cé acu mí-úsáid mhothúchánach, ghnéasach nó fhisiceach atá ann.

Violence blights lives, is a major factor in poor educational outcomes and affects generations unless the cycle is broken and interventions are carried out. We need a joined-up approach across all Departments. During my term as Minister of Education, I funded a new programme with Women's Aid that trained teachers in early intervention. I share with Pam respect for the work that Women's Aid does.

Also during my time as Minister I chose to support two charities: one was Women's Aid, and the other was Aware. The Member is absolutely right when she talks about the link between suicide prevention, depression and many other mental health issues for women who suffer, and that is also the case for the children. It is very difficult for children to attain in the way that they should educationally when they are suffering violence in the home or on the streets.

We need a joined-up approach, and that is one of the issues that we raised with the Policing Board during the week. We need the Health Department, the Department of Education, the Department for Social Development (DSD), the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and, obviously, the Department of Justice to work together. Indeed, all Departments must work together, because

this affects all our areas, urban and rural, right across the island of Ireland.

We need a range of supports in every county in Ireland. We need early intervention in schools, the Health Service and the community. We need emergency intervention when women and children are being attacked in their home. We need post-trauma interventions and supports, including psychological and emotional support. We need the prosecution and jailing of perpetrators. For too long, our legal system has sent out the wrong message: "It should not happen, but it is not a real crime". That is where I absolutely agree with the Member who spoke previously: violence is a crime against women and against children and has to be treated as such.

All Governments made commitments at the Beijing conference in relation to violence against women and children, including the Irish and British Governments. I was fortunate to spend two weeks in Beijing in 1995 at the non-governmental organisation (NGO) conference, and, in every session I went to, whether the women were from Palestine, North America, South Africa, Ireland, Latin America or any European country, the biggest theme was the high level of violence against women and children.

Rinne gach rialtas tiomantas ag Comhdháil Beijing maidir le foréigean i gcoinne mná agus páistí, lena n-áirítear rialtas na hÉireann agus na Breataine. Chaith mé dhá sheachtain i Beijing i 1995 ag an gcomhdháil NGO.

We need a culture of change in our legal system. There was and still is a reluctance to understand the effect that violence has on victims' lives. It is seen as a lesser crime. In many cases, sentences are far too lenient and conviction rates far too low. Victims have to relive their trauma far too many times before they get near a court, and, in many cases, when they do they are faced with ignorance and prejudice.

Mr Campbell: Does the Member understand the difficulty that some people might have with her talking about the trauma of victims being revisited in the week that is in it, when her party colleague appointed a person who gave trauma revisited to a victim of some 37 years ago?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Ruane: First of all, go raibh maith agat for the extra minute.

This is a debate for another day. None of us should play politics with victims in this House. It is unfortunate that the Member has chosen a debate on violence against women and children to play politics with victims and legacy issues.

[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: Anyway, I will continue. We need a culture change in our legal system. There was and still is a reluctance to understand the effects that violence has on victims' lives. Tá athrú cultúir de dhíth orainn inár gcóras dlí. Bhí, agus tá go fóill, leisc a thuiscint cad mar a théann an foréigean i gcion ar shaol na n-íobartach.

This is an issue for women and men. There can be no sitting on the fence. As a society, we need to give out a clear message.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mrs Sandra Overend to speak, I remind Members that this is the first time that the House will hear from her. Once again, I ask Members for no interruptions.

Mrs Overend: I take the opportunity, in my maiden speech, to say that it is a great honour to stand in the House to represent the constituency of Mid Ulster. I thank the good people of Mid Ulster for their support, and I pay tribute to my predecessor, Billy Armstrong, who was a dedicated, hard-working and honourable Ulster Unionist MLA for 13 years. I am privileged to follow in his footsteps, and the fact that those footsteps are my father's makes me even more proud to do so.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion, and I thank the Members who tabled it. The scale of domestic violence in Northern Ireland must not be underestimated, with one incident reported every 21 minutes. As the proposer said, the terrible fact is that, on average, victims will experience 35 incidents of abuse before they make a call for help. It is, therefore, absolutely vital that victims of domestic violence have as much support as possible.

Domestic violence comes in a variety of forms, and, although it mainly impacts on women and children, it also affects men. It occurs regardless of age, gender, class, sexuality or religion. For those reasons, it is absolutely right that the issue of domestic violence is a priority for the Department of Justice.

I want to mention specific areas that the Justice Minister should consider in relation to the processes that are in place to deal with domestic violence. First, the process of multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) needs to be looked at closely by the Justice Minister to ensure that it is tightly focused on protecting those most at risk. In a conference of that kind, local agencies meet to discuss the highest-risk victims in their area. Information about the risks faced by those victims, a suitable action plan to ensure their safety and the resources that are available locally are all issues that are discussed and used to create a risk management plan that involves all agencies. The aim is to decrease the risk of domestic violence as much as possible for the most at-risk individuals. It must be said that those conferences have been generally successful in ensuring that the appropriate action is taken in each case where the risk of domestic abuse is high. However, I call on the Justice Minister to ensure that partnership working within MARACs is as effective as it can be and that the MARAC process is reviewed on an ongoing basis to facilitate continual improvement.

An important improvement to the MARAC process would be the provision of independent domestic violence advisers (IDVA). Such advisers could provide advice and support to victims of domestic violence and would complement the MARAC process. IDVAs could help to bridge the gap between victims and MARACs. The Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland report into domestic violence and abuse highlighted the need for a properly resourced IDVA service in Northern Ireland as a matter of urgency.

Domestic violence protection orders are also an example of an additional safeguard that would undoubtedly make the process for domestic violence cases more focused on the victim. Those orders require suspected perpetrators of interpersonal violence to leave the address of the victim and/or prevent contact with the victim. Domestic violence protection orders allow the space that is often required in the aftermath of a domestic violence incident, and the Justice Minister should look at the potential merit of those orders with a view to legislating for them.

Finally, legal aid rules for domestic violence cases are also very important. It

is commendable that the Justice Minister announced changes in December of last year to allow victims of domestic abuse easier access to the courts. I urge him to continue to ensure that victims of domestic violence get the help they need from legal aid.

Domestic violence is a serious issue, and we, as Assembly Members, can play our part too. I have been in regular contact with Women's Aid and, not so long ago, attended an event to launch its Safe Place charter. We can each commit to providing a safe place for victims of domestic violence, signposting them to appropriate services. However, it is clear that there are processes and protocols that the Justice Minister should consider making more focused on those most at risk. For that reason, I support the motion.

Mrs D Kelly: On behalf of the SDLP, I support the motion. Unfortunately, it is an issue on which we have spoken in the House on previous occasions and in previous mandates. One would hope that there has been an improvement in the fate of those who suffer domestic violence since then; however, I am not overly confident that that is the case. I know that the police and the Policing Board looked at the issue of domestic violence and established protocols and some procedures for dealing with vulnerable people, and those are to be welcomed. However, much more is required. That is in the interest not just of the women and children — some 11,000 children and one in four women in the North — who experience domestic violence but of wider society.

As the Minister may well know from his previous work as a social worker, there is also a need for us to break the cycle of domestic violence. After all, we all know that children learn what they live. There is a lot to be done to provide better education and better support mechanisms for families right across society. We all know that many families are experiencing great difficulty, particularly in the face of economic recession and job losses. That does not excuse domestic violence, but it does give added impetus to our need to address domestic violence.

As has always been the case, many victims do not feel that there is sufficient support within the criminal justice system, and time and again reports and inspections have highlighted that fact. People need to feel that they will be protected and that their complaint will be taken

seriously. Greater help and support must be made available to encourage victims to come forward so that we can see the true scale of domestic violence. We need to understand clearly the issues around domestic violence and abuse when incidents occur, so that we learn the lessons, remedial action can be taken and we can try to prevent that cycle occurring.

The police record incidents of domestic abuse, but those do not often tell the full story. Many victims of domestic crime do not report incidents, as they believe that the current systems may not help them sufficiently. There is a great need to improve consistency of services across the Police Service when dealing with such incidents.

There is also a need for a cross-departmental approach. It is not just a matter between agencies in the criminal justice system. We also need to ensure that accident and emergency departments, for example, have a highlighting system, just as they do for childcare cases. If there are women and children coming through A&E and there are concerns about domestic violence, we have to look at how that information is recorded and collated and what is done with it, bearing in mind, of course, that people are adults and can make decisions for themselves. Many would argue that those people are vulnerable adults and they need a level of reassurance and support in order to come forward.

The other agency that has a significant role to play is the Social Security Agency. Many women believe that they need help to process their claims and payments much quicker. These are all concerns that people have. If and when they do go to get help, what happens to the children and to their responsibilities to provide a safe and warm home and practical things such as food for those children? People consider all those facts when deciding what action to take next.

12.30 pm

As others have said, the Criminal Justice Inspection has also made recommendations. Its report underscores the importance of an effective police response to domestic violence. However, it also implies that the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) should take more care in how it makes decisions about prosecutions for domestic violence.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member bring her remarks to a close?

Mrs D Kelly: That report's recommendations must be put into action as soon as possible. Domestic abuse is a growing and very serious concern, as we can see from the number of women who have lost their lives as a result of it.

Mr Dickson: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I commend the proposer of the motion on her maiden speech and welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair)

Domestic violence is an important issue not just for the Assembly but for our society. It says much about the society we live in, but, of course, it is most important to the victims. The use or threat of violence is unacceptable in any context — full stop. The fact that it takes place behind closed doors does not excuse it in any way nor lessen the impact that it has on our community. Indeed, domestic violence does not always take place behind closed doors. It can, and often does, spill out into the wider family and, indeed, the street.

Domestic violence is complex and multifaceted. It does not affect just women. It can, and does, apply to men. Domestic violence does damage not only to the target of the abuse but to children, the wider family, their community, their neighbours and their friends. As other Members said, according to PSNI figures, an incident of domestic violence happens in Northern Ireland every 21 minutes.

The work of Women's Aid in Northern Ireland and other organisations that provide support to victims and projects designed to reduce the incidence of domestic violence, from whatever direction that violence comes, needs to be supported. That is why one Member referred to cross-departmental issues. I encourage the Minister to examine all the ways in which his Department can work with other Departments, whether in relation to health, social security or education, as many children talk to their teachers. A listening ear is a very important ear when it comes to domestic violence issues.

I know that there are excellent working relationships between the statutory agencies, such as the PSNI and social services, and the voluntary sectors that work in this field. As a former member of the Carrickfergus District

Policing Partnership, I can attest to the excellent work that Women's Aid does on the ground. I pay tribute to Brenda Leslie and her team in Carrickfergus for the work that they do tirelessly on behalf of many women and families in that community. We need to ensure that those groups are given appropriate financial support so that victims feel comfortable and safe in coming forward and, most importantly, have the confidence to come forward and report incidents of domestic violence.

The use of threatening and controlling behaviour is often underestimated in the domestic circumstance, but that can be a way in which people start to condition victims to accept the abuse that is being meted out to them. It is important that people who are subjected to that kind of controlling and abusive behaviour feel confident and secure in bringing it to the attention of the appropriate authorities at an early stage. Often, part of the abuse comes in the control of family or domestic finances.

We need to ensure that, if victims do come forward, the action that is taken will protect them. Whether it is the PSNI domestic violence unit, Women's Aid, some other charity or group, or social services working in the community, we must ensure that the priority is protection of the victim and their family and those who are most vulnerable. That may include, if necessary, the provision of safe places, such as refuges, because these people are literally in fear of their lives. That sends out a strong message to people that they cannot be sent back into the same situation a few months later, having received little or no practical support, whether it comes from the statutory or voluntary sector. It is vital that, when safe haven is given, it is meant as safe haven for as long as is needed to resolve the issues in a relationship.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, the issue of domestic violence against men is often overlooked and significantly unreported. A recent study by the campaign group PARITY revealed that in excess of 40% of domestic violence cases in the UK may be against men. Men who are subjected to domestic abuse often find it difficult to talk about. It is, therefore, important that adequate time and effort —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Dickson: It is important that adequate time and effort are put into ensuring that mechanisms

exist to support victims of domestic violence. I commend the proposer of the motion.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I am pleased to be able to speak on the motion. I commend my colleagues, Pam Lewis and Paula Bradley, for tabling the motion, using their maiden speeches to speak on the issue and giving a voice to people who are often unable to voice their concerns.

Statistics are often used to highlight an issue or make a particular point. It is important that we do not forget that behind every statistic is an individual or family affected by it. Other Members have mentioned some of them. In 2010-11, the police responded to 24,482 domestic violence incidents. Put another way, one domestic violence incident was reported every 21 minutes. Of those incidents, 9,903 were recorded as crimes. It is estimated that almost 11,000 children live with domestic violence in their home. Every day, five women and children turn to a refuge for help, and many other families help a brother or sister involved in a relationship or marriage in which domestic violence, sadly, is commonplace.

I have no doubt, therefore, that the Committee for Justice will want to ensure that domestic violence is a priority for the Minister of Justice and the Department of Justice. However, it is important to state that the responsibility for tackling domestic violence, as other Members said, does not sit solely with the Department of Justice. Often, the Department of Justice and the police deal with the aftermath of incidents. It is important that the Assembly and the Executive have their statutory bodies working together to try to prevent those incidents from happening in the first place. When they do, however, there must be a co-ordinated approach and response to this important issue.

If this issue is to be addressed effectively, it will require a range of Departments and organisations, particularly the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), to work in partnership to tackle it. As other Members pointed out, there is also a duty on the community, neighbours and families no longer to sit by and tolerate abuse taking place.

People should have enough confidence in the government and the systems in place to report such incidents. They should be confident that their reports will be taken forward and the incidents tackled effectively. I welcome some

recent changes, supported by the previous Committee for Justice, which will help to deliver fairer treatment for the victims of domestic violence. A change to the law replaced the partial defence to murder of provocation by loss of control. That defence can be used when the loss of self-control is attributable to a fear of serious violence, and it can be applied to years of abuse, whereas the previous law focused only on spur-of-the-moment actions. Many people will know that domestic violence and abuse can occur over a long period and is not just a one-off.

Members highlighted the change to the legal aid rules that provides increased assistance to victims of domestic violence. That should ensure that no victims of domestic violence need worry about the financial implications of seeking a non-molestation order. Again, the point is made that there cannot be any barriers that prevent or discourage people from reporting domestic violence. Victims need to have confidence in the ability of the state to respond effectively.

The Committee for Justice will wish to ensure that further progress is made, and we will want to consider carefully the proposals to tackle domestic violence in the new community safety strategy, which was touched on in Committee just last Thursday, where it was highlighted that a major issue often at the heart of domestic violence but for which there is absolutely no excuse is alcohol and drug abuse. The Assembly needs to consider seriously the devastating impact that alcohol abuse is having on our society. We have talked about introducing a minimum pricing policy, because it cannot be right that, in supermarkets, it is cheaper to buy alcohol than it is water or milk. There is no doubt that alcohol abuse is a major problem in domestic violence, so we need to think seriously about how to address it, because it impacts on so many aspects of society. Again, I make it clear that alcohol abuse is no excuse whatsoever for domestic violence ever taking place in the first place.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Givan: I know that these issues are important to Members. As Chairperson of the Justice Committee, I assure Members that we will ensure that tackling domestic violence is a priority for the Department and the Minister. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh Sinn Féin ag tabhairt tacaíochta don rún.

Sinn Féin supports the motion. Indeed, we welcome it, particularly because the two Members who tabled the motion are, as the Chairperson of the Justice Committee said, making their maiden speeches. We welcome the fact that the issue is being raised in that way.

Unfortunately, domestic violence is prevalent in society, and perhaps there are gaps in the way in which it is addressed in the justice system, which, at times, allows other offences to take place when they could be avoided. Indeed, as Members have already said, the Criminal Justice Inspection pointed out in its report that there are more than 100 incidents a day, and many more are not reported. There is a sense that there are gaps in the system, which the Criminal Justice Inspection examined, so I hope that the Minister will in some way address how those gaps are being filled.

Victims of domestic violence are of every age and class, and the majority are women. Most incidents happen in a family setting, and a high number of children are affected as a result.

Ms Gildernew: Does the Member agree that isolation can perpetuate the problems of domestic violence in rural areas, where it is often hidden or less obvious and where more opportunities exist for threatening, abusive and controlling behaviour? I have asked the Minister to work with Executive colleagues to look at the particular challenges of supporting victims of domestic violence in rural areas, looking, for example, at the work of Fermanagh Women's Aid, which has done sterling work, particularly in schools, to create awareness of domestic violence. As Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, I tasked young farmers' clubs to work with Women's Aid to create awareness of the issue in rural communities.

Mr McCartney: I thank the Member for her intervention. Indeed, people who live in an urban setting sometimes think that domestic violence is prevalent only in cities, but, as the Member outlined, it affects every geographical location. The type of work that community groups carry out is important in dealing with domestic violence and, indeed, raising public awareness of it.

I was making the point that most domestic violence takes place in a family setting, and I was about to describe its impact on children in particular. Some children are actually subjected to violence, but, even when they are not, domestic violence is well known to have a detrimental impact on them socially, educationally and mentally. Furthermore, it has a very negative impact in the long term, and, because of the setting in which children find themselves — sometimes repeatedly — they do not get an opportunity to reach their full potential.

The motion calls on the Minister and his Department to make tackling domestic violence a priority, and I welcome the fact that the Minister is here to respond. From the Committee's work in the previous mandate, we know that tackling domestic violence is a priority, so I have no doubt that the Minister will state that it is a priority. Perhaps he will outline in practical terms how that priority is being realised and demonstrate practically how he can make it a stronger priority.

12.45 pm

We have to show that there is a trend. That is a task for all of us, particularly the Minister. More and more women are reporting abuse, and we have to see more and more convictions. People reporting this type of crime should be able to see that, when they come out the other side of the system, they will get a result. We know from other crimes that a lack of success acts as a deterrent to coming forward. Women might ask: what is the point? We have to try to ensure that that does not happen.

Other Members mentioned the work of Women's Aid. Each of us has seen in our own constituencies how that has been of great benefit, particularly in raising awareness and ensuring that domestic violence is not a crime that is committed behind closed doors. Sometimes, the atmosphere or environment that is created leads to a feeling that domestic violence can be tackled only in particular settings. Women's Aid brought domestic violence out into the open, and we all now feel that we have a responsibility to try to deal with it.

Other groups, particularly those in the voluntary sector and women's groups in local areas, provide a platform and, sometimes, an escape route. Many women find themselves trapped economically or by other circumstances. Women say that one of the reasons why they do not

walk away from a violent relationship is that they have nowhere to go, so they remain trapped in it. We have to ensure that the structure around voluntary groups is supported.

One other thing that we must do is examine the need for a register, and the Women's Aid Federation has publicly articulated that view. I would like to hear the Minister's views on this issue, and I have tabled a question on it. We have the sex offenders register, and there is absolutely no doubt that that plays a fundamental role in alerting people to offenders' whereabouts and the potential for an offender to be in a particular location, et cetera. Women's Aid is articulating the view that some consideration should be given to having a similar register for serial domestic violence offenders and people who have been convicted of domestic violence offences. Criminal Justice Inspection, Women's Aid and PSNI documents show that, when women walk into violent relationships, often many people around them know that they are doing so, but, legally, no one can warn them off. People can warn the woman anecdotally or on a friend-to-friend basis, but we need a legal protection.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please bring his remarks to a close?

Mr McCartney: I hope that that is one of the issues that the Minister will address. Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Lord Morrow: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion and commend Pam Lewis and Paula Bradley for securing the debate and bringing it before the House.

In my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, domestic violence is sadly prevalent. However, I suspect that Fermanagh and South Tyrone does not differ much from the other 17 constituencies of Northern Ireland in that respect. I took the time and trouble to look at the court lists, which cover the next week at the local Magistrate's Court. The number of domestic violence-related cases is extremely high and very worrying. Special days are often set aside to hear such cases because of the number coming before the courts. The court system finds it difficult to cope. This week alone, 38 cases of domestic violence are moving through the court system in my constituency. Of those, three allege assault causing actual bodily harm, two allege grievous bodily harm, a further two allege wounding with

an offensive weapon, one alleges a sexual assault, one is for attempted murder and one is for murder. Members can see that a pattern has been established right across the spectrum of violence. There are also numerous breaches of non-molestation orders that were put in place to protect the victim or potential victim from further violence.

Seeing that list grow in recent years is a double-edged sword. Whereas the prosecution of domestic violence cases is to be commended, we must never lose sight of the fact that the underlying problem appears to be becoming more endemic. It is difficult to say whether more cases are making their way to court or whether the problem is increasing. However, the overall message that must be conveyed is that this crime will not be tolerated. Additional measures have to be put in place to tackle this ever-increasing problem.

More victims are coming forward in an effort to break free of the control that is exerted by perpetrators of domestic violence. However, as Pam Lewis said, statistics indicate that it takes some 30 attacks before action is taken. Police are more engaged with victims in these circumstances, and specialist domestic violence officers are appointed who are committed to dealing entirely with such cases. Bail terms for those who are charged are ever more tailored to protect the victim from further violence or emotional trauma and, indeed, to keep away the power of the perpetrator of using persuasive tactics to get the victim to drop the charges.

During the previous session of the Assembly, I submitted to the Justice Minister a question for written answer that asked for the number of domestic assaults in each of the past three years. I also sought to know the age groups of victims and offenders in an effort to identify any specific trends. The Minister was unable to differentiate between the types of assaults that were on record; they were listed simply as convictions for assault, and there was no way of separating them into categories where there was domestic motivation. I find that disturbing, because domestic violence is very different. Perhaps the Minister will look again at how his various units keep records and what details they record. That is important.

I also wrote to the Chief Constable in February to ask how many domestic disputes involved the

consumption of alcohol by the perpetrator. The reply was:

"We do not routinely record the information requested."

Again, that is disappointing, and Paul Givan, the Chair of the Justice Committee, mentioned the part that alcohol plays in domestic violence. I believe that it plays a significant part and that public representatives and Departments do not concentrate on that. For some unknown reason, they do not want to name the elephant in the room. Alcohol is one of the curses on our society, and, in turn, it affects families, society and education. It is a cancer in our society, yet we seem to take a benign attitude to it.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I see that you are going to tell me that my time is up.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must draw his remarks to a close.

Lord Morrow: That is unfortunate, because I got halfway through my —

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Givan: Does the Member agree that this issue needs to be tackled seriously by all government Departments?

Lord Morrow: I can answer that. It certainly does, and that is my final word. Thank you for your tolerance, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr B McCrea: It is good to see that Mr Givan has got the hang of parliamentary procedure here and, no doubt, he will help me out if I need an extra minute.

Mr Storey: He is not that generous.

Mr B McCrea: I was about to pour kind words on Mr Storey, because I know that he is particularly interested in this issue and is wearing a white ribbon. I add my congratulations to the proposers of the motion. It is an appropriate topic to be discussed, and I realise that, when making a maiden speech, Members are comfortable speaking on something about which they feel strongly.

However, it is important to realise that the issue is not one only for women. Abuse and violence happens to all genders, and all genders have to take responsibility for it. I have engaged

over a large number of years with Women's Aid and other bodies, and one of the things that I was most pleased to do at the Assembly last year was to host a ball to celebrate the work of Women's Aid. Unfortunately, some of the footage from that ball is on YouTube, and it does not do me any great favours. It serves the necessary — *[Interruption.]* Some people left a little earlier, Mr Storey.

I urge Women's Aid to bring the issue to the fore and explain that this is an important issue that affects all of us, and levity is not required when we talk about the difficulties that face people. It is not only about domestic violence. There are other, more insidious crimes. Domestic abuse is the wider form of it, and that includes things such as withholding money and various other means whereby people abuse their victims. If Lord Morrow will forgive me, although I understand the point he made about alcohol in a general sense, I must say that alcohol alone is no excuse. These are insidious crimes that have been going on for long periods of time, and the people who do them cannot be drunk the whole time.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. Had I been able to go on, I would have elaborated on that point. However, he is absolutely right: alcohol alone is not to blame, but the abuse of alcohol is very often the motivator. I maybe would have made that point if I had been allowed a few more minutes.

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful to Lord Morrow for that clarification, and I know that he is well across that issue and has done a lot of good work on it. That is part of why we have these debates. With all due respect to the Members who speak here, it is not just about wringing our hands and saying that somebody ought to do something and what a tragedy it all is. We need to see some action, and hopefully the Minister will deal with that issue.

During my previous experience on the Policing Board, we had some strenuous negotiations with the Chief Constable about the targets for the next three years. After a lot of discussion, the only target that we agreed to increase above trend was the target on resolving domestic violence offences. Those offences are not the same as others because, with those offences, the perpetrator is known. You do not have to find out who did it; you know who it is. There is nothing more disconcerting for victims of

crime, when they have the courage to bring those horrendous events to court, than to not get a satisfactory outcome. That is why I am very pleased to see the proposed introduction of IDVAs. However, I really want the Minister of Justice to concentrate on how we make sure that the criminal justice system recognises the difficulties that victims of such crimes face and ensures that they are protected and looked after.

I have spoken to two Lord Chief Justices about the issue. They want to look at the matter and see if they can come up with an appropriate way of dealing with it. However, it is not enough to just deal with it behind closed doors within the closeted system of the criminal justice system. Those discussions must take place out in the open and be totally scrutinised. All Members of this House must look at the issues and say what type of legislation they want for this most heinous of crimes. Fifty per cent of all murders in Northern Ireland have an underlying domestic nature.

I will conclude on this matter. I thank my colleague Sandra Overend, who made an excellent maiden speech. I know that the issue is particularly important to her, and I know that she has attended many briefings and events run by Women's Aid. I encourage all Members of this House, male and female, those who are new and those who have been here previously, to please get involved and please tackle the issue. This is a unifying issue, and we can show all the people of Northern Ireland —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr B McCrea: — that this Assembly will actually do something about it.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. We have had debates on this issue in the Assembly before, and, as other Members said, the impact of domestic violence on families is absolutely devastating. When we talk about estimates and statistics, it is very important that we realise that there are real people behind those statistics.

It is estimated that one quarter of all women experience some form of domestic abuse at some stage in their lives and that almost half the women who are murdered in the North of Ireland are killed by their partners. That is a startling statistic for anyone to read. The recent

report from the Criminal Justice Inspection said that an incident of domestic violence is reported here every 21 minutes. However, we have to remember that quite a number of incidents of domestic violence are not reported, because more are unreported than reported.

1.00 pm

Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence. Although, as one Member pointed out, victims can be male or female, most victims are women and children. Domestic abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional or even financial. Children and young people in family homes where domestic violence happens are, often, very much its forgotten victims. In a previous debate, we discussed research that found that up to 11,000 children in the North of Ireland are in the same room or the next room when physical violence is being perpetrated against their mother or guardian.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for giving way. Does she agree that children in domestic situations in which violence reigns are more likely to become the husbands or wives of violent partners? Does she agree that that vicious circle must be broken if we are to come to terms with that particular issue?

Ms J McCann: Certainly; such violence has long-term damaging effects on children who have witnessed or been the victims of it. Those children are at increased risk of self-harm, drug and alcohol misuse and all sorts of other at-risk behaviours. Violence in the home, therefore, has a serious impact on the physical and mental well-being of all its victims. Other Members mentioned organisations, such as Women's Aid, and women's centres. Society could not do without them. They provide a lifeline to people who are under threat.

We must remember that deep societal problems need to be challenged and tackled to ensure that violence and abuse in the home are seen as crimes. Often, people do not see domestic violence as the crime that it is. Over half of the incidents reported to police result in no prosecution. It is clear that more needs to be done to keep women and children safe and to ensure that people come forward to report such abuse. Now that there is a Minister of Justice and local control of policing and justice, there is an opportunity to reshape the justice system to make it less difficult for women to come forward and report that crime and to make it easier for

them to access the support from the justice system that they need to keep them safe.

The Minister of Justice, in reply to a recent question that I asked him, said that it cost, on average, around £537 to obtain a non-molestation order. The threshold for someone to obtain one through legal aid is very low. A person must earn less than £234 a week. Such orders should be free of charge for all those who need them. It should not be based on a person's disposable income. A person at risk needs to obtain an order whether or not his or her disposable income is above a certain threshold.

Evidence shows an almost lenient attitude towards perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse. People receive much shorter sentences for the crime of domestic abuse than if the same crime had been committed against a stranger. Domestic violence must be seen as the major public threat that it is. One key area of prevention, which has been identified as such, is to change people's awareness and the public perception of domestic violence. For example, the awareness campaign taking place in schools should become part of the school curriculum. Focus must be shifted on to the abuser. Programmes that are part of the preventative campaign must be taken up by abusers as part of their rehabilitation.

As I said, further steps must be taken to ensure that all violence against women, specifically domestic violence, is given appropriate importance in any strategy or policy on crime reduction and community safety. At present, the system is unfair. Women need to feel safer in coming forward, they need to know that someone will listen to them, and they need to see that sentencing reflects the seriousness of the crime. As elected representatives, we have a responsibility to work in partnership with organisations to bring that about.

Mr A Maginness: I commend Ms Lewis and Ms Bradley for proposing and seconding the motion and Ms Overend for her contribution to the debate. It is a very worthwhile debate, and to bring it to the Assembly at this early stage is of great value, so I commend the proposer for doing that.

I do not want to repeat the arguments that have been rehearsed in the House today and, indeed, on previous occasions, but there have been changes in the way in which the courts and the

police deal with domestic violence. Those have been positive changes. However, if you look at the Criminal Justice Inspection report you can see that there is room for very significant improvement by the PSNI, the courts and the Public Prosecution Service. The report highlights a number of initiatives that could take place, one of which relates to the way in which cases are processed by the Director of the Public Prosecution Service. Prosecutions are not made on approximately half of all reported cases of domestic violence, so there is a very significant level of non-prosecution. That is for all sorts of different reasons.

The report indicates that prosecutors and the police should be looking at the way in which they assess the evidence that is presented to them. Perhaps cases in which victims of domestic abuse, in particular, have withdrawn their statements from the police or the prosecution service should be looked at again. There may well be space for manoeuvre by the prosecution service to say that even though the victim has withdrawn their statement, there is other evidence that, if presented to the court, could bring about a conviction. That is something that the prosecution service and the police should look at.

There is also the problem of whether to arrest an alleged perpetrator. The police are allowed a large amount of discretion on that. However, there has to be consistency of approach by the police in exercising that discretion, because there is always the danger that those who are cleverer in perpetrating such domestic violence get away with it. That has to be looked at as well.

There is also the suggestion that a domestic violence protection order be introduced. It has been suggested that we, as legislators, should look at the possibility of introducing a temporary order barring an individual from the home for 14 days and that we should strengthen the protections given to those in vulnerable families.

As other Members said, women are, by and large, the direct victims of domestic violence, but the indirect victims of domestic violence are, doubtlessly, children. The terrible damage that is caused to children as a result of domestic violence should be appreciated by all of us in the House.

The report looks at other matters which, as legislators, we should be concerned with. One is the performance of prosecutors in court. Do the

prosecutors get it right? Could there be a higher quality of service by the prosecution or a higher quality of prosecution by individual prosecutors? Is there consistency of performance? Can that be improved? An improvement in the quality of prosecution would mean that there would be a higher level of convictions. We know that only 61% of those who are prosecuted are convicted. I suggest that that is too low. I will end there.

Mr Storey: I commend my party colleagues Pam Lewis and Paula Bradley for bringing this important issue to the House today. Equally important is the fact that they have done so in their maiden speeches, which underscores the importance of the issue and the work. I also commend Pam Lewis for helping to launch the White Ribbon Campaign in December 2008. Mr McCrea referred to the fact that I am wearing the badge of that campaign today. We, as politicians, are all keen to be seen doing what is right. A lot of organisations send us badges, petitions and various things, and we can very easily fall into the trap of trying to be politically correct by wearing and signing such things. However, I am not wearing the White Ribbon badge because it is politically convenient to do so and is seen as the right thing to do politically, but because it is the right thing to do morally, given that domestic violence is a scourge on our society.

I pay tribute to the work of Women's Aid, particularly the Naomi Centre, which is based in Ballymena in my constituency of North Antrim. I have dealt with some victims of domestic violence who have come to me as a public representative, and were it not for that facility in Ballymena, I do not know how we would have dealt with the problems presented. I, therefore, pay tribute to — I place this on public record — the work of the Naomi Centre. I trust that it will continue to have the support of Government agencies, which I know it has had in the past, in order to ensure that it is able to deliver for those who suffer domestic violence.

I also pay tribute — sometimes we come to this House and place all the pressure on the Minister who is responding to the debate — to the Minister, because, having had the opportunity to correspond with him on this issue over a period of time in the previous mandate and already in this one, I know that he places a particular importance on ensuring that there is delivery on the matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am conscious that time is of the essence so, having given that praise to the Minister, I just want to raise a particular issue with him about the multi-agency risk assessment conference process before I conclude. I listened to other Members, and the Member for Mid Ulster Mrs Overend raised concerns about the problems with MARAC. I would like the Minister to deal with that in his response, particularly the issue around sharing agreements and the current difficulties with the process. I think that that needs to be dealt with as a matter of urgency. I ask that the Minister give a commitment today to look at that issue.

I conclude by reiterating the slogan of the White Ribbon Campaign, which was launched in 2008, and remind Members that they signed this pledge:

"I will not commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women."

In light of that pledge and commitment, it is fitting that the House is dealing with this issue today. I trust that, as a result of this debate, we will see positive measures being taken that will protect those who desperately need our help and assistance. I support the motion.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): First, I congratulate Pam Lewis and Paula Bradley on securing this debate on what I consider to be an extremely important issue not just for the Department of Justice but for us all. The issue of domestic violence is of the utmost importance to the whole of society. Although Members from different corners of the Chamber took different slants, the debate produced total unanimity, with the possible exception of Mervyn Storey who gave me some slight praise, and that is very much welcomed.

1.15 pm

Let me make clear my position: as the proposer of the motion said, and as nearly every Member repeated, domestic violence is a crime and is not acceptable in any circumstances in a civilised society. That is clearly the view across the Chamber. However, recent events have highlighted only too vividly the terrible consequences that we see at times from domestic violence.

Domestic violence and abuse is a serious problem, causing devastation to individuals, families and wider family circles. Domestic violence occurs across society and is no

respector of age, gender, race, ethnic or religious group, sexual orientation, wealth, disability or geography. Examples have been given to show the way in which that applies. As has been rightly said, the majority of victims are women. However, we also see victims who are men and a significant number of victims who are children, which must be a concern for all of us.

The proposer of the motion quoted the statistics from a year ago of over 24,000 incidents of domestic abuse. In one sense, the good news is that, last year, the number of incidents was 22,685 — a 7.3% decrease — and the overall detection rate for crimes with a domestic element was 3.3% higher than in the previous year. However, that is absolutely no reason to be complacent; 22,000 crimes is far too many. Indeed, any one incident is one too many.

I have one slight quibble with what the proposer of the motion said. The first part of the motion calls on me to ensure that addressing domestic violence is a priority for my Department. I think that, as Mervyn Storey made clear, it would perhaps be more charitable to say “continue to ensure”, and I shall interpret the motion in that respect.

I welcome the opportunity to emphasise the work that is being done by the Department of Justice, along with other Departments, other elements of the justice system and a range of NGOs, to address this heinous crime. I believe that during the past year — my first year as Minister — I was able to demonstrate that commitment tangibly in a number of ways, not least through my attendance at events in support of those working to deal with domestic violence. I also delivered changes to the way in which the justice system operates that benefit victims — in particular, victims of domestic violence. Most recently, my ministerial colleagues and I endorsed the domestic violence action plan for 2010-12. In the Justice Bill, which was passed just before dissolution, we included, amongst other measures, the offender levy to create a victims-of-crime fund and extended special measures for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses giving evidence. Those are key issues with regard to domestic violence.

I was also able, as has been highlighted, to announce changes that give victims greater access to the courts by removing the upper earnings and capital limits for those who are seeking the protection of a non-molestation

order. Although Jennifer McCann asked for that to be removed altogether, I believe that by removing it at an early stage to ensure that people could obtain their orders we have made a very significant step forward. Nobody should be prevented from going to court to obtain a non-molestation order on financial grounds. That has been recognised as a significant step forward.

Although I can highlight some positive moves, I certainly acknowledge that much remains to be done. I intend to use this second year that I have been given as Minister of Justice to continue to tackle domestic violence.

On 1 June, just last week, I commenced changes to the law on murder that will have an important impact on domestic violence cases, as has been highlighted. The different circumstances in which somebody may commit murder almost as an act of self-defence are now being properly catered for where that has been because of a matter of violence and abuse over a period of years rather than in the heat of the moment. That will provide a more just and equitable outcome.

It is imperative that we seek to work together to better protect all victims of domestic violence. My Department has joint policy lead with DHSSPS on domestic and sexual violence but it is, as others have said, a cross-departmental issue, and I welcome the opportunity to work with ministerial colleagues on the inter-ministerial group on domestic and sexual violence. Dolores Kelly pointed out that issue when she referred to my previous profession. We have to acknowledge that support for the victims is, in large measure, a matter for health and social care trusts and that Department. However, we have also heard examples of responsibilities in social security, and Caitríona Ruane highlighted the work that she had done as Minister of Education in providing support and educational opportunities for teachers to support. Therefore, we do need to recognise that this is very much a cross-cutting theme.

In September 2010, the inter-ministerial group on domestic and sexual violence agreed to extend the current domestic violence strategy until September 2013 to coincide with the end of the current strategy on sexual violence. Between now and then, we will develop a single strategy to address the linked matters of

domestic and sexual violence. In the interim, we have the action plan in place.

Let me also stress, because there has been a bit of reference to it, that the Tackling Violence at Home strategy is gender-neutral. Clearly, the majority of victims are female, but we need to ensure that we recognise that that is not uniformly the case. Some initiatives in the strategy include the introduction of a 24-hour domestic violence freephone; the launch of a leaflet explaining the criminal and civil law systems to help the victims of violence; the introduction of a perpetrators' phone line; the creation of public protection units in each police district; and the extension in 2009, just before I came into post, of courts' powers to impose a restraining order in a much wider range of circumstances than was previously the case. All those measures were designed to support the victims of domestic violence, particularly those most at risk.

A number of Members, particularly Mr Storey, mentioned multi-agency risk assessment conferences. We need to highlight the successes that MARACs have had since January 2010. Designed specifically to help protect those most at risk, MARACs operate in each police district in Northern Ireland, where local agencies meet to discuss the highest-risk victims and to share information about the risks and the actions needed to ensure the victims' safety, with a proper plan in place and the necessary resources made available for it.

The introduction of MARACs has been overseen by a project management steering group, chaired jointly by the Department of Justice and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. From their inception until the end of April this year, the 14 MARACs across Northern Ireland discussed 1,759 high-risk cases, and safety plans were put in place to protect the victims, who included 2,500 children.

MARACs have been in place for only a year, and I believe that they have achieved a considerable amount. However, I fully acknowledge that there are concerns on the part of many of the related NGOs, to which Mervyn Storey referred, that we will need to continue to address. In particular, independent domestic violence advisers — IDVAs, if we are to continue to go into further acronyms — have not yet been appointed. Such issues were largely held up because of budgetary matters owing to the range of

agencies involved. I believe that, with the departmental budget now in place, it is possible that we can move forward, and I hope that we will see IDVAs in place to support victims within the MARAC process and to keep them informed and involved. That will be a significant step forward in improving the operation of IDVAs. It will be a key issue, but it should be something that is seen to happen in the next few months.

Some NGOs have raised concerns about how information sharing operates properly. We need to ensure that we get the information-sharing agreement in place to facilitate the legitimate and secure disclosure of all necessary information, which may include a certain amount of personal data, with the Police Service and other agencies and NGOs operating at an appropriate level. There has been significant discussion on that. I believe that it is necessary to have the discussion to get it done right, but I will be doing my best to ensure that discussions are concluded as quickly as possible so that MARACs, as a measure in place, can function properly.

A number of Members referred to the report from the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland on the handling of domestic violence cases. A number of Members also acknowledged that there have been some significant improvements recorded in that report, but it is clear that much still needs to be done.

Let me highlight some points about the recommendations made. There is a clearly an issue of consistency of service across all eight police districts. There is an issue about quality of prosecutions, which is, of course, a matter not for me but for the PPS. There is also the issue that I just referred to regarding the appointment of IDVAs. Michelle Gildernew highlighted the issue of rural isolation as being a factor in some cases, although it should be said that the 14 separate MARACs operate in urban and rural areas, as do five domestic violence partnerships. In reference to the point that Lord Morrow, among others, made, MARACs are examining information on alcohol and drug abuse and their correlation with domestic violence. It may not form part of the formal criminal statistics, but it is an issue that is being looked at and taken seriously.

CJINI's recommendations are already being addressed significantly and seriously, and

Members who raised concerns can take some comfort, but not complacency, from that.

Issues were raised about domestic violence protection orders, which are being trialled by the Home Office in England and Wales. They can last for up to 14 days to prevent a suspected perpetrator from entering the address of a victim or having personal contact. My officials are working closely with the Home Office to examine the effect of those proposals. We will monitor closely to see what lessons can be learned and assess the appropriateness of introducing such a measure in Northern Ireland. While a trial is being piloted in England and Wales, it would seem pointless to rush into something that might not be done in the right way.

We are also looking at the issue of the domestic homicide reviews (DHRs), which are being conducted in England and Wales. Last year, there were seven murders with a domestic abuse motivation, which is a horrendous figure for each of us to think about. We need to ensure that we learn lessons from DHRs, which commenced in England and Wales only in April. My officials will look closely at the appropriate mechanisms to introduce them here.

Similarly, we also need to look at supporting victims through work with perpetrators. A key element of the domestic violence action plan is accountability for perpetrators through various programmes. We are considering how to deal with that. Reference has been made to serial perpetrators. We need to look at the work of the Probation Board in particular and the integrated domestic abuse programme to ensure the safety of victims by confronting perpetrators with the effects of their behaviour. All those issues need considerable attention.

Throughout my remarks, I have referred to the issue of partnership and the work between different Departments, agencies of the criminal justice system and a number of others, particularly the work of the MARAC process. Many Members, notably Dolores Kelly, highlighted partnership as being vital if we are to tackle domestic violence and get all relevant agencies to work together to make a real difference. I take this opportunity to thank those who have invested time, not just in MARACs but in a range of other opportunities, to improve the services that we provide to victims.

As we look at the outcome of the community safety consultation that my Department is

collating, and as we shape a new strategy for making safer communities, clearly issues such as domestic crime and other crimes will be part of that because of the devastating effect that they can have on families and communities.

I suspect that, in the time that I had available, I have not answered every point that was raised by every Member, but I hope that I have confirmed my continuing commitment to doing all that I can to address domestic violence and to ensure that my Department does so. I have a vision that we will continue on that downward statistical path to the point at which we eradicate domestic violence and that, in particular, we help to break the silence that surrounds this crime. Through the delivery of actions, including the DHSSPS and Department of Justice strategy, Tackling Violence at Home, we have made significant progress in the area, which is evidenced in the fall in the number of incidents. However, I am also well aware that one crime is one crime too many, and this crime is particularly horrendous. As Basil McCrea said, we have had a unifying issue in the Chamber this afternoon, which is part of the ongoing partnership that is unifying agencies and NGOs across Northern Ireland and for which I am grateful. I commend that approach to all Members, and I assure them that the Department of Justice remains committed to working in that partnership with all relevant bodies to address the scourge of domestic violence.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Ms Paula Bradley to conclude and wind up the debate.

Ms P Bradley: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I should have said that this is your maiden speech, so we will have no interruptions from Members.

Ms P Bradley: I welcome the opportunity to make my maiden speech to the House today. I also thank the people of North Belfast for placing their trust in me.

My colleague Pam Lewis began her speech by stating that, by the time this debate draws to an end, three victims will have suffered domestic abuse in Northern Ireland.

She also stated that it gave her no joy to bring this matter to the attention of Members. Although I agree with the Member that proposing the motion gives us no joy, I am truly delighted that I can use this short time to raise the

seriousness of domestic abuse and the crippling effect that it has on our country.

1.30 pm

On International Women's Day last year, I listened to a radio debate that highlighted the suppression of women in other parts of the world. I was told by the very worthy panel how fortunate we were in Northern Ireland: we have freedom of speech, freedom to marry whom we choose, freedom to dress how we want, freedom to vote and even freedom to achieve success in all aspects of our life. However, one in four of us is suppressed, controlled, bullied and lives in fear daily of what lies ahead. Statistically, that is five women in the Chamber and countless others in the grounds of the estate. Before the end of today, one in four women in this country will have been beaten, raped, starved or made to feel totally worthless.

As Basil McCrea highlighted, domestic abuse is much more than violence. Many Members also touched on the effect that it is having on our country and our economy. The issue has the power to affect almost every Department. It affects the children who are sitting in classrooms this afternoon, thinking about their mother's tears as she kissed them goodbye this morning with swollen lips; the teachers who deal with those children's emotions; the small business that is struggling to stay afloat with a member of staff whose absences are becoming more frequent, through no fault of their own; the police officer who is called to the scene of an attack, an overdose or possibly even a death; the overstretched benefits system that deals with victims who are unable to work due to physical or mental scarring; and the Health Service, which is filled with many allied health professionals who feel powerless due to time constraints imposed on them when dealing with bed turnover.

Mrs Kelly spoke about A&E departments and the need for more training to deal with women when they present themselves. As the Minister knows, I have a background in social work, and mine is in hospital-based work. A&E is not always the most appropriate place to deal with the issue. It is the place where the perpetrator will play the loving partner and hold the hand. If the victim is fortunate — or unfortunate — enough to have sustained injuries and be admitted to a ward, that is when they will feel safe and able to disclose their circumstances.

At this stage, I pay tribute to the nurses and allied health professionals for their compassion and continued support for all the victims who pass through their doors daily. Safe places have also been mentioned this afternoon. When I was Mayor of Newtownabbey, I had the pleasure of being part of the Safe Places campaign that launched across Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey. I am proud to say that Newtownabbey Borough Council was the first to introduce a domestic violence workplace charter, and Ballyclare was made the first safe town through the commitment of the council and businesses. As a business owner, I have, over the year, made my business a safe place. The Minister stated his ongoing commitment to make this a priority, and I know that he has shown his commitment to the Safe Places campaign by displaying the logo and making his constituency office a safe place. I thank him for that. Although the debate has been cohesive and Members from across the Chamber have shown their support for women and men who suffer from domestic abuse, I ask Members to pledge to make their constituency offices safe places by placing the logo in their window and having the information available for victims to get the help that they need before it is too late.

Just before I came into the Chamber, I received an e-mail from Women's Aid, thanking me for bringing the motion to the House. We have a wonderful medium to highlight the plight of victims. When I was preparing for my speech this morning, I thought about how I felt and about how nervous I would be. I thought that that was nothing compared with how an abused man or woman would be feeling. Many people will be watching this debate at home or in the Building, and, if it has empowered a woman or man to break the cycle because they know that the Assembly is prepared to keep this issue to the fore, Pam and I will have made a great achievement.

I wish to thank Members for their support today and for starting this Assembly term in such a practical and positive manner.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to ensure that addressing domestic violence is a priority for his Department; and that all the agreed processes and protocols in place are focused on protecting those most at risk.

Government Structures

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Elliott: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the need to reform its structures, including having a requirement for an official opposition to be in place by 2015 to create greater delivery, flexibility and scrutiny; and supports a review of the number of Departments and MLAs, and a restructuring of arm's-length bodies.

I recently read a press article that stated that times are tough. It said that we must tighten our belts and brace ourselves for austerity. For quite a long time, I have thought that one area that we can change in the system in Northern Ireland is overgovernance. We have 108 MLAs, 18 MPs, three MEPs and 582 councillors, not to mention the commissioners, quangos and scores of consultants that we use in the Province. I would like to see an overall review that takes cognisance of that entire make-up. It may be useful to do that in stages, but we must look at the overall context in which we do so.

The St Andrews Agreement required the First Minister and deputy First Minister to appoint an efficiency review panel to examine the efficiency and value for money of aspects of strand one institutions. The panel was expected to consider the structure of Departments as well as the number of MLAs. However, I understand that no consensus was reached. I was a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee in the last mandate. We discussed issues in and around changing the size of the Assembly and the number of MLAs, as well as issues around section 16A to 16C of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which refer to the appointment of the First Minister, deputy First Minister and other Ministers. Again, no real consensus was reached.

The number of Departments is one of the easier aspects to change, as the First and deputy First Ministers can reduce the number of Departments quite easily and simply through transfer of functions. However, that would require some consultation with Members and the wider community. That could be moved on quickly, although I would not advise it at

this stage, now that we have gone beyond the selection of Ministers. At this stage, it would need to be looked at in the context of an overall review.

Another ongoing aspect, the outcome of which will have a deliberate and definite effect on the Assembly, is the Boundary Commission's review of the Westminster boundaries, which will also affect Assembly boundaries. There is talk that the number of constituencies will be reduced by either two or three, which would automatically reduce the number of Assembly Members by either 12 or 18.

Mr Weir: The Boundary Commission has met all parties, including your own, and it has made it fairly clear that there will be a reduction of two rather than of two or three.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for his clarification, although, as we know from the past, the Boundary Commission can often change its mind at some stage in the process.

Mr Weir: A formula was set across the UK, and a set figure was produced. The Boundary Commission has no flexibility as to the number of constituencies in Northern Ireland; it will be 16.

Mr Elliott: We will not get into any greater debate on that issue, as it takes away from the motion at hand. Commissioners will make up their own mind at different stages, and rules are set to be changed.

One of the biggest areas that we must look at is the number of quangos and non-departmental bodies. Looking at the annual report on public bodies within the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I saw that this year's budget for such bodies is £26 million. That is for this year and those bodies alone, not to mention the much wider issues. The Equality Commission has a budget of almost £7 million this year, and, as the Human Rights Commission is within, I think, the Northern Ireland Office, I have no idea how much the budget is for that organisation.

There are huge opportunities to reduce the number of quangos and non-departmental bodies. Some of those bodies were established during the many years of direct rule to give the wider public more of a say in the governance of Northern Ireland. However, instead of the number of those bodies reducing after

devolution, it seems to have increased. It is now time to conduct an overall review of those bodies to reduce their number. There is no argument for increasing their number, and we should make a firm commitment to reduce them.

The Ulster Unionist Party and other parties have taken a stance on having a system of official opposition in the Northern Ireland Assembly, which would be very useful. We must set a process in place for reaching a conclusion and set a date for reaching that conclusion, because we will never reach that stage if we just talk about it. We need a proper, formally recognised opposition that will give people an opportunity to change government to a greater extent than at present. In the long term, it will provide much greater and better delivery for the community at large, whom we are here to represent.

Mr Campbell: The Member is talking about how opposition might lend itself to a better system of government. Does the Member accept that there is nothing in Standing Orders, legislation or anything else to prevent an opposition emerging today if it wanted to do so?

Mr Elliott: I accept that, as the Member correctly says, there could be an unofficial opposition here. However, such an opposition would not have any speaking rights or any right to ask questions or challenge Ministers to a greater extent than at present.

There are official oppositions in the UK Parliament in England, in Scotland and in Wales, and I do not see why we should not have one here in Northern Ireland. We all recognise the reasons why we did not have an official opposition in 1998, but we are moving on, and we need to look at a process whereby we can have such an opposition. The community at large wants to see a much more democratic system in the Northern Ireland Assembly and would, by and large, welcome such a system.

An official opposition would also give us the opportunity to have opposition days, and I am sure that Mr Campbell is aware of some of these terms from another place. Those would give us the opportunity to have much more strategic debates and give a more strategic purpose to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive. The Ulster Unionist Party has laid out its stall. I do not see and I am sure that we will not see a huge amount of opposition to what we are saying in this debate.

1.45 pm

Mr Hamilton: I welcome the opportunity that the motion tabled by Mr Elliott and Mr McCallister gives us to debate a subject that created much interest among the wider community, particularly during the recent election period. I also welcome the opportunity that it brings to acknowledge the curious conversion that it represents. It is the culmination of a long process of conversion by the Ulster Unionist Party from being not just the authors but the advocates and supporters of the status quo of the structures that we have in place in Stormont courtesy of the Belfast Agreement in 1998 to the position where, today, they oppose the very structures that they had a hand in and were part architect of.

I hope that they come to this with the zeal of a convert. They are in very good company in opposing the structures that we have as a legacy of the Belfast Agreement. The DUP has opposed them from day one. Indeed, we opposed them when it was unfashionable, when we were derided and harangued for opposing them and when we were a lone voice. We have supported change and major reform in the structures at Stormont, arguing that they were ineffective, inefficient and inherently undemocratic.

The list of converts is growing. We have added —

Mr Allister: Does the honourable Member have any appreciation of how ridiculous he sounds when he talks about the DUP having opposed the Belfast Agreement, when he and his party today are the chief implementers of precisely the infrastructure of the Belfast Agreement: the iniquitous joint office of First Ministers, the North/South executive bodies and the mandatory coalition, which are the three legs of the essential stool of the Belfast Agreement? Who is keeping them in place but the honourable Member and his party? Therefore, it really is the height of questionableness to berate the Ulster Unionists about conversion when he has had a conversion in the opposite direction.

Mr Hamilton: I noticed the midstream conversion in the Member's terminology. He knows as well as anyone that the DUP never argued that the structures are ideal and that we believe that there needed to be a move away and that they were temporary. That was always the point that we made very clear.

The Member talks about change. He is in the middle of a structure that he has lambasted left, right and centre at every opportunity. I notice that he is sitting and serving alongside Sinn Féin — not just serving but literally sitting beside Sinn Féin in Committees of this Assembly.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: No, I will not. I will not get into a back-and-forward with the Member. He had his opportunity and may get another later. Contrary to what he may think, he is serving alongside Sinn Féin and literally sitting beside them in Committees of this Assembly.

Mr Allister: I am not in government with them.

Mr Hamilton: There is much —

Mr Deputy Speaker: There will be no interventions across the Floor. All remarks will be through the Chair.

Mr Hamilton: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. There is increasing dissatisfaction with the structures at Stormont, described by a former Member as the “ugly scaffolding”. We only ever viewed them as temporary and have argued that reform is required, and certain instances in the past and in the first term of the new Assembly highlighted the need for urgent reform.

The review that the motion refers to is not merely nice to call for or desirable; it has a statutory basis in the St Andrews Agreement, courtesy of the DUP. Rather than, as the motion suggests, having an official opposition in place in 2015, there is an argument for progress before 2015. There are aspects of the change included in the motion, such as reducing the number of Departments and MLAs, on which progress could be made much sooner than 2015.

There are several good reasons. I want to dwell on three, the principal of which is cost. It is estimated that on the administration of private offices and press offices alone some £8 million could be made in recurrent savings by reducing a single Department. Reducing that significantly would be a huge saving, particularly in these tight times. It would not be enough to bridge some of our financial constraints, but it would be progress.

When I tabled a motion on the number of Assembly Members some years ago, I was depicted in an Ian Knox cartoon as a turkey

asking my fellow poultry to vote for Christmas. However, I do not think that any of us, not even those who limped across the line on a sub-quota on the ninth count — I am not casting aspersions on anybody; I am just giving an example — I would agree that 108 is the right number of Assembly Members for Northern Ireland. There is clearly much that can be done about the number of quangos, and I acknowledge, even though the motion does not, the ongoing work by the Budget review group to address the situation with quangos. There are obviously arguments about effectiveness, and, even though some of the criticism that we receive is not entirely justified, efforts to deal with major issues and crises are not helped by the cumbersome structures that we have.

Finally, reform of our structures is a sign of growing maturity and progress. Nobody is talking about doing away with the need to acknowledge that we remain a divided society. However, there are reforms that could be made that acknowledge that and still make progress. The motion before us is very imperfect, like the structures that we have here at Stormont, but there is a need for reform.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I rise on behalf of Sinn Féin to oppose the motion, and I do so for a number of reasons. First, it is important that we remind ourselves of the reason for the nature of our political institutions: to ensure that we can have stable government that is accountable to the people here. That is a fundamental departure from what we had for far too long — direct British rule. The essence of the institutions is that they are shared institutions, so those who talk about mandatory coalitions may not want to work with other parties. As far as we are concerned, the nature of the institutions is that they are shared. They are about sharing power with a sufficient number of checks and balances in place to ensure that no one — no party or broader community — can ever again, by domination, manipulate the process to discriminate against others on a wholesale basis, as happened under the one-party state that we had here under unionism for about 50 years. So, the institutions and the checks and balances that have been built into them are very important.

I want to come at the motion from two angles. Tom Elliott is one of the Members who tabled the motion, and he has already spoken. I heard Tom in the media at the weekend saying that his party no longer wanted to give out mixed messages. So, on Saturday, he and his party were saying that they did not want mixed messages, yet on Monday morning they are talking about going into opposition or saying that they want an opposition. I am not sure that that is not an absolute contradiction about not having a mixed message. We have just come out of an election campaign in which the Ulster Unionist Party, as was its right, made the need for an opposition in the Assembly the substantive plank in its manifesto programme. The people voted accordingly, and the parties are here with their respective mandates. Tom Elliott's mandate did not increase; in fact, I think that it reduced considerably. Nevertheless, the message that he went forward with, the message about the need for an opposition, was rejected by the electorate.

All of us have acknowledged that the vast majority of people, regardless of their support for any party, want these institutions to work. People were clearly telling us on the doorsteps during the last election campaign that, regardless of our differences, we needed to work the institutions to deliver for people in the broader community. That was the resounding message that all the parties received loud and clear. So, people do not want us to come in here in the first couple of weeks after an election and say that we should unpick what we have rather than work the institutions in the best interests of the wider community.

We do not support the motion for a number of reasons. First, we are not opposed to a review of the number of Ministers or of the number of Departments; we are far from wedded to any specific number. There is a statutory requirement on all of us to review the number of Ministries and Departments and so on, which is an appropriate thing to do. However, we need time to work the systems that we have to see where improvements can be made. Therefore, although we are not wedded to any given number, we are very mindful of the reason for the current number of Ministries. All the parties here, or at least most of them, were involved in the negotiations that led to the establishment of the present number of Departments. We were trying to maximise political inclusion. We now have five parties represented on the Executive,

which shows that more people are able to be in government, sharing responsibilities, taking on the burden and working together in the best interests of the wider community in a way that this community and society have not for generations. So, we are not opposed to the review, which is already fixed as a statutory requirement.

The idea of an opposition is nonsense, and we need to say to people that they need to look at the institutions that we have. Those institutions have a whole series of checks and balances. During the negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement, some were arguing that there were too many and that they could lead to gridlock and mutual vetoes, but they work because they give protections and confidence to parties here and the people who elect us.

We should remind ourselves that, although people may argue about having an opposition, all that gives you is a shouting match across the Chamber. It does not give you better government or better delivery. What we have at the moment is a system of substantial checks and balances, including everything from the Ministers having to take the Pledge of Office to the ministerial code. There is a process for the Programme for Government and the Budget, which requires maximum support within both communities.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr A Maskey: OK, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We oppose the motion.

Mr Elliott: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will there be a ministerial response to the debate?

Mr Deputy Speaker: No, there will be no ministerial response.

Mr McDevitt: I acknowledge the Ulster Unionist Party's right to bring the motion forward; however, we in the SDLP believe that it is premature. Mr Elliott's question to you via a point of order probably illustrates the prematurity of the motion. One would presume that the reason there will be no ministerial response to the debate is that it is a matter that has been delegated to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

Those of us who are members of the Committee — this meeting of the Assembly feels a bit like a super-Committee meeting — will know that, in the papers for tomorrow's meeting, we are

reminded that one of the major areas of work in the proposed forward work programme is the need to make a report to the Secretary of State no later than 1 May 2015 on the operation of Parts III and IV of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Without wanting to bore colleagues who are not burdened with the great pressure of sitting on the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, that is pretty much what is in the motion.

We have before us a motion from the Ulster Unionist Party, as is its right, that is premature. It seeks to pre-empt a discussion that we have been asked to have in Committee, a discussion that, by its very definition, is not only a technical one that deals with issues around the procedural consequences of going in a certain direction but a highly political discussion. It is for that reason and many more reasons that I believe that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee is the best place to have that discussion. It is also for that reason that we will not support the motion.

The basic question remains: is it always the system that is broken, or is there some possibility that bits of our politics remain broken? Will it always be a debate about systems, or will we all have the courage to accept that, in fact, if we are honest about ourselves, the people elected to this Chamber could make any system work, if they wished to? They could do so, if they came to it in a spirit that puts the interests of this region and all its people first, if they were resolved not to play partisan or tribal politics around North/South or east-west relationships and if they had the courage to tackle the major challenge of the past, for example. If we could do all those things, I am sure that the system as we have it today would be held up to many across the world as a very good one and a fantastic way to transit a society out of conflict and into a peaceful new beginning.

Although it is every party's right to question the system rather than challenge the politics, it does not take away from that basic question. Yes, there is a debate to be had about the number of Departments, but the much more important debate is not about how many Departments we have but about what Departments do for the people of this part of Ireland. Surely, if we are to have a conversation about the size of government, it should be about the needs of our people. We made manifesto commitments,

like everyone did, and ours were for a single Department for the economy, for example, and to have a Department focused on energy and sustainability, because we believe that we are ignoring the threat that peak oil and high-carbon energy pose to our region and that we are not putting energy policy strongly enough at the heart of our government.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

We must have a debate about how to manage education in a departmental sense. Surely it is time for a Department for children, rather than segregating education into silos just because it suits a particular political settlement.

2.00 pm

We will go to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee over the next three to four years with a determination to bring forward proposals that are about making government better for people in this region. However, that does not mean that we must have a parliamentary system modelled on one that was conceived in another place several hundred years ago. Surely it should mean that the one thing on which we are all agreed is that, whatever we do, we will always make the basic promise to each other that the system that we agree on will be the system that works for us and is capable of accommodating our differences and providing the guarantees that ensure that we do not return to the dark side of our past, in any possible sense of the word, and that, much more importantly, is designed around the needs of the people of this region, this island and these islands.

As I said, I do not wish to sound overly negative in any way about the Ulster Unionist Party's right to bring this motion. However, if ever a motion that came before the House were premature, it is this one. We will oppose it for that reason.

Mr Dickson: The Alliance Party is willing to support this motion, not because we consider it to be perfect but because it encompasses a substantial requirement to reform the structures of this institution. I, like others, believe that it should serve to send a sound signal to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee to get on with the task at hand. That is where the substantive work in respect of this resolution will be done.

I speak with a sense of regret that others appear to have forgotten a central issue

regarding institutional reform. It is absolutely vital that the Assembly's tribal designation system be removed. The Alliance Party tabled an amendment calling for the abolition of Assembly designations and for support measures to facilitate better co-operation and collaboration between Departments. Unfortunately, that amendment was not selected.

This is a vital issue. Reform of government structures should not be addressed without tackling the designation issue. We need to create a shared future. It is a disgrace that division is institutionalised in the system of government here. We are setting a very poor example for the rest of the community and wider afield. We at the Assembly need to be able to move forward positively so that segregation can be tackled right across our community. To enable us to tackle the £1 billion annual cost of division, it is vital that we address the divisions in the institutions of government.

The main objective of reform of the institutions is the delivery of effective and efficient government. We would like a governance Bill to be put forward to ensure more co-operation between Departments. That would help greatly in tackling the silo mentality of the Assembly and the many Departments that it serves. A duty should be placed on Departments to co-operate on key themes such as promoting public health, combating crime, community safety, sustainable development and promoting a shared future.

Reform of the institutions here is vital. We need a reduction in the number of MLAs to 80. That would operate on the basis of 16 constituencies with five MLAs for each. It would be more in keeping with the size of Northern Ireland and help to deliver significant savings and streamline the institutions. We also need a reduction in the number of Departments. The Alliance Party feels that eight Departments would be sufficient. Those changes are vital to ensure joined-up government and help with strategic decision-making. They have the potential —

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. I am glad that he supports the part of the motion that relates to a reduction in the number of MLAs and Departments. However, although I have sympathy with you in respect of designation, I was little bit surprised when I saw that the Alliance Party's amendment cut out the

bits about a reduction in the number of MLAs and Departments.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute added to his time.

Mr Dickson: I assure the Member that my party is wedded to the reduction in the number of MLAs and to streamlining Departments, of which we believe there should be eight. That, however, has to be clearly linked to the issue of designation.

The Alliance Party believes that having a power-sharing Executive formed through negotiation would be a positive change, helping us to move away from mandatory coalition. We believe that it is possible for parties to negotiate and build a consensus and agree a Programme for Government ahead of the formation of an Executive that works through collective responsibility. We believe that such a coalition could be ratified by a cross-community weighted-majority vote. That style of government would deliver greater co-operation and would promote the concept of power sharing. We believe that anything is possible if the Members in this Chamber have the will to move it forward.

Mr Moutray (The Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee): As the new Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this motion. I want to begin by stating that the new Committee has not yet met; it will meet for the first time tomorrow morning. Members of the Committee have, therefore, not had the opportunity to consider or discuss the proposals that have been brought before the House today. I am not going to offer any opinion on those proposals on behalf of the Committee.

I will, however, remind the House of the Committee's remit. It was established further to the St Andrews Agreement, and its role is to consider matters that relate to the functioning of the Assembly and the Executive. Specifically, it must make a report to the Secretary of State, the Assembly and the Executive by May 2015 on the operation of the provisions of Parts III and IV of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which, as I am sure Members are aware, relate to the Executive, their Departments and the Assembly. The previous Committee, to whom, incidentally, I pay tribute, had begun to look at some of the issues raised in today's motion. In particular, it had begun to look at the issue

of the size of the Assembly. Then it suspended its work while it awaited the passage of the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill through Parliament. The subsequent Act came into operation on 16 February 2011, and, as a result, we now know that the number of constituencies in Northern Ireland, for elections to Parliament and the Assembly, will be reduced from 18 to 16. That will automatically reduce the number of Members that we have in this place.

I have no doubt that the Committee will review further the number of Assembly Members that we have here. I want to emphasise that, as Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, I will ensure that all Committee members get the opportunity to bring forward their views on which other particular matters we can look at. The Committee is clearly the right place for those discussions to take place, and I look forward to working with other members on identifying how we might improve the functioning of the Executive and the Assembly.

Speaking from a party perspective, I believe that it is important to note that the DUP has led on this issue. Since 1998, the party has consistently said that the current structures are in need of reform. Indeed, they are cumbersome, and decision-making is ultimately too slow. Our party recognised that situation and ensured at St Andrews that, by the end of this Assembly term in 2015, reforms should be put in place to take effect for the next Assembly term.

In the recent election, the DUP was given a mandate for change, and we intend to drive that forward. The DUP has been calling for a reduction in the number of Departments, Assembly Members, quangos and North/South bodies and has been consistent in advocating the abolition of the d'Hondt mechanism for appointing Ministers in the Executive. Unfortunately, some still hanker after the Belfast Agreement and its structures. However, the DUP urges those people to follow the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland by supporting much-needed change. People want to see Northern Ireland moving forward. They want to see a businesslike structure in which decisions can be made quickly in response to an ever-evolving society. I hope that we can all work together towards that end.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. One wonders whether this is a

serious proposal for reform of government structures or merely political posturing on the part of the Ulster Unionists. However, let us take it at face value and assume that the Members who proposed this motion are serious about government reform and about making the biggest potential savings from that reform. Bear in mind that we have only had one full term of the Assembly and the Executive in which to make a judgement about any shortcomings.

Let us look first at the review of government structures. That job is already in hand. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee has been tasked to report on the operation of the Assembly and the Executive by 1 May 2015. In the review, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee will consider the Assembly's voting system; designations and cross-community voting; the operation of the ministerial code; and the power to refer ministerial decisions to the Executive. In addition, it will consider the size of the Assembly and the number of MLAs. Furthermore, in conjunction with the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee will review the number of ministerial offices and the functions that can be exercised by the holder of each office. The Committee will also consider the issue of multiple mandates and matters associated with the proposed efficiency review panel as set out in the St Andrews Agreement, in which it was anticipated that due account would be taken of the review of public administration.

Of course, Sinn Féin is for efficient government. In fact, the biggest potential savings from the reform of government would arise from reducing the number of councils, which was delayed by Minister Poots in the previous Executive. The arguments for an official opposition are well rehearsed, and we know that some parties have already been to Downing Street to seek funding for it, but who can prove that oppositional politics in the Chamber would be the best system? The scrutiny Committees are, in effect, a built-in opposition. Such opposition is evidence-based; Ministers can be questioned; papers can be demanded from Departments; and, in those ways, the work of Departments and Ministers can be scrutinised.

We must remember that we have the current system of government because of the nature of the society in which we live. This is not England, Scotland or Wales, as Mr Elliott said.

The number of Departments and MLAs was set out in the Good Friday Agreement for reasons of inclusivity in government. We now have five parties on the Executive — five parties in government. That is inclusivity in action. Any proposal to reduce the number of Departments would have to be tested against the impact on continuing inclusivity, since there are still some unionists who seek a return to majority rule.

Unionists should take heed of the message from the electorate on 5 May. People want all parties to work together for the benefit and betterment of the whole community, not in a mandatory coalition, as it is referred to pejoratively, but in a sense of sharing responsibility among all parties for all people. Therefore, I urge Members to oppose the motion. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Spratt: I welcome the fact that I can take part in the debate. Whatever might be the arguments about the motion being premature, there should be and needs to be change in some areas before 2015, as my colleague Simon Hamilton mentioned. Indeed, Tom Elliott mentioned the costs associated with some arm's-length bodies; there is a very serious job for all of us in the Chamber to do in that area.

For example, the Northern Ireland Policing Board is an arm's-length body created some years ago that now costs £8.8 million a year. Two reports have been made on that body in the last number of months. Let me quote from one of those reports in respect of value for money:

"Value for money as a concept is not understood or practiced to any notable and evidenced extent. There is no VFM culture. The Board should seek to develop a VFM culture that is permeated through all activity."

2.15 pm

The second report on the board mentioned similar themes. I was a member of the previous board and so were other Members of the House, and a lot of work was done to start work on some of the problems in that board, and rightly so. The cost of the board can be drastically reduced over a number of years. It has almost one third too many staff, according to one of the reports.

Let me look at another area in that board, that of human rights advice and consultancy. That has been carried on in the board for the past number of years under a single-tender

system. It was not put into the domain of public procurement, and it cost some £150,000 a year. However, there was no concept of proper audit procedures or anything else in that.

Mr Speaker: I must bring the Member back to the motion.

Mr Spratt: I am coming back to the motion. The important thing about using it as an example —

Mr A Maskey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I do not want to interrupt the Member's flow. He talks of the Policing Board, which is not here to answer for itself. I do not want to leave unchallenged the fact that some the Member's remarks are inaccurate and reflect wrongly the reports referred to.

Mr Speaker: I have already given the Member latitude. Can we get back to the motion?

Mr Spratt: I very clearly will get back to it. What is happening in the Northern Ireland Policing Board is a clear example of what happens in other arm's-length bodies and quangos that have been set up for a number of years.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that arm's-length bodies that have no statutory powers, the like of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), have cost a fortune so far without doing anything?

Mr Spratt: I absolutely agree and have no argument with the Member on that. However, certain arm's-length bodies were created under direct rule. They have no serious concept of value for money.

The chair and vice chair of the Policing Board are paid more money —

Mr Speaker: Order. I have already given the Member quite a bit of latitude. He must return to the motion before us.

Mr Spratt: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I understand what you say and appreciate the latitude that you have given me. However, this is a very clear example of what is happening in arm's-length bodies. It was endemic under direct rule and shows how direct rule was allowed to set up arm's-length bodies. The Assembly now needs to look seriously at getting value for money and at what is being spent on some of those bodies before 2015 and make savings. I welcome the fact that my colleague has said that there is work going on in the Department of Finance and

Personnel (DFP) to look at that. It is something that needs to be progressed quickly.

Nothing that I have said is inaccurate. Other Members have their own interpretations of the report. I am happy to stand over anything that I have said in this House. However, there needs to be a serious examination and, if that can be done, progress can be made.

Mr McCallister: My colleague Mr Elliott and I tabled the motion in an effort to engage the House and help to lead the work that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee is doing to kick-start the process. This type of reform is something that we have talked about for a number of years, but nothing has happened.

As has been said, the number of MLAs is likely to be reduced by 12, not through the work or leadership of the Assembly, but through a knock-on effect from legislation at Westminster. When the number of parliamentary constituencies is reduced from 18 to 16, the number of Assembly seats will be reduced automatically by 12, if no other action is taken. Therefore, it is not the case that the Assembly is taking the lead in reforming the structures of government. We have to get back to leading and to considering what type of Assembly we want, including its roles and responsibilities and the number of Departments. We have to lead and kick-start the debate, and I welcome the role that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee will play in that. It is up to the House to ask the Committee, not for the Committee to dictate to the House what we should do or accept.

The debate has been interesting. Like Mr Allister, I found it slightly bizarre that Mr Hamilton was attacking and accusing others of converting to his way of thinking. I never realised that he was such an advocate of the Good Friday Agreement.

There were mixed messages from the Members from Sinn Féin Mr Maskey and Mr Sheehan, and I see them sitting beside each other. They must be working out tactics. I was not sure what the message from Sinn Féin was. Mr Maskey was saying no, and Mr Sheehan was saying that reform is ongoing. Maybe they need to think a bit harder about what they want to achieve. It is slightly bizarre that they are welded to the system up here but their party leader has vanished off to Dublin to sit in opposition. One wonders why, if it is good enough for Mr Adams

to go into opposition, they do not insist on having some sort of opposition up here.

My party wants to look positively at what changes we can make to the Assembly, because the Assembly and the structures of our government should be about delivering for people in Northern Ireland. It should be about delivering for each and every one of our constituents, and the question is how best to achieve that. How do you challenge government, make better and quicker decisions and make government work for people, instead of against them?

Mr A Maginness: I take on board what the Member is saying about delivering for the people of Northern Ireland, but the greatest thing that we can deliver for the people of Northern Ireland is partnership government and reconciliation. Anything that is done to undermine or tamper with the present institutions could risk that.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have a minute added to his time.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Member for that intervention. Despite comments from others, no one in the Chamber is calling for an end to the principles of power sharing.

Mr Elliott: The Member made a valid point about partnership, but partnership is useful only if it is working. On many occasions, particularly in the previous Executive, that partnership did not work.

Mr McCallister: My colleague Mr Elliott has made a vital point. There have been blockages in the partnership. He mentioned ESA in an earlier intervention, and that list of blockages also includes the Maze stadium and transfer in education. There have been huge blockages, with nothing happening. How do we tackle the important issue of reconciliation, and what are we doing with the shared future agenda, which Mr Dickson mentioned? Those are big items that the Assembly and Executive need to tackle, but we are not making the response that government needs to make. We are not facing those issues, reaching agreement, making decisions and getting on with the delivery that is required of government.

Certainly, as a party, we believe that it cannot be a healthy democracy when 102 or 103 of the MLAs in this House are from the governing parties. That is why the motion says that

we need to be serious about appointing an opposition by 2015 to challenge the Government and to give people an alternative. We have to have that type of debate over the next number of years to look at those structures and at the rights and responsibilities that an opposition would have —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr McCallister: — and what that opposition could contribute to Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Order. As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until that time. We will come back to this debate after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mitchel McLaughlin.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Speaker: Order. Before we begin questions to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I want to inform new Members of the simple procedure for asking supplementary questions during Question Time. To be called to ask supplementary questions, Members must rise in their place at the appropriate time and continue to do. Perhaps, in the past, certain Members tried different actions to try to catch my eye or that of the Deputy Speaker. I assure Members that that will not work. I also want to make it absolutely clear that multiple questions must not be asked. Members must ask only one question or make one enquiry of the Minister. When Members try to ask multiple questions, that will, certainly, be ruled out of order. Ministers have up to two minutes only in which to answer a question. They can ask the House for more time if they need it. That is not a problem. I will give new Members some latitude. However, I remind Members that, as far as possible, supplementary questions should not be read out. Let us give new Members some latitude during Question Time.

Sexual Orientation Strategy

1. **Mr Byrne** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will receive the draft proposals for a sexual orientation strategy for consideration.
(AQO 1/11-15)

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer that question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank the honourable Member for West Tyrone for his question. We have been friends for a long time. I welcome him back to his position.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has made it clear publicly that it will proceed with the publication

of a sexual orientation strategy. However, it has indicated that that will not happen before 2012. We have taken into account the views expressed during consultation on the cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy. We have also instructed officials to meet organisations from the sector and other Departments. The final consultation process will take place during early 2012 with a view to publishing a sexual orientation strategy later that year. We are confident that we will meet the timescale of publication in 2012 that was previously outlined in the Chamber.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he inform the House whether any strategic reference group will be set up to facilitate consultation with a wide range of people and interests?

Mr Bell: As I said, we have instructed officials to meet organisations from the sector and other Departments. We will take all views into consideration.

Mr Spratt: How does that fit in with the overall cohesion, sharing and integration strategy?

Mr Bell: The cohesion, sharing and integration strategy is designed to tackle racism and sectarianism. It was in the wider context of legal obligation, with regard to measures to tackle discrimination and the Government's section 75 obligations, that OFMDFM's recently published consultation document on cohesion, sharing and integration undertook to publish the sexual orientation strategy.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat. Will the junior Minister comment on the provision of funding for the sector, which ceased in 2009? Will that be part of the consultation process?

Mr Bell: All matters will be taken into consideration during the consultation process. We will respond on the basis of that.

Mr Allister: As there is already a plethora of statutory protections for the so-called gay community and generous financial provision from the junior Minister's Department for various organisations therein, why do the junior Minister and the First Minister, who once campaigned to save Ulster from sodomy, now want to introduce a sexual orientation strategy? Why do they now think it necessary?

Mr Bell: Peter Hain announced the funding package under direct rule. It amounted to

£230,000, which OFMDFM administered to the sector.

Community Relations Week 2011

2. **Mr S Anderson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the success of Community Relations Week 2011. (AQO 2/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Members will be aware of the programme of events that were organised to mark community relations week during the last week of May. I know that many Members attended those events. The annual programme has now passed its ninth year and has steadily grown to a point where, this year, over 150 events took place across Northern Ireland. Its aim is to highlight the issues and challenges facing our diverse communities. Junior Minister Bell and junior Minister Anderson attended the forum for cities in transition, where they had the opportunity to address and engage with local and international delegates. Junior Minister Bell also addressed community relations week's flagship event, the Community Relations Council's annual policy conference. There, he reinforced the Executive's commitment to bring forward policies and funding opportunities that will seek to reduce division and deprivation within our communities while encouraging economic growth and employability.

I was particularly pleased to join over 400 members of the local community from differing political and ethnic backgrounds who were participating in a football-fest organised by Charter for Northern Ireland and supported by Belfast City Council. That event highlighted the power of sport in developing relationships and improving understanding between our local communities and diverse cultures.

The community relations week serves as a reminder of the good work of countless community groups, volunteers and public bodies who are committed to tackling the problems of division in our communities. It gives fresh impetus to the determination that most of us share to eradicate the divisions and hatreds that prevent so many from enjoying the benefits of the peaceful, prosperous and fair society that we are continuing to build.

I thank publicly all those who contributed to community relations week. I congratulate them

on the success of their events and wish them well in the progression of their future projects.

Mr S Anderson: I thank the First Minister for his detailed answer. Building on the kind of community relations that most people desire is part of a process that has not yet been completed and which can be affected, positively or negatively, by all manner of events on the ground. Given the number of public inquiries and apologies that have come from the United Kingdom Government in relation to the past in Northern Ireland —

Mr Speaker: Please come to a question.

Mr S Anderson: Does the First Minister agree that the decision taken recently by the Dublin Government to guillotine the workings of the Smithwick inquiry has the potential to set community relations back? Rather than trying to draw a veil over this involvement in the Troubles, there needs to be a full inquiry to benefit relations with Northern Ireland.

Mr P Robinson: There are many issues occurring within and impacting on our community that have an effect on the relationship. As far as the matter that the Member refers to is concerned, I spoke with the Justice Minister, Alan Shatter. We talked about the issue, and he has given me an assurance that there will be no curtailing of the activities of the inquiry and that the dates had been set with the views of the Smithwick inquiry people taken into account.

I think that everybody recognises that the first people to be on their feet complaining if there were curtailment of any of the inquiries that were being carried out in this jurisdiction would be those in the Irish Republic. People are right to be alert to those issues and to make it clear that there is an obligation to ensure that the inquiry is handled in a fair and transparent manner. Those who have questions should be given every opportunity to ask them, and the representatives of the two families involved should not be restricted in any way in how they take forward the issues that their solicitors will bring to the inquiry. We will continue to monitor events, but I have a firm assurance from the Justice Minister.

Mr Lyttle: I join the First Minister in congratulating all those who were involved in the very successful community relations week. Given that a more robust CSI strategy was

one of the recommendations from community relations week, will the First Minister confirm when the CSI consultation responses and their independent analysis will be made available to the OFMDFM Committee?

Mr P Robinson: For all of us, every week should be community relations week. I hope that the Member will play his part in that.

As far as the CSI strategy is concerned, a meeting took place among party leaders after the election and before the appointment of Ministers. At that meeting, we discussed a number of policy issues that had not been resolved, one of which was the CSI initiative. We agreed that a representative from each of the five parties in the Assembly will look at the timetable and the key issues involved. As far as the OFMDFM Committee is concerned, the deputy First Minister and I gave a commitment to provide it with all the submissions that have been made. At present, we are carrying out an analysis of the submissions, which we intend to publish along with a commentary on them. The analysis should be available on our website and can be made available to any Member who wants it.

Mr Eastwood: Given that community relations week is run by the Community Relations Council, what role will it play in taking forward the Department's work on a shared future?

Mr P Robinson: The Community Relations Council has played a pivotal role. Obviously, the future role of the Community Relations Council will be more closely defined when the Assembly as a whole looks at the CSI strategy.

EU Funding

3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps their Department has taken to ensure that there is a greater drawdown of European Union funding. (AQO 3/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Our 2011-15 budget commits us to increasing drawdown of discretionary European funds by 20% over the next four years. Although that target will ultimately fall to individual Departments and their sponsored bodies, the deputy First Minister and I will facilitate its achievement in any way that we can, and we have included that objective in the OFMDFM business plan.

We met President Barroso in Brussels on 9 December 2010, and we jointly committed to renew the work of the European Commission's task force for Northern Ireland. That work has been taken forward by the Barroso task force working group, which is chaired by our junior Ministers. The working group is co-ordinating the next phase of contact with the European Commission and is exploring how Northern Ireland can benefit from European engagement, including the potential for increasing financial drawdown. That work commenced on 30 March with a series of meetings at venues in Belfast and other locations throughout Northern Ireland involving senior Northern Ireland officials and 15 European Commission officials from eight directorates general.

Following that engagement, Northern Ireland Departments are being encouraged to investigate new sources of funding and innovative ways in which to participate in European policies, programmes and networks. The European division of OFMDFM is facilitating that work in Belfast and through the Brussels office. Our aim is to ensure that we retain our political profile in Europe, maximise the benefits to Northern Ireland and create an overarching environment conducive to increasing financial drawdown.

Mr Ó hOisín: I thank the First Minister for his answer. What is the current status of Peace IV funding?

Mr P Robinson: The deputy First Minister and I took the opportunity when we were in Brussels to speak to the president and, indeed, a number of commissioners about the future of the peace project. We also had discussions with Owen Paterson, as a representative of Her Majesty's Government, because, to some extent, we expect the potential for Peace IV to be wrapped up in how the budgetary agreement is reached and, in particular, to depend on whether funding to the European community is increased.

However, we recognised the president and commissioners' high level of support for continuing with Peace IV. If we were to gain that, it would be an achievement, because I think that most people recognised at the completion of Peace II that we were unlikely to get Peace III, but we managed that, and now people are talking, some of them confidently, about Peace IV.

Mr Swann: I thank the First Minister for his update on the Barroso task force. Will he

indicate what increase in EU funding he is hoping to secure for Northern Ireland and whether he has taken into consideration the difficulties in obtaining match funding for those projects?

2.45 pm

Mr P Robinson: Funding from Europe does not just come to member states. It also comes to Departments, non-governmental organisations, small and medium-sized enterprises, universities and partnerships between councils and others. Therefore, it is very difficult for us to be able to easily assess the baseline from which we work. However, when we were in Brussels, we spoke particularly in relation to FP7, of which there has been a very significant take-up in the Republic of Ireland, with Northern Ireland lagging considerably behind. We felt that the application process had been considerably off-putting. We were promised by the Commissioner that they were looking at ways to make it much more simple for people to apply. On coming back from Brussels, we encouraged Departments. I do not say this as a criticism, because it would be too easy a criticism to make, but, to some extent, even Departments find it difficult going through some of the very weighty application processes that come to them if they want to take up European funding.

We need to concentrate a lot more. We have committed ourselves to an increase of 20%, and we will be putting in place a monitoring process to ensure that that happens.

Mrs D Kelly: I want to ask the First Minister whether there is any evidence of regional inequality in the drawdown of European funding. If so, will that be addressed in the setting of targets for the next phase of European funding?

Mr P Robinson: The Member talks as though European funding comes in from just one block. It comes in from so many different sources that one region may well do better with one kind of funding than another. I have no doubt that the OFMDFM Committee can look at all those things. The junior Ministers, who have particular responsibility for that, will be happy to meet the Member if she has a particular case in the back of her mind that she is not telling us about at this time. We will be as helpful as we can.

Mr Humphrey: Can I ask the First Minister —

Mr Speaker: Order. We are coming to your question; it is next on the list.

Mr Humphrey: Sorry. It is just that I have been trying to get your attention from the outset of the previous question being asked.

Commissioner for Older People

4. **Mr Humphrey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the office of the Commissioner for Older People will be fully operational.

(AQO 4/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: The recruitment process to select a Commissioner for Older People is ongoing. It is our hope that we will announce the successful applicant shortly, and we expect the person appointed to take up post by September 2011. In learning from the experiences of the Welsh Commissioner for Older People, we decided that we would have a phased commencement of the powers and duties of the Commissioner for Older People. Therefore, although the Commissioner for Older People Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 became law on 25 January, the main provisions of the Act will not be commenced until after the Commissioner is in post and his or her relevant staff have been appointed.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the First Minister for his answer. Recently, I met representatives from the greater Shankill pensioners' forum and the north Belfast pensioners' forum, and I attended the Age Northern Ireland event here last week. The First Minister's announcement is hugely awaited. Will he explain the outworkings in greater detail for those listening outside the Building who will benefit so greatly from the appointment of the Commissioner for Older People?

Mr P Robinson: At this stage, it might be appropriate for me to say that we have been greatly helped over the past number of years by having an Older People's Advocate. I think that everybody who has spoken with Dame Joan will recognise just how committed she was to that task, and her work has been well appreciated by those in that sector. People have had something of a flavour of what can happen when there is a champion for older people. However, the legislation that this Assembly passed gave very significant powers — powers that are not surpassed anywhere else in the United Kingdom

— around the ability of the Commissioner for Older People to investigate matters and bring to our attention various issues. It will be a powerful position and one that is being watched very closely internationally to see whether it is an example that could be followed elsewhere.

Later today, as I understand it, the shortlist of names to be considered should be made available to the deputy First Minister and me. Undoubtedly, we will go through a process to select the appropriate person. After that, the person will want to be part of the process of putting their office in place and selecting the appropriate staff. At that stage, I suspect, they will then ask us to bring down the various powers and commence the legislation.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Given that the Commissioner for Older People is going to be located at Equality House and is going to be sharing IT, administration and other admin support, what lessons does the First Minister believe can be learnt by other arm's-length bodies and the Budget review group?

Mr P Robinson: For several months during the previous mandate, the Budget review committee has been sitting down with the deputy First Minister and me, and we have been looking at how we can do things better and at lesser cost. One of the lessons that we have been learning is about the significant cost of some of our arm's-length bodies. We are seeking to have three commissioners housed in the one building. Therefore, there will be a sharing of accommodation costs. However, there will also be the savings that can be made on IT, human resources and the back room administration itself. So, there are very significant savings to be made by shared services overall. If it is proper and appropriate to do this with these commissioners, then we need to look at many arm's-length bodies to see whether some of them should be drawn back into Departments or amalgamated, or whether there is a need for them at all.

Mr Beggs: Recognising that the Ulster Unionist Party is in favour of ensuring that there is a strong voice for older people through the Office of the Commissioner for Older People, is the First Minister confident that processes have been set up such that we will avoid duplication — in other words, that the investigations of the Commissioner will not be duplicated by other

commissioners or ombudsmen and that we have an efficient process and that matters are addressed?

Mr P Robinson: That is the intention. To some extent, bringing commissioners together into one office should help to do away with some of the potential areas of overlap. Of course, we have a very rigorous Committee in this House that will no doubt continue to monitor the work of the commissioners and make its views known, after a suitable period, on whether it feels there has been any overlap. I think that the powers are such that the Commissioner will have a very important role. I believe that the sector as a whole has welcomed the fact that the legislation went through the House, and I was encouraged by the fact that there was unanimity in the Assembly when the legislation came forward.

Corporation Tax

Mr Speaker: I call Mr McLaughlin.

Mr McLaughlin: I was not expecting to be called to speak. I am sorry, I am not prepared. I know that we have reached question 5, but I was not anticipating being called.

5. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their discussions with Treasury in relation to corporation tax and for an assessment of whether its reduction will benefit the local economy.
(AQO 5/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: I will speak slowly, Mr Speaker. *[Laughter.]* That will give the Member an opportunity to look at his question, which relates to corporation tax.

The deputy First Minister and I, along with Minister Foster and Minister Wilson, met David Gauke, Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, and the Secretary of State, Owen Paterson, at the start of this year to explore a number of options with the potential of stimulating the Northern Ireland economy. Following that meeting, HM Treasury published its consultation document 'Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy' on 24 March. The consultation period for the report runs to 24 June. The paper considers the impact of lowering the corporation tax rate and includes consideration of other fiscal measures such as extending the National Insurance

holiday, enhancing research and development tax credits and increasing capital allowances.

We are scheduled to attend two consultation events involving Executive Ministers, the Secretary of State and the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury in London later this week and in Belfast at the start of July. These events will be an opportunity for us to hear directly from key stakeholders.

Without a radical change of approach, our economy is unlikely to improve its performance and will not converge. The HM Treasury consultation paper and a report published by the economic advisory group on 26 May identified potentially significant benefits for Northern Ireland from a lower corporation tax rate in increased foreign direct investment and, in the latter report in particular, an increase in job creation. That has the potential to improve living standards and to help us to address problems with low wages, poverty, disadvantage and other social problems. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee report of 24 May also identified a "convincing case" for a lower rate of corporation tax.

Mr McLaughlin: Apologies to you, Mr Speaker, for that senior moment. *[Laughter.]* Really heartfelt thanks to the First Minister for his extensive reply.

In the First Minister's discussions with the Treasury, has he addressed the issue of the deficit between the estimates of corporation tax revenues from this region? That differential could have a significant impact.

Mr P Robinson: I will draw the Member's senior moment to the attention of the Commissioner for Older People when he or she is appointed.

A number of issues have still to be negotiated about the quantum of the figure that would be the reduction in our block grant. We have yet to agree an appropriate percentage. The percentages in the two options in their paper are beyond that which we calculate the corporation tax level from Northern Ireland stands at the present time. However, the key issues about that overall figure are that, although they have looked at the amount of corporation tax standing on its own, there are other benefits that presently would go to the Treasury if a lower rate of corporation tax were to increase opportunities in Northern Ireland. The Treasury would benefit from National

Insurance, an increase in tax and a reduction in a number of welfare payments that would be made in Northern Ireland. We need to consider a calculation that allows that benefit to be shared and, therefore, the reduction to be much less than is suggested in the Government's consultation paper.

Mr Hamilton: The First Minister will be aware that there was some public discussion about the effect that a cut in corporation tax could have on the Northern Ireland block grant. Will the First Minister outline how that impact could be lessened by a phased introduction of a cut in corporation tax?

Mr P Robinson: The impact can be lessened by two factors. As the Member said, it can be lessened by having a phased approach, but it can also be lessened by having a delayed approach. For instance, if we were to decide today that we were going to reduce our level of corporation tax, there would be no need for us to do so immediately. We could announce that it would commence, be that 18 months or two years down the road. If we were to go to the United States or to any other country to encourage them to come to Northern Ireland, it would take at least 18 months or two years for them to get here. It would certainly take them 18 months or two years to get here and start to make a profit that is likely to draw down the reduced level of corporation tax. So we would benefit from the sales advantage of having a lower rate of corporation tax without a reduction in the Budget that would be a consequence of starting the lower rate. Thereafter, we could reduce the level of corporation tax in stages, which would allow us to increase our corporation tax take while not paying out the full amounts that are set down in 'Rebalancing the Economy'. If the introduction of a lower rate of corporation tax were handled carefully, it could considerably reduce the pain that might otherwise be felt.

Mr Hussey: Will the First Minister outline the outcome of the discussions on corporation tax during the trilateral meeting with the heads of Government of Wales and Scotland on 31 May?

Mr P Robinson: We had a useful meeting in Edinburgh with the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister of Scotland and the First Minister of Wales.

During that meeting, we discussed a number of economic levers. Scotland is looking for particular issues that it wants to progress with

the Treasury. Although corporation tax was considered, it was not the main subject of the debate. However, it was agreed by all present that Northern Ireland would take the lead in the matter and that we are doing that. Indeed, even if they had not agreed, we are taking the lead in the matter, because we are the only part of the United Kingdom that has the paper from the Government out for consultation at the present time.

It is slightly tangential, but during the meeting we dealt for some considerable time with end-year flexibility (EYF). That is where the Government's new rules after the comprehensive spending review took £315 million that was in our EYF to themselves, and it was lost to Northern Ireland. We have given a signal that we intend to bring that before the disputes procedure in the Joint Ministerial Committee so that Northern Ireland can argue for its money back.

3.00 pm

Agriculture and Rural Development

Agriculture: Shared Resources

1. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has any plans to share scientific and research resources on an all-island basis to achieve savings and produce better outcomes. (AQO 16/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am pleased to report that there is already substantial co-operation at operational level between my Department and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) in the South on scientific and research issues. I fully recognise the need for a strong scientific and research base to support a sustainable, competitive and innovative agrifood sector. In that respect, co-operation with local, national and international partners helps us to achieve the best value and outcomes from our limited research budget and is a key principle of my Department's evidence and innovation strategy.

As our strategy develops, we have been exploring mechanisms to work more closely with

the South in identifying future research priorities and opportunities for further co-ordination and collaboration on a range of scientific initiatives. For example, colleagues from DAFF and Teagasc participated in our first evidence and innovation stakeholder forum last October. In addition, the Department's scientific adviser is a member of DAFF's agri-research expert advisory group, which is developing a strategic research agenda for agriculture production research in the South.

My scientific adviser also recently accepted an invitation to join the new DAFF competitive research committee, which oversees the operation of research funding programmes. We have also implemented reciprocal arrangements with the South for the assessment of agrifood postgraduate studentship proposals. At an operational level, the Department's main research provider and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) work closely with Teagasc in the South through the mechanism of their joint memorandum of understanding. Last autumn, AFBI also signed a memorandum of understanding with Animal Health Ireland to examine options for the control of endemic non-statutory animal diseases in cattle right across the island.

Like my predecessor, I will continue to receive regular reports from my Department's North/South unit outlining progress on formal and informal activities of mutual benefit to both Administrations. Reports of that nature also serve as a useful vehicle to highlight areas that can increase co-operation on an all-island basis.

Finally, my officials are participating in a North/South steering group that seeks to facilitate increased participation and collaboration by researchers and industry right across the island in the EU framework 7 research funding programme and its successor.

Mr McDevitt: The Minister will, of course, be aware that AFBI here in the North can generate about £10 million extra revenue on top of the £40 million subvention provided to it by her Department. What plans does the Minister have to road-test market services specifically for AFBI and when can we expect to see the commercialisation of AFBI's services?

Mrs O'Neill: I visited AFBI last week and was very impressed by its work. Its co-operation across the island is fantastic. I am looking forward to working with AFBI more and have arranged to see it again to exploit its services.

We need a strong research and scientific evidence base to support our sector.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I wish the Minister well in her new position; I have no doubt that she will do an excellent job.

The Minister will be aware that, in order to extract real efficiencies and co-operation North and South, effort and organisation between both Departments North and South is required to realise those efficiencies and that co-operation. What specific role does the North/South unit in her Department play in trying to raise levels of co-operation and, in doing so, to improve the efficiency of and resources available to both Departments, North and South?

Mrs O'Neill: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's (DARD) North/South unit monitors the Department's engagement on a formal level through the North/South Ministerial Council and on a more informal level through activities that require cross-border co-operation of mutual benefit to both Administrations. The unit co-ordinates the Department's input into the work of the North/South Ministerial Council's (NSMC) agriculture sector meetings and provides a quarterly update on progress across a range of DARD activities, including fisheries, educational training, rural issues, forestry and flood-risk management.

Mrs Cochrane: Other than research, what plans does the Minister have to ensure sharing of resources on an all-island basis to enhance quality assurance schemes, which would build a robust, quality supply chain from port to plate and close the loopholes that let in products that are not assured?

Mrs O'Neill: My Department introduced new arrangements for the commissioning and management of research in 2010. As part of those arrangements, we issued a call to AFBI last December for new research proposals worth some £3 million a year. We received a number of proposals from AFBI that have now been assessed, scored and ranked in DARD, taking account of the views of the industry and other stakeholders received last year, and those proposals will include looking at the issue that the Member raised. A final list of approved projects should be agreed this week, and work on those can proceed straight away.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that they must continue to rise in their place if they want to ask a supplementary question.

Mr McCallister: I thought that I had missed my slot, Mr Speaker.

I welcome the Minister to her first Question Time. In an earlier reply, she mentioned work at national and international level. Will she give us a flavour of some of the work that is going on at what I would regard as the national level with other UK agencies, as well as work that is going on with EU bodies, particularly on research in the scientific field?

Mrs O'Neill: We are already collaborating with funding partners in Britain on research of mutual interest and benefit. Examples of that work include the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)-led agricultural greenhouse gas inventory research platform, the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute (FAPRI) and efforts to reduce levels of campylobacter in the food chain. We will continue to explore the scope for co-funding future projects with local, national or international partners.

AFBI, along with Queen's University and Teagasc, has already had some success in attracting EU research funding through the INTERREG programme and continues to submit applications for other funding streams, including framework 7. My Department also participates in local, North/South and east-west proposals, and we are obviously working for the benefit of everyone on the island.

Gorse Fires: Single Farm Payments

2. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the recent gorse fires will have any financial implications for farmers in receipt of single farm payments who own land affected by the fires. (AQO 17/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I hope that that will not be the case. Following the recent gorse fires, it is possible that some land that was previously eligible for single farm payment or other area-based schemes may now be ineligible or that land may not now meet the requirements for good agricultural and environmental condition. EU rules allow payment only on land that is eligible — that is, if it is in agricultural use for an entire calendar year and is accessible

to livestock and/or farm machinery. However, if farmers can demonstrate that the circumstances of the fire were unforeseen and outside their control and that they did whatever was possible to lessen the impact, my Department may set aside the normal scheme rules. However, it is farmers' responsibility to tell us of their particular circumstances within 10 working days of being in a position to do so.

Each case is considered on an individual basis, and it is important that the farmer detail all the facts, including where and when the fire started and when the incident was reported to the police or the Fire and Rescue Service. To date, 210 farmers have notified us of the fact that their 2011 claim has been affected by such fires. I take this opportunity to encourage any other farmers who have been affected by gorse fires to tell my Department of their circumstances now. That will allow us to apply EU rules and help to ensure that they do not lose any money unnecessarily.

Mr Buchanan: Will the Minister give a commitment that this will not delay the single farm payments for any of these farmers? The situation was not brought about by the farmers themselves, yet often in such cases, when farmers respond to the Department, the Department delays, and the single farm payment, which the farmers need, is delayed. Can the Minister give a commitment that there will be no delays on the Department's part in the making of single farm payments?

Mrs O'Neill: It is not in anyone's interest to delay payments. We had something like 37,000-plus applications for single farm payments this year, and it is my intention to issue the payments as quickly as possible.

Mrs D Kelly: Over and above the single farm payments affected by gorse fires, some farmers are still awaiting back payments for last year. Will the Minister detail how many cases are still pending and exactly when those payments will be made?

Mrs O'Neill: I paid out on 97.5% of last year's applications, which equates to about £262 million of funding. Around £7 million still needs to be paid, and I am working through those applications to issue those payments as quickly as possible. As I said, 97.5% was paid out. That is a high out-turn, but farmers in the final bracket to be paid are struggling and want to

receive their money. It is my intention to ensure that it is paid out as quickly as possible.

Mrs Overend: Is the Department in receipt of any evidence of fires that were set deliberately by individuals who will gain financially as a result? If so, will she pass on that information to the PSNI?

Mrs O'Neill: It is not for me to say why fires started; it is an issue for the PSNI and the Fire and Rescue Service. There was an increase in the number of fires this year in particular, and, although I am not an expert on why fires start, I think that many of those were the result of weather conditions. Indeed, there was an increase in gorse fires across the whole island and in Scotland and Wales. Those who have any information should take it to the PSNI or the Fire and Rescue Service.

Less-favoured Areas

3. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she will take to ensure that the level of support that is currently offered in less-favoured areas will continue.

(AQO 18/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The less-favoured areas (LFA) compensatory allowance scheme forms an important part of our current rural development programme. I can confirm that the architecture of that scheme will remain unchanged until the end of the programme in 2013 and that the level of payments for the remaining life of the current scheme will be fixed in light of affordability and competing demands in the rural development programme. I will announce the rates for the 2012 payment year later this year.

In the longer term, the future of LFA support beyond 2013 will depend on the outcomes of the EU CAP reform process and the EU-led project on the redesignation of less-favoured areas or areas of natural handicap. It is too early to predict exactly what those processes might deliver. However, I am clear in my own mind about the need for a robust support framework for areas of natural handicap, which encompass many of our most valuable landscapes and habitats, and the benefits that such support can deliver in environmental outcomes. I am committed to working to ensure that the EU framework allows me to address that need.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for her response. I accept and even welcome the European Commission's review of the designation of less-favoured areas, as it is important that all expenditure is wise expenditure. Could those new measures result in some land in Northern Ireland having its less-favoured area status removed, which would have a large impact on the incomes of the farmers concerned?

Mrs O'Neill: Given that around 70% of farmers claim under LFA, I want to ensure that I am a strong voice in trying to protect that funding. I am aware of the European Commission's intention to introduce a formal legislative proposal on an objective classification system for areas of natural handicap later this year. Map assimilation work across the North of Ireland, based on the Commission's earlier proposed biophysical criteria, suggested that the redesignated areas would be broadly in line with the current severely disadvantaged areas. I will do my best to secure an outcome that is suitable for our local conditions and ensure that we provide a fair, objective and robust basis for the delineation of any area of natural handicap in the North.

Ms Gildernew: I also wish the Minister well in her new role, and I wish her good luck for her first questions for oral answer. Does the Minister envisage LFA support changing as the result of CAP reform?

3.15 pm

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat. Thank you for the question. In November 2010, the Commission issued a communication paper on CAP reform that set out its preliminary thoughts at a high level. DARD responded to that in March 2011. Initially, there was some confusion about how the Commission viewed the future of LFA support, with a suggestion that it would no longer be part of the rural development pillar of CAP. However, the Commission clarified that that was not its intention, although we will have to wait until probably the end of this year before we see formal legislative proposals.

It is possible that the Commission's proposals on the greening of the single farm payment may affect the nature of any future LFA support regime, but my officials and I will press the Commission to ensure that there is a policy to deliver coherence between any new greening actions under pillar 1 of CAP and

agrienvironmental scheme actions, including LFA support, being carried under pillar 2. As well as information on the nature of the LFA support framework, we are expecting the Commission to publish formal legislative proposals on the approach to the future designation of areas with natural handicap, and we obviously have a keen interest in that going well.

Mr Byrne: Will the Minister outline whether her Department is working in concert with any other Department to make sure that we have economic sustainability of local farming areas and rural communities?

Mrs O'Neill: I am not sure if that question is relevant to the main question, but, yes, I work with other Departments, particularly with the Department of the Environment in the agrifood sector. My sector is the producer, but the Department of the Environment is the processor. So, there is a lot of cross-departmental working in this Department.

Rural Development Programme

4. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on spending in relation to the axis 3 rural development programme. (AQO 19/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: To date, the clusters have spent just over £13 million in total, of which £8 million has been on projects. The clusters are continuing to process large numbers of applications and issue letters of offer. Commitment through letters of offer currently stands at just over £27 million, with a further £9 million worth of letters of offer being drafted. Applications worth in excess of £18 million are also under appraisal.

Although slow to get up and running, which is often the case when local partnerships need to be set up and administrative systems put in place, the local action groups and joint council committees have put a huge amount of effort into working with their local communities in bringing forward projects and programmes that have the potential to bring a lasting and positive effect in creating and sustaining jobs, helping businesses, creating and enhancing tourism and renewing country villages.

My predecessor and party colleague Michelle Gildernew approved a number of recommendations based on a review of the

axis 3 processes and procedures. Those are now in place, and further work is ongoing through the Rural Network to investigate issues around intervention rates and match funding. The match funding work is being progressed with the four main banks, and I hope shortly to have recommendations that will assist more applicants to avail themselves of match funding through the banks. It is only through that proactive approach to issues that we can continue to animate the programme, achieve our targets and make sure that all the money is spent.

My officials have introduced a number of easements to help to speed up project processing and introduce guidance and grant assistance to stand-alone renewable projects. All that is good progress, and I hope that the good work being done by local action groups and the joint council committees continues so that rural developers can see their opportunities for employment and quality of life improve.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for her reply, but there were a couple of points that I was hoping she would have brought out. Does she share my concern about the high level of bureaucracy and the high level of spend on administration and running costs rather than on actual project costs in this programme? There is also asynchrony or mismatch between bank requirements and the Department's requirements in some of the details for some of the business plans.

Mrs O'Neill: As I said in my initial answer, there is no doubt that the process was slow to get started and to get the funding out there. I accept that. A number of factors contributed to that. We had a high number of speculative applications. We have issues about planning and banks lending money, but that is all stuff that my Department is proactively working on with the intention of speeding things up and making sure that that money is put into the rural communities and spent wisely.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline how large community-based rural organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) have made use of the rural development programme? I also invite the Minister to join me in congratulating the Tyrone team on beating Monaghan yesterday in the championship.

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely concur with that. Come on, Tyrone.

Funding for sports clubs is the statutory responsibility of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) but, under the rural development programme, sports clubs can apply for funding where the service, facilities or products offered are available to all potential stakeholders in the wider rural community. So, I am happy to say that a good example of a rural organisation that has embraced the rural development programme is the GAA. It was working with rural communities on the ground to bring forward solid projects through the competitive application process. Those projects will make a significant contribution to the quality of rural life. I commend the GAA for its proactive approach and hope that other rural organisations will see it as a benchmark and will work through the programme as it has done to the benefit of the wider rural community.

In commending the GAA, I want to add that the rural development programme welcomes all rural dwellers and organisations, and my officials work proactively with many of them, such as the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster, the National Trust and the Countryside Access and Activities Network, to name but a few.

Mr Allister: I appreciate that the Minister may only have been a reader of 'Farming Life' for about three weeks, but she must be aware of the unease in the rural community about the mismanagement of the rural development programme by her predecessor. That dates back to the overloading of the programme in comparison to axis 1 and the gross mismanagement in administration. When the first £5.5 million of funding was announced, it emerged that £3 million of it went on administration. Will she give us the up-to-date, accurate figure for how much of the money from the rural development programme that has been allocated has been wasted on administration?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not agree with the Member's assessment of the previous Minister; I want to make that clear from the start. There were teething problems in getting the funding out; there is no doubt about that. In previous answers, I have addressed that issue and outlined what my Department is doing to look at that.

I am not in favour of lots of money being spent on administration — I do not think anybody is — but you have to administer money to get it

out into the communities. That is the reality. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Will she assure the House that she will look at credit unions, which do tremendous work in rural communities, with regard to the rural development programme and at how she can support them?

Mrs O'Neill: I agree with the Chairperson of the Committee. I totally support the credit unions in what they do in all our communities. I am happy to take that on board and come back to the Member in writing on how we can take that forward.

Agriculture: Bureaucracy

5. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she intends to reduce the level of bureaucracy currently being experienced by farmers.
(AQO 20/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My predecessor, Michelle Gildernew, and Arlene Foster, the then Minister of the Environment, asked for an independent review of the regulations that apply in the agrifood sector in the North of Ireland with a view to simplifying and reducing the administrative burden placed on farmers and the industry in general. My Department has published its response to that review and is currently taking forward an extensive programme of work through its better regulation action plan.

Outside the scope of the action plan and in order to build on the positive progress to date, I have asked my officials to go further and revisit every aspect of my Department's work to see if more can be done to reduce the administrative burden. I want to see my officials continuing to work positively with the industry, with the goal of allowing the industry as much freedom as possible while ensuring that adequate controls are in place and farmers feel a real difference on the ground.

Mr Dallat: In wishing the Minister well in her new job, I ask her to announce a cull on red tape and bureaucracy. Will she assure us that, from now on, farmers will be allowed to grow crops and look after their animals and will not be threatening the rainforests due to the amount of paper that is used to make returns to her Department?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat. Obviously, it is my intention to ensure that farmers get on with doing what they do, and I will support them in whatever way I can through the Department. In relation to rainforests, I would like to see more things done online, and that is an intention of my Department, which I hope will help farmers a bit.

Your point is about bureaucracy. Farmers are raising simple issues with me, such as needing a pass to get into a show and needing one to get out of it. Those are simple things that I want to look at, and that is why I have asked officials to take forward another review and to look more closely at what we can do to make simple gains for farmers.

Mrs Dobson: I am sure that the Minister believes that the move to online applications has eased the amount of paperwork that farmers have to complete, but does she accept that poor rural broadband infrastructure remains a major obstacle? What steps is her Department taking to improve that?

Mrs O'Neill: Coming from a rural area, I am very aware of the challenges that arise from being unable to get access to broadband. It would be unfair of me to ask farmers to complete everything online when they cannot get access to broadband. Broadband access will be one of my key priorities in the coming term.

Mr Molloy: I welcome the Minister to her first Question Time. What progress has been made in reducing the administrative burden so far?

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has made some good progress to date, including the introduction of a sheep electronic identification system with an important derogation. Furthermore, as a result of feedback from stakeholders, the Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) online interface has been improved and, in response to customer demand, my Department has undertaken an extensive training programme helping farmers with the use of the APHIS online system. That training and increased promotion of APHIS online saw cattle birth registrations via that channel rise from 34% in October 2009 to 45% in October 2010. It allows 24-hour access and is in keeping with customer expectations.

Computerisation of the application process for the agrienvironment schemes has contributed to reducing the administrative burden on

farmers who participate in the new countryside management scheme. My Department has also eliminated herd size as a factor when synchronising annual brucellosis surveillance herd tests with any due TB herd test.

Under EU rules, the Veterinary Service is responsible for assessing 11 of the total 18 statutory management requirements (SMRs) on farms in the North as part of its programme of cross-compliance inspections. The inspection programme was designed at the outset to minimise regulatory burden on farmers, with eight of the 11 SMRs being assessed at a single farm visit. The three other SMRs under Veterinary Service responsibility are assessed administratively, without any involvement of individual farmers whatsoever. In setting up the Veterinary Service programme of cross-compliance inspections, pre-existing on-farm veterinary checks were incorporated, with a view to reducing the administrative burden on farmers. Examples of that are the random farm inspections for animal welfare, which were previously carried out as stand-alone inspections but are now fully integrated in the cross-compliance inspection protocol. Moreover, my officials, working jointly with DOE, consulted stakeholders on the impact of the nitrates action programme 2007-2010, and issues raised will be largely addressed in the implementation of the action programme for 2011-14 through working together with farmers to improve compliance.

Forests

6. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the implementation of 'A Strategy to Develop the Recreational and Social Use of Our Forests'. (AQO 21/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since the publication in July 2009 of the recreation and social use strategy, the Forest Service has been working closely in partnership with district councils, public sector organisations and groups such as the National Trust to explore opportunities to promote recreation, social use and tourism in our forests. As a result, several significant projects are being progressed. Work is almost complete with the National Trust to develop a multi-purpose trail network at Castleward forest to include cycling, pony-trekking and walking routes. That project will add significantly to the Castleward experience and will be

officially launched in late June. Similarly, the Forest Service continues to work with Down and Newry and Mourne district councils and the Tourist Board to develop proposals for significant mountain-biking challenge projects at Castlewellan forest park and Rostrevor park. If those projects proceed, they will represent a significant recreation and tourism product in the Mourne forests.

In addition, the NI Tourist Board and the Forest Service are jointly project-managing a study to assess the existing and potential tourism development opportunities available from our forests. That will inform the Forest Service planning review process and assist NITB and other partners who support the case for tourism developments in forests. The Forest Service is continuing to work with a range of public sector and private partners to explore recreation and leisure opportunities. I believe that there is potential to develop our forests for recreation, leisure and tourism and will ensure that work continues to realise those opportunities.

Mr Lynch: How does the Forest Service plan to further develop recreation in Fermanagh forest?

Mrs O'Neill: The recreation and social use strategy commits the Forest Service to develop business partnerships with suitable public and private sector providers to secure a more diverse range of facilities and attractions for visitors to our forests. The Global Geopark in County Fermanagh is a good example of what can be achieved through partnership agreements. There, the Forest Service works closely with Fermanagh District Council to establish management agreements for the improvement of recreation and education facilities on Forest Service land within the geopark area. That has resulted in the development of five tourism walks, which were opened in September 2010.

Mrs McKeivitt: Can the Minister confirm that there is money available for the implementation of the strategy?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, there is money available that accompanies the strategy.

3.30 pm

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer and congratulate her on her appointment. I would like to know how you will pull together everything that happens in forests. In Tardree,

for example, some diverse things happen, such as quad biking, horse riding, rambling, shooting and birdwatching, as well as one or two unsavoury things. How will you pull it all together so that all, or nearly all, of those activities can happen in the same forest?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat. Obviously not everything will be suitable for every area. It will take a partnership approach. We have to get a balance between recreation and leisure in forests and maintaining the forests. It will be a balancing act all the way. Every forest is unique, and work on each will be taken forward differently.

Mr Speaker: That ends Question Time.

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I will take Mr Campbell's point of order and then Mr Allister's.

Mr Campbell: I ask that you review the video footage of a supplementary question to question 1 to the First Minister. A Back-Bench Member close to the door was attempting to pose a question to the junior Minister when an Executive Minister entered the Chamber, obstructing the view of the First Minister. A precedent has been set regarding this issue in recent days. Apologies have not been very forthcoming from that particular quarter; maybe there will be one in future, not just for this but for other more serious matters.

Mr Speaker: I hear what the Member has said, and I appreciate his point of order. I have warned all Members that it is important that, when Members are on their feet, another Member, even a Minister, should not walk in front of that Member.

Mr Campbell: The deputy First Minister.

Mr Speaker: Whether it is the deputy First Minister, the First Minister or any other Minister, they should not do what they are doing. Fair warning has been given on this issue in the House for some time.

I will take Mr Allister's point of order.

Mr Allister: My point of order concerns a different matter, but, as I am the Member referred to in the previous point of order, I will make the comment that I am grateful for the protection. It is a pity, Mr Speaker, that your

protection does not extend to the Great Hall. Some people have a habit of pushing in front of others out there as well.

I understand that the tradition is that questions for oral answer that are not reached are answered in writing. If a Member asks a supplementary question that is patently not answered, as with the question that I asked Mr Bell, is that question also answered in writing subsequently?

Mr Speaker: A supplementary question is not answered in writing to any Member. The Member will not be happy with what I am going to say. I appreciate the issue that he has raised, but it has been raised in the Chamber for some time. Members may feel disappointed with the answers that they get from a Minister, but I have continually told the House that I, as Speaker, will not sit in judgement on how a Minister answers a question. If a Minister totally refuses to answer a question, I can deal with that issue under Standing Orders. The Member and other Members will be disappointed as we go through this term, but, as I have said, it is not up to the Speaker to sit in judgement on how a Minister delivers an answer to a question.

Private Members' Business

Government Structures

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly recognises the need to reform its structures, including having a requirement for an official opposition to be in place by 2015 to create greater delivery, flexibility and scrutiny; and supports a review of the number of Departments and MLAs, and a restructuring of arm's-length bodies. — [Mr Elliott.]

Mr McLaughlin: At the outset, I will comment on the tone and tenor of this debate, because it has been very measured and interesting. I speak in opposition to the proposal, but I want to congratulate fellow MLAs and acknowledge their efforts to have a considered discussion on the matter.

I speak in opposition to the proposal for two reasons. The first reason is that, as has been noted in some contributions, it is prescriptive, pre-emptive and premature.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair)

I also oppose it because although the arguments for reform of the Assembly's structures, the number of Departments and MLAs and the arm's-length bodies will resonate, none of those who spoke in favour of the motion presented a coherent or cogent argument to establish an official opposition as a better or more effective option than the present system of checks and balances. The present system is also representative and inclusive. In my view, it functions effectively, and it includes mechanisms for its own review in the light of experience.

The Assembly is maturing and settling down. In the previous term, we settled the case as to whether we could come up with a sustainable arrangement. It is in that context that I regret what I regard as almost a return to the past, and the type of motion that would, perhaps, give us some of the experience that we had previously at local government level, and, indeed, in a different life in this Building. If we were to operate on the basis that we have established our ability to manage our affairs, that we should allow this process of maturing of the institutions and allow the scheduled review process to, in its time, take cognisance of all those lessons learned, let us examine where we can improve the facilities.

It was acknowledged that Westminster, in a move that I suspect no representative from the North would have supported, has reduced the number of constituencies here, which has an automatic knock-on effect on the number of representatives. Nevertheless, we should be prepared, in good time, to take a look at the number of MLAs that we would regard as being the optimum arrangement. I do not think that anybody would argue that we have arrived at that point yet, or that 108 Members represents a figure that we cannot depart from. Similarly, with the number of Departments, we can improve, refine and inform ourselves through the lessons that we have learned and through the need to meet the challenges that are in front of us. I hope that colleagues will take that on board.

The issue of an official opposition can, of course, be examined in that context, but to get agreement for it is a challenge. It will not be achieved, no matter how the vote goes today, because there was no attempt to engage on that discussion, nor was there a presentation of the type of argument that sensible and reasonable people could respond to. When we saw the regrettable development in which unionist parties, post-election, formed power blocks in individual local government institutions, then, perhaps, we saw evidence that there is in some a desire to return to those practices. Those issues have to be dealt with.

The Assembly has engaged through the RPA, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee and the reviews of this institution that have been conducted. We have examined those issues. The Budget review group, for instance, is tasked, with agreed criteria, to examine whether some arm's-length bodies can justify their existence, whether, in fact, they should be merged with others or, if they can justify their existence, continue to do so.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr McLaughlin: OK. How long do I have?

Mr Deputy Speaker: You had five minutes.

Mr McLaughlin: I think that the case is made. Those who want to argue for an official opposition need to convince those of us who are not of that opinion, and I am amongst those.

Mr A Maginness: Mr Deputy Speaker, I congratulate you on your position and wish you

well in your term of office. I have to agree with the learned Member for North Antrim Mr Allister that the DUP has, in fact, moved to accept and operate the infrastructure of the Good Friday Agreement. I believe — I am sure that he does not agree — that that is progress, because we now have all major parties participating in the institutions within the Assembly and the Executive. That is amazing progress, which is important for the future of our politics.

I am a little concerned by the tabling of the motion by the Ulster Unionist Party, whose members, to paraphrase Simon Hamilton, were advocates for and authors of the Good Friday Agreement. They were certainly authors of the Good Friday Agreement, and I hope that they are still advocates for it. However, the motion does not preserve the integrity of the agreement, which I and my party believe is very important.

Why is that document so important? It is not just because it brought us to this point in our political history; it is because the mechanisms it contains to establish partnership between Catholics and Protestants, nationalists and unionists, and loyalists and republicans have brought us to a point at which we can unite our community in politics. Instead of maintaining old, historic divisions, we have started to tackle and do away with them. That is the genius of the Good Friday Agreement, which is about bringing about reconciliation. Partnership is the way to do that, and that is why we have strange governance arrangements that differ from the norms throughout the Western World. They differ because the history of our society has been divided and bloody, and that is why we need to look carefully at preserving the institutions, particularly the political balance of the Executive and the Assembly, which has been carefully calibrated to include every significant element of political opinion. That balance did not come about by accident; it is deliberate that we include as many people as possible in the Executive, because we want to unite, not divide, our community. I believe that the reconciliation process is strengthened, supported and directed by that institution, and it is important that all in the Chamber support that.

I do not think that anybody in this institution is seeking to go back to the bad old days or is not seeking to create reconciliation. Let us bank and build on what we have. Let us move forward. If we start to tamper with bits and pieces here and there, as, unfortunately, we

did in relation to the Department of Justice, things will start to unravel. We now have the strange situation where the Alliance Party has two Ministers in the Executive — the new mathematics whereby a minority gets more than a majority. In other words, 16 Ulster Unionist Party Members got one Department and the Alliance Party got two. That was because we interfered with the integrity of the Good Friday Agreement.

Mr McCarthy: I am very grateful to the Member for giving way. I just cannot sit through an attack on the Alliance Party. Does the Member agree that, up to now, the actions and activities of the Justice Minister have been second to none and that he has delivered a first-class service for the community in Northern Ireland?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr A Maginness: For all I know, he may be the archangel Gabriel and full of goodness and kindness, but it is about how he got there. It is the abnormality and absurdity of the situation in which the Alliance Party holds two Departments, as opposed to the one each held by the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists. Can we take a lesson from that? Once we start to interfere with the integrity of the institution, we depart from its fundamental strength, which is to provide a basis on which everybody can be included.

3.45 pm

We are not opposed to some rationalisation of Departments, but we are opposed to interference with the basic integrity of the institutions that will damage them. Some people will use reform to undermine the Good Friday Agreement.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I must ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr A Maginness: That is what my party and I are worried about, and I hope that you are worried about it as well.

Mr Weir: Mr Deputy Speaker, I offer my congratulations as this is the first time you have been in the Chair when I am speaking. I wish you the best in your new role.

A lot of nonsense has been talked at times in this debate; I hope to add to it over the next five minutes. There are a number of elements to the debate. I do not think it a perfect motion, but

it is one that we on these Benches find favour with.

The first element is the concept of opposition. The SDLP and, to a lesser extent, Sinn Féin need to get away from the notion that every arrangement that has been put in place by the Belfast Agreement is like Holy Writ and that we should burn at the stake anyone who dares suggest any change to it. As with any institution, a monolith that does not evolve will mummify. That is not healthy. One of the things that gets me is that any time opposition or any deviation from the precise arrangements of the Belfast Agreement is mentioned, it is seen as an attack on partnership government.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: You did not give way to me, but I am happy to give way to you.

Mr A Maginness: I am sorry. I was unaware that you wished to intervene.

If you remove a party from the Executive, you create an imbalance. The balance has been carefully calibrated so that everyone is included. You may be well intentioned, but such a move could have very unwelcome results.

Mr Weir: I find it interesting that the Member argues that any change creates an imbalance: a few moments ago you were complaining that the Alliance Party had twice the number of seats of the Ulster Unionist Party. Any mature democracy should be moving ultimately towards Government and opposition, but that is not simply a choice between the exact arrangement that we have at present and simple majority rule. A range of mechanisms could be put in place, such as weighted majorities, to provide protection. The stark contrast that is put forward by the SDLP and Sinn Féin does not hold water on scrutiny. It is clear that to make those changes requires persuasion because in the real world this will not happen without unionists and nationalists agreeing. However, let us at least look at this as a step forward.

As for the argument of prematurity that has been bandied about, there is work to be done on some of the details and the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. However, this is ultimately about commitment to a principle and a time frame. I do not see this as premature, as it has been 12 and a half years since the institutions and the number of Departments

were set up. That is a reasonable period to allow things to bed in.

The other element to the motion is the number of Departments and MLAs. Here, we are ripe for reform. Not just from a democratic point of view: there is clearly a good argument that we are over-governed. The public is crying out for reform. My party has always supported a reduction in the number of Ministries. That is why the DUP and I voted against the creation of 10 Ministries when the matter was brought up in January 1999. There is a belief that this is some form of Holy Writ in the Belfast Agreement, but there is no need in the agreement for there to be 10 Ministries. The agreement simply makes reference to “up to ten”. Consequently, a sacrifice could be made there by the SDLP and Sinn Féin without tampering with the sacred document that is the Belfast Agreement.

This is a time of austerity, and many families in my constituency and others are being hit by the recession. They will take it very ill if we are forced to reduce front line services or if the Assembly has to look at additional charging of whatever nature. That could be imposed on people at a time when we in this House have failed to grasp the opportunity to put our own house in order by reducing the level of bureaucracy to a minimum. Before the formation of the current Executive, there was an opportunity, driven by the First Minister, to look at an immediate reduction in the number of Government Departments. Unfortunately, that was not taken up by everyone.

We need to ensure that we have the most effective and efficient form of government that can be provided on a cost-effective basis. That is why the issues of the number of Government Departments and the number of Ministries need to be tied together. That can also help to deal with some of the slightly illogical couplings that currently exist. For example, there are not many places on these islands where higher education is divorced from primary and secondary education. Surely we should be looking at building those into one Government Department in a reduced number of Departments. It has been done in Scotland and in other parts of the world.

The other part of the motion puts a spotlight on arm's-length bodies. We need to ensure that we get the best value from those. Some Members have gone on about particular bodies, and I will

not get into that debate in the seven seconds that I have left. However, there is a ripeness and a keenness for reform.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Weir: We should be serving the people by having the most efficient form of government, not the other way around by serving ourselves. There is a strong need for reform, and I support the motion.

Mr Allister: The governmental arrangements in Northern Ireland are a blot upon the democratic landscape of the Western World. I pretty much guarantee that, if I were to ask any class of public affairs students aged 12 to name two things that denoted democracy, they would say: the right in an election to change your government, and the right to have an opposition. Those are two of the most fundamental tenets that operate anywhere across the democratic world — anywhere except Northern Ireland. That is why I say that these arrangements are a blot upon the democratic landscape.

We have just had an election. Oh yes, you can have an election, but you cannot change your government. You dare not have an opposition. You arrive at the farcical situation where all parties are in government, and then we are told by some person in this debate that you have vigorous scrutiny Committees. Those vigorous scrutiny Committees are composed of Government MLAs. Nine of the 12 Committees are controlled exclusively and occupied and populated only by Government MLAs. The cabal that controls the House made sure that the three MLAs outside of that body of governmental parties did not get on any of the Committees that matter.

Do not let anyone come to this House and talk about the principles of democracy when they are the practitioners of the antithesis of democracy and live by the suppression of democracy. They cannot even accommodate the basic fundamental concept that, in a democracy, you must have — it is not optional — the right to an opposition. Of course, those who oppose it most are the associates of those who used to deal with opposition with a bullet in the back of the head, and they are still of that totalitarian mindset in saying that there will not be an opposition.

Then there are those who pretend — yes, pretend — that it is all going to change, when they know that they have signed up for an arrangement that guarantees that it will not change, because they have signed up for a review that delivers a veto to the very totalitarians who say that there will never be an opposition. Yet, they come to the House and mouth platitudes about wanting to see an opposition, an end to mandatory coalition, voluntary coalition and basic democracy operating when they know full well that everything that they have signed up to in the Belfast Agreement guarantees that that will not happen.

Yet one of them, the Member who spoke previously, can write in Saturday's 'News Letter' pretending that the Belfast Agreement is a thing of history, when it is a living history and a living act that he, as the Whip of his party, implements and enforces every day of the week, because all the architecture of the Belfast Agreement is that which holds up this very anti-democratic structure.

Of course, there are 43,000 very good reasons why these structures will not change. Many Members of this House know that, if they rock the boat or disturb the equilibrium, there will be nobody outside this House foolish enough to pay them anything like a salary of £43,000. Well they know it. That is what motivates, what drives and what feeds the pretence. They say, "Yes, we want change; yes, we want an opposition; yes, we have created structures that could bring it about". However, they never tell the truth that they have delivered the veto to the anti-democrats who will never allow it to happen, and, therefore, they sit happily and merrily propping up the very system that they made careers out of attacking. The very system that they belittled the Ulster Unionist Party for creating, they now operate with the gusto of the salary that comes with it. So, it is a shame that we are putting upon the Province structures and operations —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will you draw your remarks to a close, please?

Mr Allister: — that are utterly undemocratic, and those who keep them in place will never have the bottle to face down those who say they must stay. That is the harsh reality, and they know it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. This is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from

Mr Nesbitt, and I remind the House that it is the convention that someone making a maiden speech should do so uninterrupted.

Mr Nesbitt: As I make my opening remarks, I am mindful of two other places: the wonderful constituency of Strangford and the people to whom I am responsible; and the studios of Ulster Television, where, for 13 years, certain Members of this House harangued me every time I tried to make a point. Had I known then that I could stand here and speak uninterrupted for 10 minutes, the good people of Ulster would not have had to suffer me as their news provider for so long.

Many of you will recognise me as a broadcast journalist. However, that is a two-dimensional view of my past. A more 3D vision would include my time as the managing director of a successful private sector organisation and, indeed, my time as a commissioner in the Commission for Victims and Survivors, although the success of that body remains to be tested. I speak, therefore, with experience of a reasonably senior level in both the private sector and the public sector and with an appreciation of the different cultures, processes and outcomes that they embrace.

This debate is about how we govern and about the structures and processes that we use. It is not, overtly at least, about why we govern, and it might be useful to define why we are doing this before we go on to discuss those structures. If you look at it as a simple business model, we are in danger of over-concentrating simply on the input side of the equation. As Mr Elliott said, that input includes MEPs, MLAs, MPs, quangos, commissions and consultants too numerous to mention. We are certainly oversupplied with inputs, and that is why so many people think that Northern Ireland is over-governed. However, when we look at the other side of the equation — the outputs and outcomes — I suggest that we are under-governing through our failure to date to deliver on all the big-ticket decisions, such as the national sports stadium, the reform of public administration, agreed and regulated post-primary transfer arrangements, and so on.

In the recent election campaign, there seemed to be general agreement that the biggest achievement of the 2007 Assembly was that it survived a full term. However, I suspect that no one in this Chamber thinks that they can get re-elected next time on the same survival ticket.

The 2011 Assembly must commit to delivering outcomes that make a meaningful difference to people's day-to-day lives.

4.00 pm

I take a simple view of what that means — of what success looks like for the Assembly. As I speak, a child is being born a couple of miles from here at the Ulster Hospital. We know little about that child except its sex and its initial assessment of health. Although each child is unique, all children share something in common. Without exception, in every newborn child, there is a spark of ability, creativity and talent. Surely it is our role as politicians to create the environment in which that child has every opportunity to discover that spark and to use it to develop into the person he or she is meant to be. We must cherish the child, whether he or she is academic or vocational, sporty or musical, a performer or a producer, or, as is more likely, a glorious and unique combination of all those attributes and more.

Surely it is not beyond the wit of the House to achieve that for a population of fewer than 2 million people. Unfortunately, at present, that is not the case. When children leave hospital, their opportunities to develop their potential are shaped, often negatively, by factors that are beyond their control but that are within ours, such as issues in health, housing, education, employment and, indeed, all matters for which authority and responsibility have been devolved to the House.

Success will be measured when more of those newborn children have more opportunities to develop, irrespective of the accident of their birth, and when their parents have more reason to be thankful to the House and for the work of the Assembly. If we can agree on what success looks like for this Assembly and the next, we can start to build structures that can get us there. Therefore, as we debate inputs, let us do so with clear focus that the process is not an end in itself but the means to that end. I cannot overemphasise that point enough. During my time with the Victims' Commission, I witnessed processes that served only to slow down delivery, increase the cost of delivery or make delivery impossible, even when all those concerned agreed that the intended outcome was exactly what was needed.

An analysis of the most recent Programme for Government by business consultants PWC

found that, although the programme had only five key objectives, there were no fewer than 331 measurements — 331 boxes to be ticked to assess the programme's success or failure. I urge the House to liberate creative thinking and imaginative solutions from the unnecessary constraints of the over-complicated spider's web of process.

My party was at the heart of negotiations that led to the return of devolved government. Structures that were agreed in 1998 were always going to be transitional, with a primary goal of making politics the way forward. Changes that have been agreed since, which include those agreed at St Andrews, were also going to be transitional, as will be any changes that are agreed today, tomorrow or next year.

I heard something that disturbs me. I recall, during the last Assembly, a Minister explaining inaction in the following terms. That Minister said that it is such an important issue that the Assembly must take time to ensure that it reaches the right decision, as though there were always a perfect solution and we would find it if we waited long enough. Businesspeople face difficult decisions every day. Often, there is no right decision. There is only a series of choices, none of which is perfect or delivers all that is sought, but some of which advance the cause. Therefore, let us not be paralysed by the search for the Holy Grail of perfection. Instead, let us grasp the imperfect advantages that are achievable today. What is clearly achievable is a change of mindset that puts outcomes before process, from which can flow reform of structures.

My party calls for a review of arm's-length bodies, informed by the fact that many quangos and non-departmental public bodies were created to fill a gap in the democratic process that the House now fills. It calls for a swift return to the question of reform of public administration and looks forward to an early resolution to the need to go forward with fewer local councils. It calls for a review of the number of Departments and consequent Committees while being mindful that, although we should go forward with fewer Ministries, we should also accept that there will always be a need for cross-cutting initiatives and that processes should enable and not hinder that important work.

We call for a review of the number of Members of the Legislative Assembly, not least to reflect

the upcoming reduction in the number of Westminster constituencies.

Mr Campbell pointed out earlier that there was no obstacle to any party's going into opposition today, but the point is that we call for legislation to enshrine and protect an official opposition. The case is clear. It will maximise the prospects of parties in government agreeing on a way forward, and it will give the parties of opposition the opportunity to warn the public of the dangers of government action and, indeed, inaction. Furthermore, as an overarching point, if we finally start doing business the way it is done in the rest of the world, the public may finally have confidence that the Members of this House do not believe that they know better than everybody else.

The mandatory coalition was a transitional arrangement, and its time is fast running out. As my time runs out, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to finish by addressing an uninformed criticism of our call for an opposition. Cynics accused us of simply looking for funding for the Ulster Unionist Party. That is not true. An official opposition is not about funding; it is about rights and resources. It is about having designated days in the House when the opposition can determine the business of the day and have a formal input into setting the agenda for the Assembly's business. It is also about having speaking rights in the House and, with appropriate resources, the ability to conduct opposition scrutiny and challenge functions. So, no, this is not a call for money for the Ulster Unionist Party; it is a call to ensure that, after the next election, my good friends and colleagues in the Democratic Unionist Party are properly resourced when they take their seats on the opposition Benches. I commend the motion.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 57; Noes 37.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mrs Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy,

Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Nesbitt and Mr Swann.

NOES

Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McLaughlin and Mr Sheehan.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the need to reform its structures, including having a requirement for an official opposition to be in place by 2015 to create greater delivery, flexibility and scrutiny; and supports a review of the number of Departments and MLAs, and a restructuring of arm's-length bodies.

Adjourned at 4.20 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 7 June 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Private Members' Business

A5 Dual Carriageway

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The first item of business is the motion on the A5 dual carriageway project. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

A valid petition of concern was presented on 6 June in relation to the motion, and a valid petition of concern was presented on 6 June in relation to the amendment. Therefore, I remind Members that the effect of the petitions is that the votes on the motion and the amendment will be on a cross-community basis.

Mr Doherty: I beg to move

That this Assembly supports the A5 dual carriageway project; recognises that it is essential to the economic regeneration of the north-west region; welcomes the financial commitment made by the Irish Government; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to give an assurance that there will be no dilution of the project, or delay in its completion.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I would like the debate to be constructive and supportive of the motion. I say that at the outset because I have noticed a tendency among some MLAs who, while supporting the building of dual carriageways or motorways in their own constituencies, which, of course, they have every right to do, snipe at or undermine the proposed A5 dual carriageway project. If a

motorway project is viable in any constituency, the project should be argued on its merits and not by making undermining references to proposals in other constituencies, particularly with regard to the A5 dual carriageway project.

I am also mindful that, while we are having this debate today, a public inquiry is under way in various locations along the proposed route of the A5 dual carriageway. The public inquiry is scheduled to conclude in the autumn. I attended that inquiry to represent residents who will be affected by the proposed dual carriageway. In previous weeks and months, I made representation for various farmers who would also be affected. While standing up for their rights as individuals, I also made it clear that I was totally supportive of the plans for the A5 western transport corridor.

I am aware that some of my colleagues who will speak in the debate will want to cover the historical situation that left Counties Fermanagh, Donegal and Tyrone without any rail or motorway network. I want to focus, not so much on the long-term history, but on the more recent history in bringing the proposal forward.

In July 2007, the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) noted the Irish Government's intention to make available a contribution of £400 million to help fund the major road works programme in the North, providing dual-carriageway-standard routes to serve the north-west gateway and, on the eastern seaboard corridor, between Belfast and Larne. The Executive confirmed their agreement in principle to taking these two major road projects forward. The two Governments then agreed the following milestones for the A5 western transport corridor project: the preferred corridor was announced in late 2008; the announcement of the preferred route was made in mid-2009; and the draft statutory Orders and environmental statement were published in late 2010.

The North/South Ministerial Council subsequently agreed a further schedule of milestones and anticipated payments from the Irish Government to the Consolidated Fund. The Council agreed an A5 western transport corridor project management structure, which set up a cross-border steering group, an A5 technical group and an A5 project team. The cross-border group reports regularly to the North/South Ministerial Council transport sector and plenary meetings.

In November 2007, Roads Service appointed consultants. It then moved forward with a novel idea of the selected procurement process, which adopted an early contractor involvement. That brought the contractors' procurement phase of the project ahead of the statutory procedures process, thus removing about nine months from the overall project delivery time frame. It also allowed the contractors to provide valuable input to the design, and to provide advice and costs on construction-related issues.

I wish to relay to the House the strategic and policy context framework that advised this project as we moved forward. The long-term vision for transportation in 'Shaping Our Future', the regional development strategy 2015 is:

"To have a modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone's quality of life."

Other strategic documents have also projected visions: the regional transportation strategy 2002-2012; the regional strategic transport framework transport plan 2015; the Programme for Government and the investment strategy; and the investment delivery plan for roads. The Programme for Government and the investment strategy were agreed by the Executive at their first Programme for Government and associated Budget meeting in 2008. They also endorsed a revised 10-year investment strategy covering the period 2008-2018. Very clearly in the middle of that was the proposal to upgrade the A5 western transport dual carriageway to a very modern standard.

I have quite deliberately gone through all of the mechanisms that led to this proposal. I also clearly anchored it in joint decisions that were made by the Executive and the Irish Government and in what is contained in the Programme for Government and the strategic investment strategy. I did all that because it is a huge project that highlights, as its main objectives,

the need for improvements in road safety, in the road network in the North and in North/South links, and the need for a reduction in journey times along the A5 western transport corridor. It also highlights the need for increased overtaking opportunities for motorists along the route, and for the final proposal to be developed in light of safety, economic, environmental integration and accessibility considerations.

The issue of safety is a huge one —

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. For the purposes of clarification, does the Member accept that the A5 dual carriageway was not included in the regional transportation strategy or the regional strategic transport network transport plan?

Mr Doherty: No, I do not accept that. The project was very much part of the Programme for Government. It was also part of the ongoing dialogue in the House and between the Executive and the Irish Government.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Doherty: I am very conscious of time, so I will hold on until I get towards the end of my contribution.

The issue of safety is crucial along the existing A5, where there have been many accidents and fatalities.

All of those issues are important. However, the major plus in all of this is that, by working together in the House and with the Executive working with the Irish Government through the North/South Ministerial Council, we were able to procure an agreement to build the road. More crucially, we were able to obtain an agreement by the Irish Government to pay £400 million, which is approximately half the required money and which, in the current economic climate, cannot be sneezed at.

Before my time runs out, I want to say that this is an enormous project that the Executive and the Irish Government have brought forward together.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Doherty: Any proposal coming to the House to undermine the project at this late stage should be rejected.

Lord Morrow: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after “supports” and insert

“the upgrading of the existing A5; recognises that it is essential to the economic regeneration of the north-west region; welcomes the financial commitment made by the Irish Government; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to consider all alternatives to the current proposed scheme.”

At the outset, I must say that the proposal is turning out to be one of the most controversial pieces of road that is ever likely to be constructed in this region of the United Kingdom. However, no matter how controversial it might be, the present Minister for Regional Development has a very simple decision to make. Many people have said many things and committed their parties to many positions. Mr Kennedy is in the unique position that all his colleagues — some present, some past and, perhaps, some in the future — have stated categorically that there is no need for this road under any circumstances. We all heard that. The issue was quite the subject of debate during the election campaign, and what Members said during that campaign makes very interesting reading. I have no doubt that Mr Kennedy will avail himself of all the information about the proposed new road, particularly that highlighted by his colleagues, such as how unnecessary it is and how it will involve the unnecessary expenditure of up to £1 billion, and their claims that that money could be spent on much better things. Indeed, the Ulster Unionist Party said that it is not one of its priorities.

10.45 am

I also read in the paper just this week that Mr Elliott will no longer tolerate anybody in his party stepping out of line. Mr Kennedy, you had better beware: if you step out of line on this one, you will be slinging your hook, your days as Minister will be over, and you will be kicking a stone down the road saying: “What an unfortunate remark I made then.”

We do not need this debate because the decisions have already been made by the different parties. The present deputy — I was going to say Prime Minister, but that is not quite right — First Minister has already said that no matter what comes out of the public inquiry — and this is democracy at work, by the way — this road is going ahead.

Mr Elliott has said that there is absolutely no need for the road. Mr Kennedy, I hope that you are listening because you should by now be able to come to this House to tell us categorically that this road is not going ahead; there is no need for it; it is an unnecessary squandering of nearly £1 billion.

We were told by others that this was a clever trick hatched up at St Andrews. They had nothing to do and they all went behind the closet and came up with the idea of making a dual carriageway from Aghnacloy to New Buildings. Let us see whether that stands up to scrutiny.

Lord Laird, in another place, asked:

“whether the St Andrews agreement included agreement to build a new road of any type from the Irish border to Londonderry”.

Lord Shutt of Greetland answered:

“The St Andrews agreement did not include an agreement about building such a road.”

That is another fox shot. Those who try to tell us that this was a secret deal that was done at St Andrews now know that it was no such thing; it was never even discussed at St Andrews. Indeed, the whole thing has become a joke.

We could go on and on quoting people. Billy Armstrong, a former Member, also had something to say about the A5. On 18 January 2011, he said that the former Regional Development Minister showed continued support for the hugely expensive A5 project and asked why the Minister felt it more important for a commuter from the Republic to have a speedy journey to Londonderry than to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland had an adequate water supply. Mr Armstrong went on to suggest that Minister Murphy put the needs of the Republic before the needs of the people of Northern Ireland. Another Member from another constituency said that there was no need for it.

Mr Beggs is also on record as saying that there is no need for the project. I do not know what Mr Beggs knows about Aghnacloy, Ballygawley or Omagh, but he seems to have good knowledge of them because he was emphatic that there was no need for this road.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member accept that I said that there was no need for the quality that is being proposed for a virtual motorway in that

area but that there will be a need to upgrade certain aspects of the road?

Lord Morrow: I will tell you what you did say, Mr Beggs, since you accuse me of misquoting you. Mr Beggs said that the Minister was:

“charging ahead with a wildly expensive and controversial scheme to turn a relatively lightly trafficked road in Tyrone into virtually a motorway ... I strongly suspect that the Minister wishes the A5 to progress regardless of the cost, for political rather than economic reasons.”

I suspect that you will give the present Minister the same advice: that there is no need for this road. Now that you have given that advice, I am certain that the Minister's officials will take on board everything that has been said.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you too have knowledge of this because this matter came before Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council some 18 to 20 months ago for debate. At that time, there were those of us who stated categorically where we stood on this matter. There were those who tried to misrepresent us during the election campaign and tried to say that we were the cheerleaders for a new A5. Let me make it very clear: I want to see an upgrade in the west. We have the A4, which has just been constructed and has been an asset to the west of the Province. I want to see the upgrading of roads in the west, but I do not believe that the Department has got it right on this.

For instance, the upgrade of the A4 also took in a section of the A5. For those who are not totally familiar with the area, I am talking about the section from Aghnacloy to Ballygawley. Most of that road has already been upgraded as a result of the work that was done on the A4, and it is working very effectively. Roads Service engineers, who are the experts, tell us continually that there is no justification — no justification — for a new section of road from Aghnacloy to Ballygawley because the traffic count does not justify it. That is from the mouths of the experts; they are saying that that should not be done. Is it not ridiculous that even though the A4 has just been finished and most of the road from Aghnacloy to Ballygawley upgraded, we are going to get a further upgrade, with a section of road that will lie parallel to that?

I implore the Minister to get out on site. I know that he comes from a rural constituency and has an interest in the welfare of rural dwellers

and farmers. I urge him to come out on site and take a look at what has been proposed, because it cannot be justified by anybody's standards. The Minister is in the unique position of being able to do something.

There is a political agenda at work from those opposite, but let him step up to the plate and demonstrate very clearly where he stands in relation to the proposal. Let him do so with his colleagues Mr Elliott and Mr Donaldson, who is not here but who had much to say about this road proposal when it was time to go round the doors. He put statements in the local press which, in many cases, were false. Some of us were never given the opportunity to answer them. Had the same gentleman taken the time to do some research and check out where certain MLAs and councillors stood on the issue, he would have got a very clear message. We want to see an upgrading and we believe that the west is entitled to a good road infrastructure. We will continue to campaign for that, but it is patently obvious that there is no justification whatsoever for the proposals.

Mr Allister: I have listened with interest to what the Member has said, and I welcome his affirmation of approval for an upgrade but opposition to the type of programme proposed.

Will the Member explain how we got to this point? The Member's Ministers sit on the North/South Ministerial Council and the Executive. Both of those bodies at the least acquiesced to, if not actively approved, the proposals. So, is the Member not making a Jekyll and Hyde presentation when he seeks to distance himself from those aspects of the proposals that he does not approve of even though his Ministers, one of whom is sitting beside him, approved them in their entirety?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry, Lord Morrow, your 10 minutes are up, and there is no extra time for addressing the intervention.

Lord Morrow: So I cannot answer that scurrilous remark?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Not at this point in time, but I am sure that you will get an opportunity to do so later.

Lord Morrow: It was totally inaccurate.

Mr Spratt (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): It is normal that the Chair of a Committee speaks on a subject

that falls within the remit of that Committee, and I speak as the Chair of the Committee for Regional Development.

The A5 route from New Buildings to Aghnacloy, along with the dualling of the A8 from Belfast to Larne, represents the major capital project in the Department, with a combined budget of £400 million, which is almost 80% of the overall capital budget. It is, therefore, a hugely significant proposal. It is unfortunate that the motion has come before the House at such an early juncture in the new Assembly mandate, due both to the fact that the Committee has not had an opportunity to scrutinise the proposal and the fact that the matter is the subject of a public inquiry.

The Committee will not receive a briefing on the Department's capital spend programme until 29 June, although I doubt that the Committee's position will be established at that point. As a scrutiny Committee, we need to be aware of all of the arguments. I also feel that, as a Committee, we need to be cautious that our deliberations on the matter do not indirectly interfere with or influence the process of the public inquiry. I have no doubt that the Committee will deliberate on the matter over the coming months but, collectively, we agreed that it was too soon for the Committee to offer an opinion.

For those reasons, the Committee agreed at its last meeting that I should advise the House that the Committee for Regional Development reserves judgement on the matter at this stage. With those brief comments —

Lord Morrow: Before the Member sits down, I want to deal with the point that Mr Allister made. I suspect that Mr Allister is aware that a Minister draws up his own priorities, not the Executive. That is why we are imploring the Minister to draw up his priorities. We are asking him whether this matter is one of his priorities. We recognise that it was one of Mr Murphy's priorities, but the torchlight now moves to Mr Kennedy, who now has to draw up his priorities, and we will wait and see whether the A5 proposal is one of them.

Mr Beggs: I support the amendment. As others said, there is an ongoing inquiry into the A5. Therefore, the motion that there should be no alteration whatsoever is certainly ill-timed and, at worst, foolhardy. We are in much changed economic times since July 2007, when the current extravagant A5 proposal emerged. Given those

new factors, the Assembly, the Executive, the Department for Regional Development and the Minister would be wise to take all those changes into consideration before coming to a final conclusion.

Four years ago, there was a commitment, following the St Andrews Agreement, for £400 million from the Republic of Ireland to invest in our roads infrastructure. I believe that there was also £200 million from the Chancellor. I am not sure whether many people considered at that time that the proposal that has emerged was the one that would have emerged — the construction of a virtual motorway. It is just off motorway standard, lacking hard shoulders, on what is a relatively lightly used road. There are sections of it that carry around 13,000 vehicles a day, but there are other sections that carry 6,800 vehicles a day.

We have to appreciate that some of the traffic will be local: people going to a local school or shop. Even when the new road is built, people may not actually use it because they want to use a local road that is more convenient, given the limited on/off options that will be available. What level of traffic will the new road carry in places?

In settling on the design for the new road, there is a huge question about the quality standard that was set and its appropriateness for this day and age. There is considerable opposition from farmers, landowners, environmentalists and even transport groups. Who was managing that process over the past four years in the Executive? There have been regular North/South transport sectoral meetings, where I understand there is joint decision-making, and we have a Finance Minister. We are talking about a nearly £1 billion scheme, so it is rather strange that some are deciding that it was nothing to do with them and that it was forced on us by the Regional Development Minister.

Others in the Executive, particularly the Finance Minister and those who attended the North/South group meetings, have a responsibility for the decisions they agreed. It would also be interesting to know what has actually been agreed in the budget. Who voted for the budget? Is this a ring-fenced budget line? I understand that it is. What has been agreed? We have to assess where we are today and decide what is best for Northern Ireland. I have to say that I

was shocked when I viewed the road with the Agriculture Committee.

11.00 am

It is not an east-west issue. The scheme means that work on many roads throughout Northern Ireland will not be able to proceed in the next four-year period. The Dungiven bypass and the extension of the M2 between Randalstown and Toome will serve the west. Indeed, those roads will serve more traffic than what is being proposed. The haulage industry is concerned about the roads in those areas because they cause delays that affect the economy. We need to think collectively about what will be good for Northern Ireland plc.

Mr McGlone: Thanks to the Member for giving way. Does the Member accept that the rest of those schemes, although crucial to the region's infrastructure in their own right, do not have a £400 million subvention from the Irish Government?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Beggs: When you go into TK Maxx, you do not buy everything because it is half price. You have to decide what you lose when you spend your money. We have to decide what the Northern Ireland economy will lose. Tom Wilson of the Freight Transport Association said:

"We have little money to spend at the moment."

He applauds the A5 project, but only when we can justify the expenditure:

"Let us leave that project until we can justify improving those hot spots."

He wants to improve the hot spots that cost the economy money first.

We ought to look at the timing and quality of the new road. Is a flyover needed when relatively few cars go up and down sections of that road? The move to a motorway standard will greatly inconvenience the local community, who will have to travel considerably further to cross the road. That will cause problems.

Ms Ritchie: I thank Mr Beggs for giving way. Does the Member not accept the need for a greater strategic road vision on the island of Ireland to facilitate greater access for all local and national commuters? Does he not accept that the proposal was contained in the Irish

Government's national development plan and promoted by the then Taoiseach as a means of not only facilitating access but upgrading the infrastructure and providing greater North/South economic co-operation?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr Byrne: As a resident of west Tyrone and an Assembly Member for the West Tyrone constituency, I am happy to support the motion brought forward by Mr Pat Doherty MLA.

The people of west Tyrone and, indeed, the counties of Derry and Tyrone have waited for such a road for a long time. Why? The A5 is a strategic route. Many years ago, it was classified as a Trans-European Network by the European Commission in a structural funds common chapter document. The north-west of Ireland is a geographic and economic region identified primarily by the counties of Tyrone, Derry and Donegal. The region, therefore, straddles the border. Face-to-face development of infrastructure is required to enable future economic and social development for the people who live there.

When the railway through Tyrone was closed in 1964, a long time ago, the then Government promised that a motorway would be built to link the western part of the North to the rest of Northern Ireland. That never happened. At long last, we have reached the stage of having a major proposal for road transport infrastructure. Let us not jeopardise it.

Road traffic volumes have increased a lot since then, and there are at least 11,000 vehicles a day on that route.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that 6,800 vehicles a day use the road between Aghnacloy and Ballygawley, that that figure has fallen considerably since the construction traffic from Tyrone to Dublin has decreased and that considerably fewer vehicles are using that section of the road?

Mr Byrne: I accept that fact, but it does not take away from the strategic nature of the route. It is a national all-island strategic transport route.

As I said, road traffic volumes have increased enormously since 1964. The proposed A5 western transport corridor, at long last, offers an opportunity to redress the regional imbalance in roads and transport infrastructure in Northern Ireland and, indeed, in the context of Ireland

as a whole. The people in my constituency of West Tyrone are delighted that the Irish Government have recognised the strategic nature of the road, given that Donegal, part of their jurisdiction, has been cut off for a long time. The Irish Government have agreed to put in £400 million towards the overall cost of the programme involving the A8 and A5, the two major road projects. That is very welcome.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for giving way. I do not like to hear negative comments from people saying that they are going to refuse an investment of £400 million in a road of such major significance as the A5. Nevertheless, does the Member accept that, rather than having diminished construction traffic on the road, we would like more construction traffic? Does he accept that this project will lead to a significant increase in jobs in the area and sustain existing jobs in that sector?

Mr Byrne: I agree with the Member. The construction industry and the road quarrying industry are crying for projects at the moment. We want a kick-start to the local economy, particularly in the construction industry. Hundreds of jobs would be created immediately by the construction of the A5.

The project is also vital for road safety reasons. In the 10 years from 1999 to 2009, there were over 30 fatal collisions on the road, and there were 33 deaths. Two names spring to mind. Mr John Finlay, the founder of John Finlay (Engineering) Ltd, was killed in a passing manoeuvre near Kelly's Inn many years ago. More recently, a young man from Strabane, lorry driver Declan Harvey, was killed near Victoria Bridge. Those men represent the human cost of the death trap that is the A5 at present.

The road haulage industry finds great difficulty in getting road freight to the seaports of Larne, Belfast and Dublin on a timed schedule. That is because, effectively, on that roadway, the average speed of vehicles is between 40 mph and 45 mph, and a bottleneck exists. It is now crucial that the Minister for Regional Development and his Department reaffirm a commitment to the proposed A5 dualling project. We have come so far; £35 million has already been spent by a dedicated team in DRD and by Mouchel, the project consultants, in the design and planning stages. I appeal to the Minister and the DRD to move on with the project, show the people of the north-west that progress is being made

and demonstrate that regional infrastructure imbalances are being tackled.

Let us not go back; let us go forward and get the road project built without any further delay. Motorists are eager for the project to be started and ready for use sooner rather than later. If we talk about democracy and the meaning of having modern politics —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Byrne: Derry City Council, Strabane District Council, Omagh District Council and Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council, as well as Donegal County Council, have supported the project for over 25 years.

Mr Lunn: The Alliance Party has not been directly involved in this discussion, mainly because of our lack of representation in the area affected, but we have a view on it, which I will go into shortly. However, before I do that, I want to say a word about the debate and the fact that we have not one but two petitions of concern relating to a private Member's motion. That effectively means that neither the motion nor the amendment can possibly be passed by the House.

I wonder where that leaves us for the future. A public inquiry into the matter is under way, and I am sure that it will go into things very thoroughly and come up with a considered view that will be passed to the Minister, who will condense the information at his disposal and come up with a view, which, on the basis of today's discussion, will inevitably be rejected by one side of the House or the other. Where will that leave us? We are going back to the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) and the review of public administration — down a cul-de-sac. A lot of work may go into the inquiry, but we will not be able to make a decision, so I wish the Minister luck with his deliberations.

That said, if the debate mattered, I would be saying that we support the DUP amendment. We have not been lobbied like local Members have, but, as a regular user of the road, particularly the section from Ballygawley to Strabane, I know it very well. I do not know the Aughnacloy to Ballygawley section so well, but I hear what Lord Morrow and Roy Beggs said about traffic volumes and the fact that it has already been substantially upgraded. As I understand it, prior to 2006, the policy was to upgrade that type

of road by way of bypasses and by dualling certain sections to make overtaking possible. As far as I know, prior to 2006, it was never envisaged that the A5 from Derry right through to Aghnacloy would be turned into a dual carriageway.

In my opinion, the A4 from the end of the motorway to Ballygawley has been the most successful piece of road building in Northern Ireland since I was a kid. It really did remove a tremendous bottleneck, becoming the gateway to the heart of County Tyrone. It is terrific. However, to my mind, the case has not been made for turning the section from Ballygawley to Strabane into a dual carriageway. The long-standing policy was to relieve congestion by constructing bypasses. In particular, I am thinking of Newtownstewart. I remember having to drive through Newtownstewart regularly, and it was a good reason to go to Donegal by way of Toomebridge. However, that has been dealt with.

I hear the figures involved. Will the Minister tell us whether, if we go for a dualling and bypass upgrade, the Southern Government will honour their commitment to provide a proportion of the money? If they do not, it will put a new slant on the whole thing and distort the figures terribly. We might have to look at it again.

I am told that, if the full dual carriageway proposal is to go ahead, it will affect 419 landowners and 282 working farms. I saw the dramatic effect that the A4 extension had on landowners and farming as it progressed. I am sure that Friends of the Earth and so on will come up with a list of objections the length of your arm, and no doubt we will hear shortly from Mr Agnew with a condensed version of those objections. No doubt, also, some of them will be valid, but I come back to my original point: what is the point of the proposal if somebody is able to produce a petition of concern — a political injunction — to block whatever decision is made? We should be able to do better than that, and, so early in the new mandate, it is disappointing to see that sort of situation develop. I will leave it at that. We support the amendment.

Mr McElduff: I fully support the motion. There should be no dilution of or delay in the A5 dual carriageway project. As has already been said, it is an absolutely crucial piece of road infrastructure, essential to economic regeneration west of the Bann and in the north-west of Ireland generally. I, too, welcome the

Irish Government's financial commitment. Of course, any landowner or property owner who is inconvenienced or discommoded by the project deserves a proper hearing and compensation, which should be worked out with full respect for those affected.

11.15 am

If there is any dilution or delay in the scheme, it will, for me and for very many other people, certainly in County Tyrone, be history revisited, denuding Tyrone, Derry and Donegal of essential infrastructure. The project is a road to opportunity west of the Bann and in the north-west. A prerequisite of economic development is proper infrastructure. We do not have it west of the Bann for historical reasons, which I will revisit. It is essential for investors and tourists and for public sector jobs that people have speed and ease of access and egress into and out of areas west of the Bann. It is an indispensable project. An old teacher of mine shared a thought with me yesterday that it is sine qua non: it is non-negotiable, because, if you do this, you are simply revisiting history. It is more like the old Stormont than the new.

In 1963, Henry Benson produced the Benson report, which was commissioned by the old Stormont Administration. The report stated that the two lines to Derry would be closed. Of course, the Stormont Administration of the time cherry-picked it. The Campaign for Social Justice at the time accused the unionist Government of political mismanagement and asserted:

"There were two separate railway lines to Derry. In the interests of economy it became necessary to close one of them. The one to be 'axed' traversed the western region. This has left Fermanagh, Tyrone and practically all of the county of Derry with no railway whatever."

In March 1964, the Ulster Transport Authority issued a notice to wholly terminate the line from Portadown to Derry via Omagh. In April 1964, the "big house" unionist William Craig met Tyrone County Council and promised that work would begin on the Dungannon bypass in 1965, with the construction of an Omagh bypass beginning in December 1966. He gave verbal promises of a motorway beyond Dungannon and an extension to Omagh. That was vigorously opposed by people, including working-class unionists, who were dismissed by the "big house" unionist Bill Craig. Tyrone County Council challenged the decision at a transport

tribunal, but it was upheld by Justice Lowry on 22 February 1965, and all the railway lines were sold off. That was a crime of the old Stormont Government. It was rooted in discrimination, and it had catastrophic consequences for people living west of the Bann.

Mr Byrne: Will the Member give way?

Mr McElduff: I will not give way, because I am on the A5 dual carriageway, and I have priority on this road now. I will not be giving way to other road users in this debate.

We should not, in the new Stormont, divide along unionist/nationalist lines over essential infrastructure for west of the Bann or the north-west of Ireland. It smacks of the old “big house” unionism and of discrimination.

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr McElduff: I will not.

It perpetuates historical and present economic realities. In a way, it reveals a mindset of economic apartheid west and east of the Bann. Do it at your peril because the people west of the Bann and people in the north-west of Ireland are citizens with full and equal rights. We do not want “big house” unionism to re-emerge in 2011.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Mr Hussey, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mr Hussey: I begin by thanking the constituents of West Tyrone for returning me as one of their Members of the Assembly for the current period. I say “one” because there were rumours in Tyrone that I had actually won two seats, but that was only the suggestion of a political opponent, who said that it would take two seats to hold me. In all seriousness, I am delighted to be here as an Ulster Unionist representative and re-take the seat that was held by my brother Derek, who represented my party here in various parliamentary roles until 2007.

It is also fitting that my maiden speech to the House should be about the A5. My mother, who will be 83 in September, was born in a bungalow in Conywarren, which, if it were still standing, would overlook the main A5 as it leaves Omagh on its way to the maiden city of Londonderry. It is to her that I dedicate this speech, as, without her strength and determination, my brothers and sisters would not have had the strong family unit

that we have. My mother was widowed in 1972 when I was 13, the youngest of six children. Through her devotion, we came through the worst of times. My mother was and is a strong Ulster Unionist, and I would not want to face her down in any political argument. Compared with her, I am just a kitten, as you will see over the coming months and years.

Lord Morrow: Some kitten.

Mr Hussey: Your eyesight is obviously not that good. I also want to point out to my colleague from West Tyrone that I am not a “big house” unionist but a “modest bungalow” unionist.

As Members will know, the A5 is the main route from Aughnacloy in County Tyrone to Ballygawley, Ballygawley to Omagh, Newtownstewart, Sion Mills, Strabane, Ballymagorry, Bready, Magheramason and then crossing into County Londonderry and on to New Buildings and on to the maiden city. For many years, I travelled that route on my journeys from Omagh to Belfast and Londonderry, and there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that there is a need for an upgrade of the road. However, the question must be asked: at what cost? Is the spending of millions of pounds on the project justifiable? I have been involved in local politics for several years now, and the famous political quote is “all politics is local”.

I have spoken to people such as Alfie Cooper, James McFarland, Allan Armstrong, John Dunbar, Ciaran McLean, Caroline Porter, Billy Caldwell and Irwin Shortt. Those names might not mean anything to the vast majority of people in this House, but they will be affected by the road. Alfie worked with me for several years, and I last met him at a public debate on the subject of the A5. He pointed out to the assembled gathering that he had bought a house in the country, and he was prepared to pay a substantial sum for it because it was his dream home where he, his wife and family would have a country lifestyle without all the hustle and bustle of urban dwellers. However, the road would come within a couple of hundred yards of his home. His dreams have been dashed, and he is entitled to no compensation.

James McFarland is the son of a former Ulster Unionist councillor, Crawford McFarland. James runs a farm on the outskirts of Omagh. He spent many years building up the farm that was started by his father. Like most farmers, he dreamed of handing the farm to his son until he was told that his farm was to be split by the new

road. Additional miles would have to be travelled to get from one side of his farm to the other, all at his expense.

Ciaran McLean is an environmentalist, for want of a better word, and he has used many words to describe me. He does not like the idea of additional carbon fuels being discharged in building a road that cannot be justified and more pollution draining into our air for the sake of it. Ciaran made comments that I sat on my hands when it came to the issue of the A5 because I abstained when it came to the vote in Omagh District Council. However, I abstained because I am in favour of an upgrade of the A5, but I am not in favour of the proposals that have been put to the former Minister, Conor Murphy.

Caroline is a Facebook friend of mine who keeps me informed of developments. She is not afraid to voice her concerns when she sees problems ahead for her family or her neighbours. Ordinary Tyrone people have everyday lives to lead but know that the proposed A5 will change their lives forever.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Hussey: I support the amendment. The road cannot go ahead as you cannot square a circle.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Mr Eastwood, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mr Eastwood: I am honoured to represent the people of Derry in the House, following in the footsteps of SDLP representatives such as John Hume, John Tierney, Mark Durkan, Mary Bradley and Pól Callaghan. It is with great pleasure that I deliver my maiden speech to the House on the motion relating to the A5 dual carriageway. Let me state my unequivocal support, and that of my party, for the motion, and I commend the Member for tabling it at this time.

Major infrastructural projects often attract most attention because of their headline cost. The fiscal figures become the main story. In the case of the A5, we should focus on other figures and impacts. An estimated 390,000 people will benefit massively from the greater connectivity provided by the dual carriageway. The construction sector west of the Bann will receive a long-overdue boost. The project will help to ensure that economic output from my

constituency of Derry, and the north-west region generally, will begin exponentially to deliver its true business potential. The list goes on, with increased opportunities in tourism, agriculture and right across the business sectors, creating jobs that are so desperately required. Furthermore, I am sure that the whole House will agree that the totality of those impressive facts and figures is matched by the hugely positive implications that the A5 will have for road safety.

However, there is a narrative that all those statistics tend to miss. As we know, this island was severely buffeted by an economic tsunami that caused real hardships, particularly for ordinary people distant from the convulsions of globalised financial markets. We should collectively express confidence that as a people, economy and country, we will recover. A large part of that recovery should be manifested within the logic that we can no longer afford to run two economies on this one small island. It is for that reason that the financial commitment of successive Irish Governments to this and other infrastructural projects in the North is so welcome. The completion of the A5 will continue the major road network between our cities and the capital. That should be seen as a first step along the path to a fully integrated island economy.

It is also important to emphasise that a sustainable recovery should be built with a firm commitment to balanced regional development. The A5 dual carriageway should be used as a marker, a symbol, to guarantee that Derry and the north-west are no longer left behind when it comes to governmental expenditure. For too long, my city of Derry has been at the heart of Ireland's history, but at the fringe of its economic expansion. If that trend is not quickly reversed, the Executive and Assembly will have failed.

The Minister for Regional Development should hear the clear message from today's debate. There should be no excuse for delaying the funding of the A5. When it comes to that road project, the mantra of limited resources does not qualify. Basic economic common sense dictates that capital expenditure and investment are precisely what is needed in these recessionary times.

The peoples of Derry, Donegal and Tyrone have a huge role to play in the recovery of the island. This road will, I hope, play a major role in

providing the necessary infrastructure to allow them to do so.

Mr Allister: I have said it before, and I will say it again: this is not a road project, it is a political project. You can tell that by examining its genesis.

Any regular road programme evolves through a process, which can be quite protracted. Roads Service studies the usage, needs and deficiencies, road traffic figures, accident figures — all in the context of a strategic overview — and it reaches an opinion that a particular road deserves and requires to be prioritised. When a major road is concerned, the project finds its way by due process into the regional transportation strategy.

Ask any of those questions of this project, and you will get a blank sheet of paper. As far as this project is concerned, none of that happened. Instead, it was plucked out of the air on 17 July 2007 at a North/South Ministerial Council meeting and implanted as a priority project. None of the basic qualifying procedures were followed. There was no business case, costing case or infrastructural study. There was nothing.

That is why it patently is, above all else, a political project, which is confirmed today by the sectarian stance of Sinn Féin in filing a petition of concern against the amendment.

11.30 am

Lord Morrow: And of the SDLP

Mr Allister: And of the SDLP. That has given rise to the tit-for-tat necessity for a petition of concern against the motion and demonstrates and underscores that, for those who are so adamant about the road, it is not a roads project but a political project. That is why it is a flawed project.

I make it clear that I am not opposed in the least to the upgrading of the A5. In another place, I represented for five years the west of the Province as well as the east, and I am well aware of the need for adequate road infrastructure. However, the project, in comparison with others, fails the test. Across the Province, there is an uncompleted A26 and the need for multiple village and town bypasses in places such as Magherafelt, Cookstown and Cullybackey, not to mention the A2. Those are all to be parked while this project is prioritised, even though, empirically, they have far greater

needs. Given that, one cannot but conclude that this is a political project.

Yes, let us upgrade the A5, but let us do it rationally, sensibly and according to need, not according to politics. That is why we are in the position today of being on the track to wasting valuable resources in the most austere of times on a single project, while everything else falls by the wayside. I remind some who have been raising issues of concern about the project today that it was their party that let it get this far. Were the DUP Ministers asleep at the wheel on 17 July 2007 at their first North/South Ministerial Council meeting?

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: I will give way in a moment. Were they asleep at the wheel when the Executive subsequently approved the project? Either they were asleep at the wheel or some who have spoken today do not agree with what they approved. Which is it?

Lord Morrow: I am still confused about whether Mr Allister supports the amendment. He has yet to say that he does. He has told us that he does not support the proposal. Mr Allister, you point the finger at us. It is most ironic that Mr Allister gives the Ulster Unionists a bye ball. Were they fast asleep at the Executive meeting? Our Ministers were not fast asleep, and that is why we are having the debate today.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Allister: Remember that it is the DUP that tells us that it has the steering wheel. Any unionist who sat at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting, whether Ulster Unionist or DUP, and allowed this to pass over them and then woke up later has a lot to answer for, whichever party they subscribe to.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he accept that the decisions were made at meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council in sectoral format, at which the two representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive were the Minister for Regional Development and the Minister of the Environment? Who held the position of Minister of the Environment over the past four years? It was Arlene Foster, Edwin Poots and one other. How did they allow that to slip through?

Mr Allister: It is quite clear to me, as it is to any objective observer, that the fingerprints of the DUP are all over the project, just as much as the fingerprints of Sinn Féin are. Together, as in so much else, they have produced a shambolic, dysfunctional proposal, which, I trust —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Allister: I trust that it will now have the brakes put on it by a Minister, who, I trust, will have the courage to face up to what —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to the debate. I have asked my officials to take note of the Hansard report, and I have been taking copious notes of the advice that Members have given and the statements that they have made. I will attempt to pick up on some points at the end, time permitting. Should that not be the case, I may have to write to individual Members.

I note the concerns and comments expressed by Members and particularly welcome the debate on the A5 western transport corridor project. At the outset, I must register my deep disappointment and concern at the decision by Sinn Féin and the SDLP to table a petition of concern against the amendment. That is contrary to the spirit in which the debate needs to take place, and it politicises the issue in a way that is not helpful to finding a constructive way forward. I also share Mr Lunn's concerns and regret the use of that tactic so early in the life of this Assembly.

Let me clearly state that I welcome and support improvements to the A5, the A8 and other arterial routes across Northern Ireland. As Minister for Regional Development, I wish to see improvements across the strategic road network that will enhance safety, reduce journey times, provide value for money and support economic growth. I want a selection of schemes to be based on an analysis of their contribution to strategic objectives rather than on purely political considerations, and I trust that the House will agree and support that important guiding principle.

The need for improvement to the roads infrastructure in Northern Ireland has been recognised by both the Executive and the Irish

Government. Many of you will also be aware that after the St Andrews Agreement, the Irish Government and the Executive agreed at the North/South Ministerial Council plenary sitting in July 2007 to bring forward projects to provide dual carriageway standard on the A5 Aughnacloy to north-west gateway and on the A8 Belfast to Larne routes. You will also be aware that the Irish Government have committed to making a significant contribution. Through the North/South Ministerial Council a very challenging programme, leading to the start of construction in 2012 and completion in 2015, was agreed. A schedule of the anticipated key milestones and related payments from the Irish Government has also been agreed.

I advise Members that, to date, development of the project has remained on programme. An initial payment of approximately £8 million to the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund was made by the Irish Government in November 2009 towards development costs, and, subject to final approval at the North/South Ministerial Council plenary sitting in June, a further £11 million is anticipated later this year. That commitment to make a contribution towards those two roads projects was reaffirmed in January 2011 by the Irish Government at a plenary sitting of the North/South Ministerial Council. I also understand that at a recent conference of the Institute for British-Irish Studies, the new Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland, Enda Kenny, stated that his Government will honour that commitment. In addition, the investment strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018 includes the dualling of those two roads, among others. That is the historical, factual position.

The A5 running from Londonderry to the land frontier at Aughnacloy forms the western transport corridor and has been identified as one of the five key transport corridors in the regional development strategy for Northern Ireland 2025. My Department's long-term aim is to provide dual carriageway-standard roads on those important transport corridors. The A5 also facilitates strategic cross-border links at Aughnacloy, Strabane and Londonderry and connects the new dual carriageway to the A4 south-western transport corridor at Ballygawley. The existing road comprises a variety of single carriageway roads of differing width with intermittent stretches of climbing lanes and overtaking opportunities. It is deficient in relation to carriageway cross-section, forward visibility and alignment when assessed against

modern-day standards. It carries a mix of local and strategic traffic, and there can be considerable driver frustration. Over its 88 km length, the road passes through various towns and villages, with single carriageway bypasses at Omagh, Strabane and Newtownstewart.

The A5 scheme as currently proposed comprises 85 km of new trunk road, of which 82 km will be new offline dual carriageway. The scheme terminates with short lengths of single carriageway bypassing New Buildings at its northern and southern ends before tying into the existing A5 south of Aughnacloy.

Although much of the A5 carries significant volumes of traffic, it is recognised that the minimum traffic volume that is recommended for a dual carriageway is not met on the short section of the A5 between Ballygawley and the land frontier at Aughnacloy. Under the current proposal, and subject to satisfactory completion of the statutory processes, it is anticipated that construction could commence in 2012 and be completed in 2015. The A5 western transport corridor dualling project is estimated to cost between £650 million and £850 million. To date, approximately £35 million has been invested in the design and development of the project.

Design of the scheme has been under way since November 2007, when Roads Service appointed lead consultants Mouchel to assist in taking forward the A5 dualling project. Throughout the scheme's development, my Department has sought to ensure that those who are directly affected by the project, the general public and elected representatives have been kept informed of progress. Public events were held at four locations along the route in April 2008, February 2009, July 2009 and November 2010. They were attended by over 6,000 people in total. Therefore, there is significant local interest.

The selected procurement process was to adopt an early contractor involvement approach, with contractors appointed earlier in the process than is typical. That had the benefit of shortening the development period and gave the construction contractors the opportunity to provide innovation and expertise to the design process. To facilitate development and delivery, the project was split into three sections. That led to the appointment in November 2009 of three contracting consortia to the project.

Those consortia include a number of major international and local contractors.

In July 2009, the preferred route for the scheme was announced and the preferred options report was published. After the public consultation and receipt of additional technical information, the route was refined and taken forward as the proposed scheme, which is the subject of the draft statutory Orders and environmental statement published in November 2010. The formal consultation period that followed produced a significant number of objections. It was decided to hold a public inquiry to consider relevant issues. The public inquiry, which commenced on 9 May 2011, is in progress and will run for around eight weeks, including the beginning of July.

Lord Morrow: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Kennedy: No; I have to make progress. The inquiry is being held under an independent inspector at a number of locations along the route to make it more accessible to objectors.

Clearly, a project of this scale cannot be constructed without significant impact on areas that it passes through and on people who live on or near the route. It is very important that people's concerns are given serious and fair consideration. The current public inquiry provides an opportunity for people to articulate their concerns. I encourage people who have personal or business concerns, many of which will be farming-related, to explain them carefully to the public inquiry inspector. I remind members that around 1,200 hectares of land will be required for construction of the proposed scheme, of which 250 hectares will be required temporarily during the construction phase. That affects 419 separate landowners, of whom 282 own agricultural holdings that are actively farmed. The proposed scheme will also necessitate the demolition of seven residential properties. Clearly, the proposed scheme will have a big impact.

I have instructed Roads Service to ensure that all reasonable measures are being taken to investigate the impact of the scheme on people. The environmental assessment has identified and assessed impacts on designated sites and environmentally sensitive areas. It should be noted that the proposed road will cross a special area of conservation of the River Foyle and its tributaries. Where that occurs, the scheme has been designed to avoid and minimise impacts. Depending on the outcome of

the public inquiry, more detailed accommodation works may need to be discussed with individual landowners.

My engineers have provided their professional opinion on the relative merits of upgrading the existing A5, providing a dual carriageway or an online two-plus-one carriageway. Road safety is a key issue on the A5, and it has been proven that dual carriageways are inherently safer than single carriageways. The existing A5 passes through many settlements along its length, and that has journey time and road safety implications for road users. It also has an environmental impact on residents of settlements.

11.45 am

I need to make progress, Mr Deputy Speaker. I believe that all those issues and arguments will and should get a proper airing at the public inquiry, and I will reflect on the inspector's views and recommendations when I receive his final report.

I turn now to my Department's budget allocation. Of the £1.2 billion allocated to Roads Service for capital spend over the four-year Budget period, almost two thirds, which is almost £800 million, is allocated to the two major road schemes, namely the A5 Londonderry to Aghnacloy and the A8 Belfast to Larne dual carriageways. I am also conscious that improvements to the strategic road network support the regional development strategy's vision of a modern, safe transport system that will enhance access to regional facilities and services.

I have received numerous requests to meet a wide range of bodies interested in progressing strategic road improvement schemes across Northern Ireland. Those requests include schemes for improvements to the A6 route between Belfast and Londonderry, the A26 at the Frosses and the A2 at Greenisland; the widening of the Sydenham bypass; the York Street flyover; and many bypasses of towns and villages throughout Northern Ireland. I will continue to listen to opinions from across the country before forming a view as to the way forward.

I indicated earlier that the public inquiry into the A5 is in progress, and I do not wish to interfere with due process and pre-empt the inquiry's findings. In conjunction with the independent inspector's report and recommendations, I

intend to consider proposed investment levels across my Department, including the impact of Budget 2010 on the strategic roads programme. In the intervening period, I will consult with my counterpart in the Irish Government to discuss and confirm their position on their contribution, and I will discuss funding implications with my Executive colleagues.

Finally, I await with interest the inspector's report and recommendations from the current public inquiry on the A5 route. I want to place on record my commitment as Minister for Regional Development to improving the A5 route and other parts of the strategic route network. Those improvements will help to improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists, motorists and freight hauliers and will help with the aim of improving our economy, which is an objective that everyone in the House should be able to support.

I will move quickly to some of the contributions from Members. I have outlined my severe disappointment and concern at the use of the petition of concern by the sponsors of the motion, assisted by the SDLP. I very much regret it, and I hope very much that we can make progress constructively on all the issues in a more positive way.

I thank Mr Spratt for his attendance and contribution as Chair of the Committee. I look forward to a positive working relationship with him. Lord Morrow's speech became a who's who of who in the Ulster Unionist Party said what. He said little about the DUP's view on the issue. I assure him that I am not given to knee-jerk reactions. I will not be stampeded on this issue. I will look carefully at the route in question and at the land issues that he and others raised.

I agree with Mr Beggs, and I have highlighted the difficulty involved and the importance of other projects sponsored and put forward by Members. I will consider those.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Minister bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Kennedy: Finally, it is interesting that the Alliance Party had no position, but, as it is a middle-of-the-road party, I would not have expected anything else.

Mr Buchanan: There is no doubt that the issue has had a good hearing right around the House this morning. I support the amendment. My

colleague and the proposer of the amendment, Lord Morrow, very ably laid before the House all the accusations made against my party and all the commitments made by the Minister's party, and called on the Minister to step up to the plate on this occasion. We will, of course, wait with interest to see the outcome of what the Minister does in the future.

I do not think that anyone will disagree that the roads infrastructure in the west of the Province needs an injection of investment. We have continually lobbied for that for many years and will continue to do so until there is a proper roads infrastructure in the west. There are many reasons why an upgrade is essential. First, we want to see the economic infrastructure in west Tyrone improved. Secondly, we want to see greater and more employment opportunities in the west of the Province, so we need a proper road network to get people in and out and to encourage businesses to set up there. Thirdly, we want to see safer conditions for road users, because we cannot ignore the unfortunate fact that a number of people, motorists and pedestrians, have lost their lives and that the contributing factor in many of those cases was the frustration of drivers who, perhaps because they were in a hurry and had no place to get by, took a chance, and then, unfortunately, someone ended up losing their life.

Although road improvements are essential, we must always endeavour to ensure that the right balance is struck and that we get value for money. Although we may help others, we need to be very careful not to put the farming community out of business completely, because that is really what the proposed new road would do. If we move in that direction, many in the farming community will have no alternative but to go out of business. I have no doubt that, if we proceed with the current proposals, we will lose a lot of farmers in west Tyrone who have strengthened and built up their livelihood.

Any new road upgrade or improvements will always cause an element of pain; we have no doubt about that. However, under the current proposals, the acres of prime farmland that we see when we drive into west Tyrone and out the other side would be torn apart and ripped up, and the farmers affected would have to pay the price. Mr Byrne mentioned the number of jobs that would be created by building the new road, but he did not say how many jobs would be lost

in the farming community and industry and how many people would be put out of business.

The level of consultation with the farming community has been abysmal, to say the least. Mr Hussey mentioned some of the farming community in Omagh whom he spoke to. I know farmers in the Omagh area who would be affected by the new road, which would run directly through the middle of their farm, dividing it, with the farm home on one side and the farm buildings on the other. That is totally unacceptable, yet the company concerned has completely refused to take the matter into account and to move the road to the other side of the dwelling in order to keep the farmyard and home intact. Another farmer with 300 milking cows had his request for an underpass refused, even though that would have allowed his animals to move from one side of the new road to the other. Again, the working relationship with those people has been abysmal, to say the least. I could go on about the way in which the farming community would be affected, but there is no time.

There are direct, practical problems that we have been dealing with on the ground.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Buchanan: The economic climate has changed, and that must be taken into consideration. I call on the Minister to consider all of the options and alternatives to the scheme and to bring forward a road that is fit for purpose —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time.

Mr Buchanan: — that is value for money —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

Mr Buchanan: — and that serves all of the people in the community.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis na daoine a labhair ar maidin. I thank all Members who spoke here this morning, in particular the two who made their maiden speeches. I welcome the fact that the Minister spoke and want to address some of what he said initially. I welcome his announcement to the House that the programme for this project remains on course and his restatement that the Dublin Government have reaffirmed the funding that they will give towards this. That is good to know. I reassure the Minister that our party

will be there to support him as he takes this forward.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I strongly urge him to read the Hansard report of the debate. I set out, fairly and squarely, the position that I inherited as Minister and how I intend to proceed on this issue. I ask him, rather than interpreting my speech, to take time to read it more carefully.

Mr McCartney: I listened very carefully to what you had to say, and my words stand. You may feel that you have inherited something. I am telling you that, as I read it —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Make your remarks through the Chair.

Mr McCartney: Through the Chair, sorry.

Pat Doherty, who proposed the motion, talked about there being no dilution and no delay. I say very clearly that in no way should that undermine the need for, the outcome of or the inputs to a public inquiry. There have been many, many public inquiries in the past number of years. That did not stop Members bringing debates to the Assembly, nor did it stop Members making observations. For Mr Beggs to say today that somehow this was ill timed or ill thought out —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Please, I have already given way once and I am not giving way again. You have had your say and I want to have mine; I do not want to be interrupted all the time. You did make that point; you more or less said that this was ill timed and ill considered as a result of that.

No dilution, for us, is very simple. This should be, and in my opinion will be, a dual carriageway from Derry to Aughnacloy. That has been campaigned for and articulated and, at last, is on the point of delivery. In the past number of years in Derry, there has been a regeneration process hosted by Ilex, which is trying to create much-needed jobs and is a chance to end regional imbalance, disparity and inequalities. There has been input from all the parties, the business sector, the civic sector and the community and voluntary sector. There has been input from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and INI. Through that regeneration process, I have not heard a single dissenting voice in the north-west arguing against the need for a dual carriageway.

The Executive, of which people here are members, have said that job creation is at the heart of the Programme for Government. They have said that the way to do that is to tackle regional disparity and that the way to tackle that is through good infrastructure. We have seen a lot of political and petty point-scoring this morning, and those who are arguing against this do a disservice to the people whom this road will service.

When the proposer of the amendment spoke, we had a rerun of the many quotes and perhaps misquotes made in the local press.

Lord Morrow: No misquotes.

Mr McCartney: I said “perhaps misquotes”; other people said that there were misquotes.

I want to say something that I have heard a number of times from a number of Members. I was on the Regional Development Committee for three years. During that time, a number of roads schemes were being introduced and the Minister or the Department came to the Committee to give us an insight into what was being done. In nearly every case, it was always lobbied that more should be done. I think that this is the first roads scheme that I have been part of where people are being offered a dual carriageway but are actually talking about dumbing it down. We have all seen good roads schemes being completed, and the first questions on all our lips seem to be: why was the road not made longer, why did they not consider dual carriageways and why did they not make the road wider, because, two or three years down the line, more work will have to be done and more money will have to be spent due to bad planning?

This is the first time that I have heard people saying that they do not want a dual carriageway and that they actually want climbing lanes. In the past, you have always heard people asking why there should be two-in-one rather than dual carriageways. I want to put it on record that this is a first.

12.00 noon

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: No, I have already said that I am not giving way. I apologise, but I will not be interrupted again.

Roy Beggs called the project extravagant. I think that we should be thankful for a £400 million contribution towards a road scheme

rather than describe it as extravagant. He talked about other road schemes going to the wall as a result of this. Again, this is about priorities. He talked about the Dungiven bypass. From my recollection of what is on the public record, the Dungiven bypass will go ahead with the timeline already outlined by a previous Minister. This Minister will certainly have an input to that. He will be lobbied by the people in the north-west because we see those two road schemes as being vital to regeneration and tackling regional disparity, which is a priority of the Minister.

I think that Joe Byrne was speaking for West Tyrone. He talked about the strategic importance of the road and linked it to the national development plan. As regards the idea that this road scheme came out of thin air, there has been demand for this road for a long time.

Barry McElduff made an excellent point. Those of us who live in the north-west look at our rail network and see how it has been depleted. He said that the Assembly had the opportunity to tackle at least one aspect of regional disparity and that we should not have a repeat of history. If the Minister does not proceed as he should, we will have a deficit of roads in the north-west, which will have an impact on job creation. Rather than doing something to create jobs, we will talk ourselves into a position where people are saying that we should not build this road and, in four or five years' time, will be complaining that the Executive did not deliver on their job creation initiatives.

Ross Hussey made his maiden speech, and I welcome the fact that he made it today. The fact that he abstained rather than voted for the scheme is a matter for himself, but I think that he was out of step with the rest of the council and the rest of opinion in the north-west. Similarly, Colum Eastwood is a former mayor of the city and will well understand the llex regeneration project in particular and the absolute need for the scheme and the priority that it has been given. I have heard Ministers at the Dispatch Box telling us that one of the reasons why people who seek to invest in the North of Ireland do not do so is the poor infrastructure. Indeed, Dublin Ministers have said the same about people who are trying to invest in Donegal. We are saying that this is the way to create jobs. If people think that creating a number of climbing lanes from Derry to Aghnacloy is the answer to the problem, I do not know where they are living. I know that Mr Hussey has travelled the road, but the challenge

to those who say that there is no need for the dual carriageway is to travel along the road on a Friday afternoon, when they will see that it is absolutely needed.

Jim Allister said that this is not a roads project but a political project. I can imagine him stuck in a traffic jam, looking out the window and saying: "This is not really a road traffic jam; this is a political traffic jam". However, if it did take new politics, a new political reality on the island of Ireland, to make these types of things happen, that should be welcomed. There is an absolute need for this road that I cannot stress enough. I think that I speak for many Members, particularly those who represent the north-west, when I say that the need for this road is paramount. We need it.

I will finish by referring to Tom Buchanan's point. He made legitimate points regarding the concerns of the farming community, particularly in his constituency of West Tyrone. I was on the Committee for Regional Development, and I watched this scheme. I have also been following it since leaving the Committee, and I think that the contact between the Department and people with those types of concern has been good. Tom and I have said before that every road, house and new piece of infrastructure built has an impact on people, but, when we think about the collective good and the will of our people, we can see that this scheme must proceed. I do not think that we should waste the opportunity to do this in the right way. I, my party, the SDLP and, indeed, representatives of other parties across the Chamber —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr McCartney: — support this scheme in other Chambers. Therefore, I think that we should go ahead. I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I put the Question on the amendment, I remind the House that the vote will be on a cross-community basis.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 58; Noes 38.

AYES

UNIONIST:

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree,

Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

OTHER:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Buchanan and Mr G Robinson.

NOES**NATIONALIST:**

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lynch and Mr McCartney.

Total votes	96	Total Ayes	58	[60.4%]
Nationalist Votes	38	Nationalist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Unionist Votes	49	Unionist Ayes	49	[100%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	9	[100%]

Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now vote on the motion. I again remind Members that the vote will be on a cross-community basis.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 38; Noes 58.

AYES**NATIONALIST:**

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan,

Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lynch and Mr McCartney.

NOES**UNIONIST:**

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

OTHER:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Buchanan and Mr G Robinson.

Total votes	96	Total Ayes	38	[39.6%]
Nationalist Votes	38	Nationalist Ayes	38	[100%]
Unionist Votes	49	Unionist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

Main Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The sitting was suspended at 12.36 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 11 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

City of Culture 2013

1. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what events and locations are planned in the lead up to the Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 to ensure inclusivity. (AQO 31/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I am glad to be here as Minister for my first Question Time. Plans for the 2013 City of Culture are being progressed by the Culture Company, Ilex Urban Regeneration Company and Derry City Council. Inclusivity was included in the successful bid and will be a guiding principle across the approach to programming. The board of the new Culture Company embodies the principle of inclusivity, as it includes representation from many disciplines and from across the community.

Mr Campbell: Does the Minister understand the concept of ensuring that the wider community is not just included but is content with occasions in which her Department will be involved, such as the United Kingdom City of Culture events? Does she appreciate the substantial difficulties that were placed in the way of that inclusion by her appointment of a ministerial adviser who was convicted not of a mistake but of a cold-blooded murder?

Ms Ní Chuilín: That substantive question will be answered in my response to question 14. I am sure that the Member has seen the Order Paper. In relation to inclusivity, I have asked officials to engage with the new Culture Company and stakeholders in Derry to support and develop proposals for events and projects associated with 2013. I intend to meet representatives of the Culture Company and other stakeholder organisations in the near future to hear how the plans for the year are developing.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the question from the Member for East Derry. The Minister has indicated her willingness to meet stakeholders. Given the significance and importance of this event, and to maximise the tourism potential of the north-west, will she meet a cross-party delegation of MLAs to discuss those matters in order to accelerate and maximise the importance of such a huge event to the area?

Ms Ní Chuilín: In short, I would be happy to meet a delegation from Derry City to discuss the City of Culture and the events and activities that will be rolled out. I look forward to that invitation.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister outline the potential job opportunities that will be created because of Londonderry's winning bid to be the first UK City of Culture in 2013?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The potential for jobs and investment as a result of winning the bid has to be recognised. I look forward to seeing the plans for the City of Culture initiatives and events and to seeing what economic spin-offs can be derived as a collective, because that city and, indeed, the north-west, has been deprived of funding over many years.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire go dtí a post, agus gabhaim buíochas léi as a cuid freagraí. I welcome the new Minister to her post. The new peace bridge over the Foyle, which is due to open on 24 June at a cost of £14.7 million, runs from the heart of Derry city across the river but ends up at Ebrington, where there is no current development. At what stage is that development?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, Cathal, for the question. If I am wrong, I can provide a further answer in writing, but I assume that the Member is referring to the art gallery in Ebrington. Ilex has produced a strategic outline case for the key cultural centre at the Ebrington site. When the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) submitted the strategic outline case to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) in December 2010, DFP raised a number of issues. The strategic outline case is being revised by Ilex on the basis that the project will be taken forward in phases, with phase 1 being complete in time for the 2013 celebrations. Current indications on costs and other details have yet to be brought forward but will be in that plan. I am happy to pass on any

additional information that Cathal or any other Member might need.

North West 200

2. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if she would consider requesting, from the Department for Regional Development, additional road closure hours for the North West 200 if asked to do so by the organisers.

(AQO 32/11-15)

5. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans she has to help further develop the North West 200 as a premier international event.

(AQO 35/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will group questions 2 and 5. Again with your permission, before answering, I put on record — I am sure that the entire Assembly will join me — my sincere condolences to the family and friends of the three racers who died in the past week in incidents at the TT races in the Isle of Man. Sidecar racer Bill Currie and his passenger Kevin Morgan, both from England, were killed during last Tuesday's practice session, and our own Derek Brien, from Bellewstown, County Meath, was killed yesterday during the Supersport race.

I would consider supporting an application to the Department for Regional Development for additional road closure hours for any motorcycle road race only once I was satisfied that ongoing public concerns about safety standards in the sport generally had been fully and satisfactorily addressed. I would also wish to be assured that an increase in hours would be acceptable to all relevant sporting interests and would contribute to the delivery of my targets for sport as set out in my sports strategy, Sport Matters.

Mr G Robinson: As the North West 200 is such a major economic and tourist event in Northern Ireland, will the Minister give an assurance that she will assist the organisers in every way possible to expand the event at every opportunity?

Ms Ní Chuilín: In short, I will, to develop tourism potential, notwithstanding the concerns that I have already raised. There are safety concerns, and we need to get a balance between addressing them and making sure that we tap

into the economic and tourism potential of the North West 200.

Mr Hilditch: Will the Minister tell us, in light of the various problems that were suffered this year, what additional resources have been identified in her Department to assist the organisers for next year?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am undertaking an exercise in the Department to see whether there are additional resources for many projects across my portfolio. At the minute, I cannot confirm what, if any, additional resources are available, but, once I have received that information, I will take on board and answer the Member's question.

Mr G Kelly: I, too, welcome the Member for North Belfast to her first Question Time. How much funding has been given to motorsport over the past two years?

Ms Ní Chuilín: In 2009, my Department earmarked up to £2 million to help motorsport to improve health and safety at venues here. An approved business case for the funding was developed by Sport NI together with the umbrella group for motorsport, the 2&4 Wheel Motor Sport Steering Group. As a result, more than £1 million was allocated to improvement works and dedicated circuits in Kirkistown, Nutt's Corner and Bishopscourt. A further £219,000 was made available for the purchase of road safety equipment, and an additional £155,000 has been spent on urgent safety work at the North West 200 and Cookstown 100 circuits. Another 33 projects and 25 motorsport clubs have also received assistance.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to continue to rise in their place if they are interested in asking a supplementary question.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for her replies thus far. Is she prepared to allocate more of her Department's budget to the North West 200 should the event be expanded?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sorry, I did not hear the last part of the question.

Mr Cree: Should the event increase and become greater, is she prepared to consider more funds for it?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I refer the Member to the answer that I gave to Mr Hilditch. I am looking at what funds are available in the Department.

If the event is expanded and if the tourism potential and economic drivers for that area are increased, I will look at that. However, it all depends on available funds.

Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich

3. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the refurbishment and extension to the Irish language and cultural centre, Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, Belfast.
(AQO 33/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Work on the refurbishment and extension of the Cultúrlann began in September 2010. Good progress is being made on site, and it is anticipated that the project will be completed in the summer of 2011, with an official opening in September this year. Indeed, I visited the Cultúrlann on Saturday after the unveiling of Teanga, which is a new public artwork. I was very impressed with the work thus far.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like other Members, I take this opportunity to welcome the Minister to her first Question Time. I wish her well in her post. The Minister is aware of the positive impact that the Cultúrlann has on the community in the west of the city. I am delighted that it is getting recognised and being refurbished. Will the Minister outline some of the potential that she sees Cultúrlann having on the local community and the economy of west Belfast and further afield?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy to do that. Prior to the commencement of construction, 40 people were employed in the Cultúrlann. The centre attracts 80,000 visitors annually, many of whom are foreign tourists, so we get the benefit from the growth in cultural tourism. Almost 20,000 people attended arts events at Cultúrlann this year. There is a multidisciplinary, all-year-round programme that promotes the Irish language and arts. There are almost 4,000 participants in arts programmes each year. The theatre and workspace is also available for hire for public and other events, including arts and theatre groups, as well as workshops and coffee shops.

Mrs Hale: What are the plans for capital projects for the Ulster-Scots community? What capital funding has been provided to meet its needs?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am waiting to meet groups from the Ulster-Scots community. Plans for some capital projects have been submitted, but I am waiting to meet the groups because they may want to change their plans. I need to review some of the business cases. As with other Members who asked specific questions that I do not have the answer to, I will get back to you in writing.

Mr McCallister: I, too, welcome the Minister to her first Question Time. Will she give us the exact financial cost of the extension and refurbishment of the centre?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The total budget for the centre is almost £2 million. DCAL is providing over £500,000, as is the International Fund for Ireland. The Arts Council is providing over £300,000, the Tourist Board is providing over £300,000, and the Department for Social Development is providing over £250,000.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Conall McDevitt.

Mr McDevitt: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker — *[Interruption.]* Anseo, indeed. I join the Minister in welcoming the development at the Cultúrlann. Will she give the House an estimate of the economic contribution that Irish and Ulster-Scots language and cultural centres make to our regional economy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I outlined to Ms Ramsey in my answer to her question, the centre attracts over 80,000 visitors annually into west Belfast, many of whom are foreign tourists, and currently employs over 40 people. It has programmes in which over 4,000 people participate, and has spin-offs for workshops, coffee shops and even revenue raised through conferences. Naturally, that will have an economic spin-off for the Cultúrlann and west Belfast.

Irish Language Strategy

4. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she intends to forward a paper to the Executive outlining her Department's strategy to protect and enhance the development of the Irish language, as outlined in the St Andrews Agreement and the amended Northern Ireland Act.

(AQO 34/11-15)

St Andrews Agreement: Irish Language

10. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she intends to implement the commitment to the Irish language outlined in the St Andrews Agreement and Act. (AQO 40/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will answer questions 4 and 10 together.

I am reviewing the Department's work in that area and will decide on the way forward after I have had an opportunity to consider it fully. I am committed to bringing forward a strategy to protect and enhance the development of the Irish language to the Executive for consideration.

2.15 pm

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for her answer. I, too, congratulate her on her first Question Time. Does the Minister plan to consult further Irish language groups before signing off on the strategy? Ultimately, what will the strategy mean for developing the Irish language?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I look forward to reading the outcome of the consultation exercise. I am meeting Irish language activists and Irish language and Ulster-Scots groups, and I hope to hear the views of stakeholders and of those at the coalface who are driving forward that work to have their support and influence before the strategies are introduced.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur ar an Aire faoin nasc a fheiceann sí a bheith ann idir straitéis Gaeilge agus Acht na Gaeilge agus a fhiafraí di an mbeidh sí ag cur oiread béime ar an Acht agus a dhealraíonn sí a bheith ag cur ar an straitéis. Does the Minister see any linkages between an Irish language strategy and an Irish language Act? Will she pay as much attention to the provision of an Irish language Act as she seems to be devoting to the strategy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am delighted that Dominic is taking a great interest in my Department and in my work so far. It seems from Dominic's question that he is paying a great deal of attention to me; I expect nothing less. I am discussing the strategy and the Act with key stakeholders in the community, and I will take

their views along with yours. I am not presenting the importance of one over the other, and I am sure that the Member will not pursue that.

Mr Allister: Having alienated much of the non-terrorist-supporting community by the malevolent appointment of a convicted murderer as her special adviser, why does the Minister now want to alienate further swathes of —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question that is relevant?

Mr Allister: — the population of Northern Ireland by the promotion of a language that she uses as a political tool?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I did not detect a question, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Miss M McIlveen: I would like to think that the Minister will recognise that she will not receive any support for an Irish language Act from this side of the Chamber. However, does she accept that Her Majesty The Queen has done more for the Irish language in the past few weeks than anyone in this Chamber? Does the Minister not regret her party's absence at an event where the Queen spoke Irish so fluently?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I regret that the Irish language is already being used in a belittling and begrudging way. I was quite happy to see and hear the Queen of England, and, indeed, the President of the United States, speak Irish in a non-threatening way. It is a pity that that leadership did not extend to your Benches.

2012 Olympics: Torch Relay

6. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure which towns and dates have been selected for hosting the Olympic torch relay. (AQO 36/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The dates and locations for the evening celebrations of the Olympic torch relay were officially announced on 18 May and are as follows: Portrush on Sunday 3 June 2012; Derry on Monday 4 June 2012; Newry on Tuesday 5 June 2012; and, finally, Belfast on 6 June 2012. A more detailed route announcement, which involves the other communities on the route, will be made by the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG). That will happen in November, after local consultation. DCAL and LOCOG have invited all

local authorities to a meeting to discuss the torch relay on 13 June.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for her answer. I take this opportunity to welcome the Minister and congratulate her on her appointment. Obviously, I am pleased that the torch will visit Newry in my constituency. Has the Minister any update on the proposals for the torch to visit Dublin? Go raibh maith agat.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I understand that LOCOG has been looking at proposals to bring the torch to Dublin. It has confirmed that the feasibility of taking the flame for a short visit is being explored with all the relevant parties, including the Executive. I have no further update at this stage.

Mr Gardiner: Does the Minister agree that it is totally unacceptable that her Department was unable to influence anyone connected with the Olympic teams to come to Northern Ireland prior to the Olympic Games?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I understand that there is a lot of concern about that. Today, I will receive a briefing on how many athletes are using here for their training and preparation for the London games. I feel that it is an opportunity missed. Similar sentiments have been expressed by many Members and individuals across the community. On behalf of other people, I will pass those sentiments on to LOCOG.

Mr Weir: I welcome the Olympic torch relay's coming to Northern Ireland as part of the UK tour. We have just heard Mr Brady attempt to reintegrate Dublin with the UK. Will the Minister work to ensure that Northern Ireland plays a full role and maximises the benefits from London 2012 along with the rest of the UK?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The meeting that has been organised for 13 June with local authorities will be key in that. Already, I have been lobbied by several Members who very genuinely outlined the case for the torch to go through their towns. Some have had the support of former Olympians. I feel that that is an opportunity for Members who are councillors, and for councillors and their parties, to make known their feelings about that through local government. I will try to take forward their suggestions.

Mr Durkan: My question follows on from the last couple of questions. Will the Minister outline

whether there will be any infrastructural legacy from the Olympics for Northern Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not too sure what the Member means by infrastructural legacy. Does he refer to capital projects?

Mr Weir: Bangor.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I hear Members saying Bangor. There is the whole issue of elite facilities, Bangor and the 50 m pool. You will be glad that I got that on the record. I take the question of legacy seriously. We must use this opportunity to ensure that there is a legacy of volunteering and involvement of youth and community groups in the 2012 Olympics. Their contribution here in the North will be recognised in London.

World Police and Fire Games

7. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her Department's plans for the World Police and Fire Games in 2013. (AQO 37/11-15)

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ceist seven. Question 7. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Fair play to Kieran. I welcome your positive use of the Irish language.

A company limited by guarantee known as 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited has been established by my Department to deliver the games in 2013. The company was registered in Company House on Monday 28 February 2011.

A chairman and board of directors have been appointed, and they are now responsible for taking forward the delivery of the games. Following a competition, a chief executive for 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited has been appointed and will take up the post on 21 June.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her response. With 2013 just around the corner, can the Minister assure the House that there will be sufficient facilities for competitors and the huge amount of visitors who will come to Northern Ireland for the 2013 Police and Fire Games?

Ms Ní Chuilín: We are awaiting plans coming forward from the World Police and Fire Games and the company. There are huge perceptions about the Olympics, and it is vitally important that we ensure that we get this right. There are

benefits for our economy, for the North and for people who are participating in the event.

Mr I McCrea: Anyone in the Chamber who knows me will know that I will try to be as parochial as I can in looking into issues in my constituency. If no venues have been chosen yet, can the Minister give my constituents some type of assurance that she will consider Mid Ulster as a possible area for those games to be held in?

Ms Ní Chuilín: In fairness to the Member who asked the question, he was consistent in the previous mandate and is continuing to be in this one. He has every right to be parochial, because that has put him where he is.

I am concerned that all parts of the North will benefit from this event, and, although decisions on where the events will be held have still to be taken, there are still opportunities for all parts to benefit. Again, local councils should consider what they can do to maximise the benefits to their areas, because this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Leas Cheann Comhairle. The Minister answered my question.

Mrs McKeivitt: Can the Minister outline how many countries and athletes will participate in the games?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I cannot at this stage; I do not have any details. I know that the sectors that are involved are the police, the Prison Service and the Fire and Rescue Service. I do not have the exact details of how many people will participate and the countries that they will represent.

Ulster-Scots Agency

8. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding, in total, has been cut from the Community and Ulster-Scots Group and reallocated to the running costs of the Ulster-Scots Agency over the last three years. (AQO 38/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: From 2008 to 2010, the Ulster-Scots Agency budget was reduced from £3·315 million to £3·202 million, a reduction of 3·4%. Over that period, the funding awarded as grants to community groups and other qualifying organisations increased from £1·32 million to

£1·8 million, an increase of 8·6%. Over the three-year period, the amount that was spent on administration costs rose slightly, from £1·11 million to £1·14 million. During that period, the agency significantly reduced expenditure on marketing and promotion, from £654,000 to £138,000.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for that comprehensive answer. Will she join me in congratulating the agency on reducing its overheads to deliver for the people on the ground? It can be used as an example for other organisations.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I totally agree. An organisation that has gone through a rigorous and robust process to reduce what are seen as internal costs to ensure that those are targeted and directed towards front line delivery has to be congratulated. Through my deliberations with the Ulster-Scots Agency, I intend to find out how it did that. I hope to apply the same sort of governance procedures and the same sort of attention to the service users that it has done.

Education

Education: Parental Choice

1. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education to outline how his Department's policy on education embraces and respects parental choice. (AQO 46/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My Department's education policy most obviously embraces and respects parental choice in the area of school admission. The open enrolment policy in legislation provides a framework for all preschool and school admissions. That framework ensures that parents' preferences for preschools and schools are met to the maximum possible degree. According to that framework, parents are able to express an unlimited order of preference for the preschools, primary schools and post-primary schools that they wish their child to attend. Education and library boards are then required by law to process those preferences in that order until an application is successful.

2.30 pm

The only limit constraining the degree to which the admissions process may meet parental preference is the physical capacity of preschools and schools. That is defined, for the purposes of admissions, by individual school number limits that are set annually by the Department of Education (DE) in accordance with the legislative framework. That limit will mean that some parents' preferences cannot be met, and that is always unfortunate. However, the most recent figures available show that the typical rate at which the framework delivers on the first preferences of parents is 98% in admissions to primary schools and 88% in admissions to post-primary schools.

Mr Allister: The Minister comes to the House with platitudes about respecting parental choice. However, is the truth not that his cornerstone policy of destroying the grammar schools and denying a legitimate transfer process is built on the destruction of parental choice? When will Her Majesty's Minister of Education give paramountcy to parental choice in the very important matter of children being allowed to attend schools of choice and school types of choice through a process of choice?

Mr O'Dowd: I am actually a Minister of the people. If the Member opposite wishes to be a subject, that is perfectly up to him, but I am the Minister of the people. I carry that title with pride.

The Member said that I was destroying parental choice. Where exactly is the parental choice in children having to sit five tests? Where is the parental choice in 10- and 11-year-old — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Minister, resume your seat. I remind Members that this is Question Time, not a debate. In any case, no one should be shouting from a sedentary position.

Mr O'Dowd: Where is the parental choice in 10- and 11-year-old children being not only selected but rejected by schools? There is no parental choice there. My focus as Education Minister, as was the case with the previous Minister, Caitríona Ruane, is on academic excellence, tackling underachievement in the education system and ensuring that, through our education system, we produce young people who not only value themselves — it is vital that they value

themselves — but become valuable members of society. We will continue on that course.

Mr Storey: I welcome the Minister to his first Question Time. Will he give the House a categorical assurance that, when he considers the rights of parents and the choices that they make, the schools that their children attend will not, as happened under the previous Minister, be demonised in any way or looked on as schools that should not be in existence? Will the Minister give an assurance in the House today that he will ensure that, as a priority, he meets the needs of children who attend special schools and have special educational needs? I refer particularly to the disgraceful situation in my constituency in Castle Tower School.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member, and I welcome him back and congratulate him on retaining his position as Chair of the Committee for Education. I look forward to working with him and the Education Committee over the coming months and years.

I do not accept the Member's terminology about the work of the previous Minister. Our function has never been to demonise any school. We want to ensure that schools open up their doors and resources to the local communities that they serve and to local pupils and parents, so that everyone can have access to a first-rate high-quality education system.

The Member's other points were about special educational needs and special schools. Certainly, by right, we have to ensure that we service and fund those schools correctly and that, when it comes to new capital builds, we push the boat out and ensure that we can achieve the maximum with the limited capital resources that we have.

I am aware of issues that relate to the school that the Member mentioned. I have agreed to visit the school with him at a later date. We will proceed with that visit and discuss matters further. I assure him that, as was the case with the previous Minister of Education, I will do everything in my power and with my limited budget to ensure that special educational needs are a high priority.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate the Minister on his new post and, indeed, on today's Question Time. Is he aware of media reports that GL Assessment papers were seen by some pupils

before they sat the exam? Does he believe that that undermines the unregulated testing system?

Mr O'Dowd: I am certainly aware of media reports on the matter, and my Department is investigating it. I await further information on documentation, which I hope has been forwarded to my Department by the source who also brought the issue to the media. Those who set about putting forward unregulated exams had a responsibility not only to individual children but to schools and broader society to ensure that those tests were set in a professional and well-managed way. I am deeply concerned about media reports on the possibility that some children were given an advantage in tests by seeing papers before other children. I intend to return to the matter. I will keep the House informed of my Department's investigations.

Mr McDevitt: How does the Minister intend to uphold the principle of parental choice in light of the Budget that his party and the DUP put through the previous Assembly? Will he confirm to the House whether all schools that are running in Northern Ireland will remain open for the next four years, or will he, in fact, preside over the closure of significant numbers of schools, thus reducing parental choice in the region?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. He is referring to the Executive Budget, which was passed by the previous Assembly and which we are working with in the current tenure. In years 2, 3 and 4 in particular, my Department is presented with a difficult budget. However, the Member should not equate the difficult budget with the current school estate. A number of factors determine whether schools remain open, the main one being parental choice. If parents decide not to send their children to a particular school, the numbers in that school fall. When the number of pupils attending a school falls, the income that goes into that school also falls. It reaches a certain critical point at which it is incumbent on and important for all educationalists, including the Committee for Education, of which, I believe, Mr McDevitt is now a member, to look at that school not only from a constituency perspective or with a view to battering the Minister over the head but from the perspective of ensuring that children in the school receive a first-rate, first-class education.

At present, a number of schools are in a critical condition. The Department and the boards will work with those schools and support them. However, when it comes to the crucial decision as to whether a school should stay open to save my blushes or should close to ensure that its children receive a quality education elsewhere, I will take the blushes and ensure that those children receive a first-rate quality education elsewhere.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 10 and 14 have been withdrawn. Both questions require a written answer.

Foyle and Londonderry College and Ebrington Primary School

2. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed move of Foyle and Londonderry College and Ebrington Primary School to a new site in Clooney. (AQO 47/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Foyle College and Ebrington Primary School are two major capital investments that remain on my Department's investment delivery plan. The proposed site at Clooney was acquired in December 2009. A stage C submission of initial sketch plans and costs for both schools was approved by the Department on 21 March 2011. The Executive Budget, however, highlights significant reductions in capital resources for education during the next four years, which will have a detrimental effect on the Department's ability to deliver a school building programme. It will, therefore, be important to consider how the limited capital funds that are available should be deployed on a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people. That work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister and welcome him to the Dispatch Box. I understand and appreciate the dilemma that the Minister faces, but, last week, I met the chair of the board of governors and the principal of Foyle and Londonderry College, who made it clear to me that the project started in 1995. It is a long time in moving. In 2001, I attended a meeting in the city regarding a number of Departments looking at the three-way educational development, involving the university, the expansion of the northern campus and St

Mary's College, a secondary school that has since moved. Minister, given the importance that the college and the parents place on this newbuild programme, would you be kind enough to meet the chair of the board of governors, the principal and myself to discuss the project?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes, of course I am happy to meet you and a delegation from the college. One of the reasons why it is important to have a local Administration is that it gives accessibility to the citizens we serve. I am acutely aware of the frustration and disappointment not only of schools such as the college in Derry but of others across the North. Not only am I the Education Minister, I am an MLA for a constituency, and I am aware of the difficulties and pressures placed on schools that are awaiting builds, especially in the longer term.

I am also aware that this project is part of a wider development for an economic brief for Derry. If the build goes ahead, Magee College can move in, and other things will fall into place. I am aware of all the potential that it has. However, we are working with the realities of a constrained budget. I recently took the opportunity to visit Lisneal College in Derry. It is a fine school with a fine intake and leadership. I had discussions with the board of governors. We have a £17 million project sitting there, and we have to ensure that we protect that. With the changing demographics and the fall in numbers across the board, it would be foolish of me and the Administration to allow that £17 million project to go to waste and to decline over the years. When we are coming to final decisions around Foyle College, we will have to ensure that the school moves forward, that Magee College is allowed to move in and that we protect Lisneal College.

DE: Procurement

3. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to incorporate social objectives into procurement policy in the 2011-15 period.
(AQO 48/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department ensures that procurement for capital projects is carried out in line with the public procurement policy, as approved by the Executive in 2002, and in accordance with the principles of best practice. Economic, social and environmental strategies and initiatives compatible with existing EU and

international law are integrated into all current procurement. That integration is transparent and aims not to discriminate directly or indirectly between suppliers. The Executive's policy commitments, including equality, sustainable development and environmental standards are also incorporated into the procurement process.

The education sector utilises the Central Procurement Directorate's (CPD) standard major works procurement documentation, which takes into consideration the need to provide opportunities for small to medium-sized enterprises and social economy enterprises to compete for education projects. That documentation is revised on an ongoing basis to take account of changes in legislation, guidance and matters endorsed by the Executive and the procurement board.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like others, I welcome the Minister to his first Question Time and wish him well in his portfolio. In previous questions and answers there was a mention of some projects that are ongoing. You are aware of the benefits of introducing social requirements. Have you plans to expand on the opportunities afforded by procurement, given the current economic difficulties?

Mr O'Dowd: My predecessor brought in a number of reviews in relation to procurement across the education boards. My departmental officials are further exploring those to see how we can expand that area. As part of their examinations, I have raised with them the issue not only of how we protect small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) but of how we should expand their role. I also want them to look at how we can use the spending power of Departments to ensure that we tackle social disadvantage and long-term unemployment in all those matters. I hope to report to the House at a later stage. I suspect that it will be after the summer recess before we know how the procurement policy will roll out. Suggestions on how we tackle social disadvantage will certainly be contained in that document, and I am open to suggestions on that.

2.45 pm

Mr Craig: When it comes to including the social enterprise aspect of procurement, does the Minister agree that it is better to do so with a central procurement policy? If so, does he agree that the idea outlined by the Department

to devolve to schools the power to procure some services, as opposed to that being done centrally, is contradictory?

Mr O'Dowd: Any changes we make will be done in consultation with the Central Procurement Directorate and in line with Executive policies, principles and papers. If the Member has any specific areas of concern, I am more than happy to take further details of those. I assure him that any policies we bring forward will be in line with the Executive's thinking and with the way in which they are moving forward. My Department — I can speak only for it — has a major financial contribution to make to the economy, and I think that that contribution has to be used wisely in a bid to tackle social disadvantage. As I stated in an answer to the previous questioner, we are looking at procurement across the board, and I will bring a report about that to the Assembly. However, I am more than happy to discuss the matter further with the Member.

Mr Eastwood: First, I congratulate the Minister on his recent appointment. What plans does he have to incorporate fair trade requirements into school meals procurement?

Mr O'Dowd: That matter is the responsibility of the purchasing body, be it the school or the board. I certainly encourage all bodies with access to resources to include fair trade in their purchasing policies.

Teachers: Employment

4. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to assist newly qualified teachers in obtaining full-time positions. (AQO 49/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am keen to ensure that newly qualified teachers are afforded every opportunity to obtain full-time positions. The number and type of vacancies for which newly qualified teachers may be eligible to apply is primarily influenced by the decisions made by schools on the basis of the funding they receive under the local management of schools common funding formula arrangements. The decision on whom to appoint to a vacant post is a matter for the board of governors and/or the relevant employing authority in line with current employment legislation.

I am aware that newly qualified teachers gain vital experience providing substitute cover and filling temporary vacancies. However, I am

concerned that schools continuing the practice of re-employing prematurely retired teachers are denying newly qualified teachers the opportunity to gain employment in a temporary or substitute capacity. My Department has taken action and plans to take further measures to encourage schools to give preference to newly qualified teachers over prematurely retired ones. That includes proposed amendments to the common funding scheme for the local management of schools, on which consultation closed on May 11.

Mr Ross: One of the many failures of the previous Minister was around the issue of trying to get newly graduated teachers into full-time work. There is an old saying that, if you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got. I am afraid that, listening to the Minister's answer, we have not heard much new. What new thinking is the new Education Minister bringing to this Department, and what new policies does he plan to bring in to help those newly qualified teachers?

Mr O'Dowd: I could bat that one back to you: in your questions and response, I did not hear any new proposals. I sat through many debates in the previous Assembly, where no concrete proposals came forward from any section of the Floor. Indeed, I am more than willing to examine any proposals on the matter that come forward from either side of the House.

The fact of the matter is this: the previous Minister did take action on the issue. She put constraints on how the employing bodies — the boards of governors — should employ newly qualified teachers and, indeed, prematurely retired teachers, and that is having an effect. There was previous mention of an initiative taken in Scotland, and that is under review. It would cost the Executive £12 million to give newly qualified teachers a year's guaranteed employment. The counter-argument to that is that those teachers will not be on benefits. However, the fact of the matter is that the Executive would not get a return in the benefits system and would lose that £12 million. If we can negotiate a package that ensures that, if we saved money for the Chancellor's Budget around benefits, they were prepared to give us £12 million, whole new avenues would be opened up.

We are dealing with the budget that we have. The previous Minister took forward initiatives that are showing results. If the Member or

anyone else in the House has proposals to present, please feel free to do so.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister on his appointment. I wish him all the best for the future, and, as a member of the Education Committee, I look forward to working with him.

I want to pay tribute to a primary 6 pupil from St Columban's school in Belcoo, who, along with students from Ballinamallard Primary School, visited Parliament Buildings today. We went to a meeting with them, and one of the questions they asked me was what measures were being taken to prohibit or restrict the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers and to encourage the employment of newly elected teachers.

Mr O'Dowd: I suspect that you are a pupil of Barry McElduff, who is quick to mention his local constituency and constituents.

Measures have been put in place on the rates of pay available to newly retired teachers and on the responsibility of boards of governors to pick up the difference. The previous Minister set in train a review of locally managed school funding, the equality impact assessment of which ended on 11 May. My Department is reviewing that. When those results become clear, I will report to the Assembly on what, if any, other measures we can take.

Boards of governors are made up of teachers and members of the community who do an excellent job in the majority of cases. As local representatives, we should encourage boards of governors to take a principled stand and to ensure that they use their power to assist newly qualified teachers to obtain employment.

Mr Lunn: I wish the Minister well in his new position. Unfortunately, my question is on the same topic of substitute teachers. The Minister said that the previous Minister had been able to place constraints on boards of governors. However, the only constraint of which I am aware is the requirement not to have a level rate of pay, whether that is for a newly qualified teacher or a recently retired one. Does the Minister have any plans to give that policy some teeth so that he can enforce the position that a newly qualified teacher must be preferred to a recently voluntarily retired teacher?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for that question. I understand — I am willing to be corrected — that it would not be legal to discriminate against prematurely retired teachers applying for any post. They are perfectly entitled in law to apply for those posts. We could not put a legal barrier in their way. The constraints on pay are having an effect on how boards of governors view such matters. The debates in the House and the media and public debate on those matters have also had an influence. The review of LMS, which I mentioned to the previous questioner, was completed on 11 May. When its findings have been sifted through, I will report to the Assembly in a more detailed manner on what, if any, further actions we can take.

Education: All-Ireland Co-operation

5. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the ongoing North/South co-operation study, including any further areas identified for all-Ireland co-operation in education. (AQO 50/11-15)

Education Ministers

11. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Education when he intends to meet with his counterpart in the Dublin Government. (AQO 56/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I shall answer questions 5 and 11 together.

The aim of the study is to appraise the key themes and patterns of historical co-operation in the education sector and to consider areas of future collaboration between the two Departments. Both Departments have received a draft copy of part 1 of the report, which is under consideration. The report describes the ongoing work by the education bodies, schools and youth organisations, North and South. We need to build on that for the benefit of all our children and young people and of our economies.

On 3 June, I met the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn TD, to discuss the scope of part 2 of the study, which will be a jointly costed action plan. Minister Quinn and I agreed that our respective Departments would work closely on the plan and identify areas with the potential for practical co-operation.

Mr McKay: I thank the Minister for his answer and congratulate him on his new appointment.

Further to that answer, will the Minister provide an update on the work involving both Administrations on the autism centre in Middletown?

Mr O'Dowd: The autism centre in Middletown has delivered training to more than 7,000 professionals and parents since its training service commenced in December 2007. The research and information service publishes quarterly research bulletins, which are distributed to all schools and relevant agencies, North and South. Recent publications include research on leisure, translations and educational assessments. Until all services can be delivered, the centre has in the interim introduced an advice and guidance service in line with the two Departments' wishes. That has focused on delivering the service to a small number of children in the North and on parental training in the South.

An assessment of current autism services, North and South, has been completed. Informed by that assessment, the Department of Education and the Department of Education and Skills are preparing proposals for the development of the centre for ministerial consideration.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Francie Molloy.

Mr Molloy: Question 11.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, Mr Molloy. Do you have a supplementary question?

Mr Molloy: Sorry.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Dominic Bradley.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire nua go Tráth na gCeist anseo inniu; agus guím gach rath ar a chuid oibre sa toadhcháí. I welcome the new Minister to his first Question Time and wish him every success in the future.

As regards the study mentioned in the original question, does it address the need to harmonise safeguarding policies across Ireland, and, if so, what actions have been taken to date?

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat for your kind remarks and good wishes.

The study is retrospective and looks at the co-operation that has taken place between the

Departments over the years. In one sense, I suppose, you have to know where you have come from to know where you are going. It is that kind of study. I am more interested in how we move forward. Politicians are often lambasted if they look back too much. In some senses, this study could be lambasted for looking back too much, but it is an important piece of work because it allows us to understand what work has been carried out and what work we can do.

As far as protection across the island is concerned, there is — again, I am prepared to be corrected — no specific mention of this work, but I will be keen to examine with my counterpart in Dublin how we can ensure that child safety is at the centre of all our policies and that we have policies to ensure that the border does not get in the way of protecting young children.

Mr Cree: I welcome the Minister and thank him for his answers so far. Does he agree that the significant differences between the examination systems in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic make it easier, more profitable and more appropriate to seek co-operation with other UK regions that have an identical examination structure to our own?

Mr O'Dowd: I assure the Member that I have no phobia about working with England, Scotland and Wales, and I am more than happy to meet the relevant Ministers in those jurisdictions. The fact is that we are on an island, and it is much easier for people to travel back and forth here. When you are living in the border constituencies, whether you are a pupil or an educationalist, it is much easier on many occasions to use the services or centres of educational excellence on either side of the border. It is a piece of work that is worth looking at, both from an educational and an economic point of view.

In my conversation with Minister Quinn, he told me that the South is planning to build 20 new schools — not replacement schools but new schools — because the population is growing. Therefore, it is important that I, as Education Minister for this jurisdiction, ensure that we have harmonisation across the island. With respect to previous questions about how we can get work for student teachers, if someone close to us is building 20 new schools, I want to be in on that to ensure that our teachers are qualified to work in those schools. If it can in any way assist with the budgetary constraints

that both Minister Quinn and I face, we want to be in there. However, I am more than happy to meet and work with the Education Ministers of England, Scotland and Wales.

Private Members' Business

Nursery and Preschool Education

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has allowed up to one hour 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes for the winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes for the winding-up speech. All other Members will have five minutes to speak.

3.00 pm

Mr McDevitt: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that adequate nursery school provision is available for all children; to conduct an immediate review of current provision to ensure that unmet need in areas of high demand is addressed in advance of the next school year; to undertake a wider review to ensure that there is adequate provision in future years, with increased attention to early years education; and to introduce a statutory right to preschool education.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members leaving the Chamber to be quiet.

Mr McDevitt: Members might be interested to know that on Tuesday 25 May 2010, the House debated a similar motion to the one that we are about to debate. That motion called for the Department of Education to recognise the need to review the criteria around the allocation of nursery and preschool places. It also called on the Department to acknowledge the fact that, although at a headline figure there would appear to be enough preschool and nursery places for every child needing one in this region, they are not in the right places.

It is with a heavy heart that SDLP Members have felt the need to bring the motion to the Floor of the Assembly again. We believe that a series of basic inequalities face children at a very early age, and those inequalities affect their parents, their families and many people who, through their professional lives, are deeply committed to providing the best possible preschool access to learning for all.

The first inequality is in funding. It is simply not the case that all children accessing preschool education are entitled to the same funding.

We have, effectively, three systems in one, each funded differently and some funded much better than others. The net effect of that is to create a perception that some are better than others. Another inequality is geography, in that some families simply do not have access to an appropriate place close to their home. Today's press reports that families in Ballynahinch have been offered places in Twinbrook, which is hardly a solution to a young family's problem or a young family's desire for their young child to enter into a form of preschool education. In effect, we have a postcode lottery that says that if you live in certain places, you will be fine, and that if you live in other places, you will be in deep trouble.

There is also a perceived inequality in standards, which is fuelled by the inequality in funding and to some extent by the postcode lottery. That is compounded by an inequality in the pay of the people who provide preschool education. Teachers in our nursery schools enjoy the same terms and conditions as other teachers. That is not so in our nursery units, and it is not so at all in our preschools and playschools. What message does that send out about how seriously we take the issue? Does it say to parents and young children that the early years of everyone's education are valued and important to us as an Executive and as legislators, or does it say that we are quite happy for the market to sort this one out? We are quite happy to have some kind of mixed economy in play in which, if the state can get a good deal on the cheap, it will take it, or, if it cannot, it will send people 30 miles to their nearest possible provider.

This year again we have the situation that arises every year, whereby parents all over the region, but more so in some parts than in others, are receiving letters telling them that their children will not get a place. The figures in today's press state that there were 210 unplaced children in the Western Education and Library Board; 158 in the South Eastern Education and Library Board; 133 in the Belfast Education and Library Board; 71 in the North Eastern Education and Library Board; and 38 in the Southern Education and Library Board.

Those children, who are three years old, simply do not have access to a nursery school place this year. It is an improvement on last year; I will give the Minister that. However, it is not an acceptable outcome.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. We run the risk of reading into those statistics that there has been an improvement. In fact, what may have happened is that parents who decided that it was not worthwhile going through the process made other provision. By this time next year, the problem may be much worse.

Mr McDevitt: Mr Storey makes a salient point, which leads me on to the question of criteria. Bearing in mind the basic inequalities in the system, the second issue that the motion seeks to address directly is that the criteria could not be more out of kilter with the need. Before speaking about the specifics of the criteria, I will outline one thing that depresses me. In 2006, the Department of Education published a report called 'Outcomes from the Review of Pre-School Education in Northern Ireland'. In that report, the Department expressed concerns about what are known as the social disadvantage criteria. Many parents in working families will argue that those criteria discriminate against them and exclude them from the opportunity to access nursery-school places. That is a problem in itself. If those criteria do the right thing for one section of our community at the expense of another, we have a problem. It is a particular problem when working families in our community are a group who want and could do with access to nursery schools. We have known since 2006 that this has been a problem, yet, for some reason, we doggedly refuse to do anything about it.

We have a second problem. In 2006, the same report identified as questionable the fact that children with birthdays in July and August were a priority. Those children have a preferential position in the application process. The Department acknowledged that it:

"no longer considers that there is a need for children born between 2nd July and 31st August to receive priority in admission as the current criteria can work against younger children. For example, a child born on 1st July may not get a place in a pre-school setting in its final pre-school year, because older children are given priority. This could lead to a situation where, on starting compulsory primary education, a child born on 1st July (aged 4 years and 2 months) will not have had the opportunity to access pre-school education, whilst a child born on 2nd July, and starting school at the same time (aged 5 years and two months) will have had at least one year's pre-school education."

In 2006, the Department identified that as a criterion that had to be addressed. What has happened? Absolutely nothing. I would not mind if it was 2007 and we had just got our act together and settled down to devolved government, but it is not. It is 2011, and we have had devolved government for four-odd years. We all want the Minister to explain why, although we have known about the problem for five years, the issues surrounding the allocation of nursery-school places in this region have still not been addressed.

I do not have much time left, but I would like to make one final point about the basic right of a child to access preschool education. I come from a party that defends the rights of children, and I thought that the Minister belonged to a party that does the same. However, his amendment seeks not to uphold the right of a child to preschool education, but to introduce a conditional right that states that we will think about allowing kids to have a preschool education if we can afford it. That is an indictment of anyone who does not believe that the rights of children should be elevated to a position of absolute sanctity and prominence in our society.

I hope that, when Members walk through the Lobbies to vote in this debate, they will, as well as supporting the need for improved criteria and allocation, acknowledge the basic right that every child should have: that irrespective of a child's colour, creed or socio-economic background, the state should guarantee him or her the right to access to preschool education at age three if he or she so wishes. That should be done in statute. That is what this motion seeks to do, and it was on that basis that I was happy to propose it.

Mr Flanagan: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "nursery school" and insert

"and preschool provision are available for all children; to conduct an immediate review of current provision to ensure that unmet need in areas of high demand is addressed in advance of the next school year; to undertake a wider review to ensure that there is adequate provision in future years, with increased attention to early years education and with a focus within the review on the educational benefits and financial implications of bringing forward legislation giving a statutory right to preschool education."

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the amendment. My party has some concerns about the impact that the motion would have on the provision of preschool education across the North, if it were to be agreed without amendment. Preschool education in my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone is very well served by the community and voluntary sector, and that is particularly so in rural areas such as Garrison in the heart of the west and places such as Kinawley and Killyman. Those organisations often operate with limited space or in shared facilities but always with staff who are well trained and qualified, dedicated to the children whom they care for and passionate about providing a quality service. This year, almost 8,000 places out of a total of 22,500 were funded to the community or voluntary sector, which shows the extent to which we are reliant on that sector to provide a world-class education service to our children. If it were to be agreed without amendment, the motion would effectively do away with that provision, leaving rural communities in my constituency struggling to compete for a quality service in a scenario in which there are only four statutory providers.

Preschool education must be delivered locally. It is not feasible for three- and four-year-olds to travel 10, 15 or even 20 miles for a morning session, nor is it possible for their parents to get them there. If all preschool places were to be based in a statutory nursery setting, there would be a minimum annual cost of £30 million, and that, in itself, is a very low estimate. There would also be a requirement for an initial capital investment of at least £40 million to establish the required number of new nursery units. The consequence of that is that much-needed funding would be removed from the community and voluntary sector, which not only delivers a fantastic service, but does —

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will not. It also does so at great value to the taxpayer.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: Give way.

Mr Flanagan: I will give way. Go on.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat. I think that the Member has misinterpreted the terms of the motion, which calls for children to have

a statutory right to a preschool place but not necessarily a right to such a place in a statutory setting. That is a distinction that the Member needs to bear in mind.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for his intervention. There are two key elements to the amendment that we tabled. The first of those is an attempt to change the motion's reference to "nursery school provision" to "nursery school and preschool provision". The second element comes at the end of the text of the amendment, and I will deal with that at the end of my contribution.

Just this week, my wife and I were discussing where we should send our 17-month-old child to preschool. We have thought long and hard about it, and we have decided that Rosie will attend the local preschool in Tempo, which is provided by a community and voluntary organisation. When I attended nursery school, I attended one run by a community and voluntary organisation, and that same organisation is still in Garrison providing the same service and the same world-class education system that it always has.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: No. I wish to use this opportunity to pay tribute to the vast number of community and voluntary preschools right across the North. I was delighted to attend an event in Enniskillen town hall earlier this year at which the cathaoirleach of Fermanagh District Council held a reception to mark the achievements of those community and voluntary preschools that had received accreditation from the Early Years organisation in Fermanagh. I was delighted to see so many volunteers from across the county attending that event, and their passion and their dedication to the children was clear for all to see.

In 1997, the North had the lowest level of nursery provision and provision for under-fives in these islands, and that was despite the fact that our children start school younger than elsewhere. In 1997, the figure was 45%, whereas in 2009-2010, the comparable figure was 97%. Therefore, tremendous advancements have been made, and we are all keen to ensure that further improvements are made.

That progress was made possible only through the partnership approach that has been in place to date. We are all aware that spending money earlier in young people's lives is much more

cost-effective and more effective in raising the standards of our education system.

The programme for international student assessment (PISA) has shown:

"Fifteen-year-old students who had attended pre-primary education perform better on PISA than those who did not, even after accounting for their socio-economic backgrounds."

PISA also highlights the impact of parents playing a positive role in their child's educational development, particularly when it comes to reading. Parents need to be encouraged and supported to become more engaged with education and need to be reassured that it makes not one bit of difference who they are; it is what they do that makes the difference.

3.15 pm

The motion sets out ambitious targets for the provision of preschool education, and rightly so. At this stage, we have all been convinced of the benefits of early years education and investment in that sector. Although preschool education may not be compulsory, the fact that parents recognise its value is very welcome.

There should be a place for every child whose parents wish it, and that is currently departmental policy. In the past few years, a significant number of children have been unable to get a place in their preferred preschool as a result of oversubscription. The responsibility for the planning and implementation of preschools lies with each education and library board, which carries out annual reviews of provision at a local level.

I ask Members from all sides of the House to support the amendment.

Mr S Anderson: I welcome the motion and am happy to support it, but it is a great pity that such a motion is needed at all. These issues have been around for a long time, yet we are still calling for the Minister of Education to act.

As we know, the previous Minister was rarely short of words. Indeed, she could waffle for hours in English and Irish and still say nothing. It was all talk and no action. That is why we have a motion on nursery provision before us today. This motion is, indeed, a testament to Caitriona Ruane's failure. I note that the Minister's party colleagues have tabled an amendment. From its wording, it seems that

they also accept that we have had four years of failure in the area of nursery provision.

However, I suppose we should be thankful for small mercies. The long-awaited early years strategy is making some progress, but we now need to move the debate on and try to implement that five-year strategy. Sadly, we seem to be moving at a snail's pace, and the same problems are still with us. The policy and funding of nursery provision leave a lot to be desired. There are anomalies right across the system. We need clear leadership from the Minister of Education and his Department.

Feelings among parents have been running so high that some have threatened legal action against the previous Minister. Indeed, many are of the opinion that there is a legal entitlement to a nursery-school place, but that is not the case. The motion proposes a statutory right, but that is qualified in the amendment. Although I understand the funding implications, we should aim to move towards the establishment of a statutory right.

As I said, there are anomalies right across the system. We hear regularly in the media, and I hear in conversations with constituents and others, about how the most popular schools are heavily oversubscribed and how up to 1,500 young children are left without a place. Some children are being offered places many miles from home, as was stated by Mr McDevitt. I think that he said 30 miles, but it may be as far away as 60 miles.

Let me illustrate that by referring to a case in my Upper Bann constituency, where a mother recently failed to get a place for her three-year-old daughter at three Portadown nursery schools. She has been offered a place at Crossmaglen, in south Armagh. She said in the press:

"there aren't enough places in Portadown and we just can't drive her to somewhere like Crossmaglen each day. It just can't be done and I'm not the only one in this situation, I know of other parents who are in the same boat."

That mother's case highlights the severe shortage of nursery provision in the Portadown area, and that really does need to be addressed. I warmly welcome the proposal for a new nursery unit at Bocombra Primary School, and the additional units at Seagoe and Portadown Integrated primary schools. It is vital

that progress is made as quickly as possible in those areas.

I also understand that the consultation on the proposed additional unit at Waringstown has just ended. There is a severe shortage of places in Waringstown, and I urge the Minister to look favourably on this proposal or, better still, approve it without further delay.

The statutory basis for the allocation of places needs to be reviewed and amended. At present, children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are given preference over other children. That means that many children whose parents work hard are denied access to nursery provision simply because they do not meet the criteria. That has created a two-tier system.

The statutory arrangements also favour children whose fourth birthday falls in July or August. The basis for that is that older children are likely to benefit more from the preschool nursery experience. That might well be the case and children should be old enough to benefit from the preschool experience, but we should look at that area again to see how we can make it fairer for all children in the three- and four-year age brackets. At present, a child who turns four in August is more likely to get a place than one who turns four a few days later.

Nursery education is not just a luxury but a key foundation stone of our education system.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr S Anderson: The inequalities and discrepancies in the system ought to be sorted out now. Failure to do so will store up problems for years to come.

Mr McNarry: This debate could be a scene-setter for developing new opportunities. We will support the amendment to further that cause.

Ulster Unionists are unequivocal in their support for early intervention as a means of dealing, in a fundamental root-and-branch way, with many of the defects in education that we all know surface later, such as literacy and numeracy. Our constant and consistent record has been in demanding that early intervention be a key underpinning element of any new Programme for Government. We have persistently asked for preschool education to be a universal entitlement, and it is to that end that we have pushed for a cross-cutting early years strategy for all children aged up to six, offering combined

and integrated support for children and families on issues that relate to parenting skills as well as to education itself. To sustain that, we previously suggested a cross-departmental early years fund to help finance such an early years strategy. Without such a fund, such a strategy would be pointless.

Education is a partnership between parents and schools; they need to function together and not apart. The emphasis of this House has to be on prioritising the children's interests. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of public policy not just sustaining a joined-up approach to education but using the huge and free resource that parents represent. Meeting adequate, localised nursery provision is essential to giving children the right start in their lives.

We need to bring the continuing old-fashioned approach to an abrupt end, because it does not get results; it has never really got results. We need to think and plan far better our future courses of action in early years education and in other fields. "Integration of approach" should be the catchword that we adopt.

I suggest that the relevant authorities use birth registers as a point of reference not only to assess how many children locally are entitled to nursery and preschool education but to validate those who are applying. A postcode lottery has been referred to. An example of that is that pointing families from Ballynahinch to places in Twinbrook or Newtownards is outrageous. I would love to know where the places are in Newtownards, because families are telling me how difficult it is to find them in their and my constituency.

I throw into this debate the issue of families coping with children's pre-nursery provision, which, certainly for most of them, is not free. Rather, for some families, the cost is equal to their monthly mortgage payment. Those young families need to be congratulated for their persistence and dedication in helping to maintain high education standards for their children while leading a responsible economic lifestyle. Perhaps in his oversight of the immediate issues impacting on those young families, the Minister will look at a form of easement for pre-nursery provision. Perhaps he will also address the serious concerns of parents with children who are making the transition from nursery to primary school and

who feel penalised by the criteria set, especially when they know that they have personally funded their child at pre-nursery school.

The Ulster Unionists want to see a people's agenda brought forward in this place. A big part of that is delivery — delivery on time — of real quantitative and qualitative change in how things are organised and delivered, including early years education. I welcome the Minister to the debate and look forward to hearing his approach on this important issue, among others.

In conclusion, in this place we cannot curtail, deny or diminish any opportunities open to children, and, where they are not accessible to children, we must widen, not reduce, access to those opportunities.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Judith Cochrane, I remind the House that it is convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mrs Cochrane: I am very pleased to be able to debate this matter in my maiden speech. The lack of adequate preschool provision has been a real issue all over Northern Ireland, particularly in the constituency that I represent, East Belfast. Over the past couple of years, I have spent many hours with parents, trying to negotiate the system and assist them in finding a place for their child. It is a matter that is very close to me on a personal level, too. Indeed, due to the timing of this debate, I am unable to take my three-year-old to meet her nursery teacher and her classmates for the incoming year. However, I realise that I was fortunate enough to get a place for my daughter, and I understand the stress placed on other parents who have failed to find a place. That is why I am here today to support the motion.

Other Members have already mentioned the benefits of a quality preschool education experience, so I will not go over those points. However, it is important to underline the fact that quality provision leads to a reduction of at-risk status for developing special educational needs. Surely that strengthens the economic case for moving to a statutory right to a quality preschool education place, as special educational needs are expensive in relation to individuals' development and public finances.

What do we mean by quality preschool education? The Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) report of 2006 provides clear evidence that children benefit more from nursery school, nursery classes or playgroups than from other types of preschool provision. Those findings were supported by the chief inspector's report. However, in planning for the future, we need to recognise the role played by the voluntary and private sectors, too, and give them the opportunity, where necessary, to increase the quality of their provision. Perhaps a move towards consistency in qualifications and remuneration of staff and the level of early years specialist support would lead to recognised standards across all settings.

Planning of the provision is key to ensuring that needs are met, and the preschool education expansion programme has planned on the basis that 10% of parents do not wish to send their child to a preschool. Will the Minister detail when the figure was arrived at and whether he thinks it is accurate? Has his Department investigated the reason why parents are choosing not to apply for a preschool place when, surely, the benefits are undisputed? Perhaps it is because timings are too difficult to co-ordinate with work patterns, or perhaps parents are unhappy with the standard of provision in their area. Or is it because places are too far away and it is more hassle to try to get a young child ready and transported to a place for two and a half hours?

Many parents also complain about the selection criteria, including the fact, as has already been mentioned, that children from socially deprived backgrounds receive priority over others. I have spent many hours explaining that rationale to parents, and I feel that the only way to prevent it from still causing upset is to ensure the availability of a place for every child.

Those are all issues that need to be looked at and addressed in any review process. However, I would be concerned if the Department were simply to conduct another review process and not actually implement the recommendations. It has already been stated that, since 2006, the Department no longer considers that priority should be given to children with birthdays in July and August, yet that admissions criterion is still in place. Indeed, in my constituency, it has allowed children who live 12 miles from a setting to secure a place at the expense of children who live within a two-mile radius.

Perhaps the Minister will indicate whether that will be removed from the application process for 2012-13.

3.30 pm

I would like to take this opportunity to put on record my thanks to the previous Education Minister for meeting Alliance representatives last September and taking on board the proposal to amend the application process to ensure that children in their immediate preschool year receive priority over those in their penultimate year. That has certainly made a difference in east Belfast this year. However, despite the change, there was still a worrying oversubscription rate. Thankfully, by working proactively with the Department, the education and library board and parents in east Belfast, I have managed to ensure further places at St Colmcille's, a playgroup with an excellent reputation for quality preschool provision. That is an example of how the problem can be somewhat addressed in the short term.

However, we must plan for the future. We must plan for the best for our children and deal with the resulting financial implications. The Department may have to take difficult decisions; for example, to convert some full-time places into part-time places to try to match preschool provision with the number of P1 places. Indeed, research indicates that there are no additional benefits for children who attend preschool on a full-time basis compared with those who attend part-time. Therefore, the arguments for full-time preschool have to be looked at within the social context for the family and the economy. Perhaps the funding formula could be applied to enable smaller groups in rural settings to be sustained.

We should also consider what full-time means. We are talking about four-and-a-half hours.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mrs Cochrane: What many parents will come to realise is that that will not make any difference if they are paying for day care. Parents do not want, and our children do not need, review after review.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mrs Cochrane: May I just finish?

Let us give a commitment that action will be taken to implement recommendations and ensure that our children have the best start —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry; I know that it is your maiden speech, but you are still confined to five minutes.

Mr Givan: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion and the amendment.

I agree with other Members' comments about early years intervention. Early years intervention is critical, particularly in identifying young children with a learning difficulty. There is an opportunity in a nursery school or preschool to, hopefully, identify any learning difficulties and take action. Indeed, I was suspended from the South Eastern Education and Library Board because we refused to accept a budget that removed the assessment of children in nursery school. Hopefully that board can be reconstituted under the new Minister rather than having three commissioners, at a rate of £500 a day, running the board for tens of thousands of children. I digress.

It has been pointed out to me that some parents believe that a formal nursery school provides a greater structure than voluntary preschool facilities. The Department should take that on board and provide those parents with greater information and greater confidence that preschool, outside of a traditional nursery school-type facility, is an appropriate means by which children can get a preschool place and allay some of the concerns that have been raised.

In my constituency, almost 100 children in Lisburn did not have any of their indicated choices met. Today, I have been informed that there are still children who, having gone through the second stage, have not been allocated any preschool provision in Lisburn. The Department needs to look at that issue. I ask the Minister to give me an assurance that, if required, the Department will be able to assist the board in ensuring that the children who still do not have a place, the number of which I believe is now down to single figures, get a place.

The Member for East Belfast also raised a concern about the criteria. I, like her, have spent considerable periods listening to irate parents trying to understand why the criteria favours those on benefits in getting their first choice. Indeed, a nursery school in Lisburn had 78 places, 26 of which were full-time. I think that 19 of those 26 full-time places have been filled based on the criteria favouring those on benefits. That has caused some consternation

among working families. They feel that they are being discriminated against because they work and that the criteria have disadvantaged them. That is a particular grievance which would not exist if every child were able to get a place. Obviously, families from socially deprived backgrounds need assistance, but the current criteria disadvantage working families.

Mr McDevitt: I concur with the Member's argument that, if there were a place for every child, the question of criteria would not be as big a deal. Therefore, is it not the case that the best way to ensure a place for every child is by endowing every child with a statutory right to such a place?

Mr Givan: It is obvious that there should be a statutory right. We support the amendment because we believe that it is critical that resources are available for that provision. It should be a priority for the Department of Education and the Executive. Ultimately, however, financial resources are always necessary to empower us to do what we want to do. Every child should get a place; that would ensure that there would be none of the concerns that have been expressed to me by working parents. The situation has an impact on them, because many of them pay for childcare provision as well. If those parents do not get a nursery or preschool place of their choice, that will continue to have an impact on them. That must be addressed.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the amendment. It is vital for children's development that they receive a high quality of early years education to help them to develop the required social and emotional skills that are essential for their health and well-being. Equally importantly, the education should be delivered alongside parental involvement. Parents also need to be proactive in engaging with education through the early years, as those are a child's formative years.

We all recognise that funding is required to reach areas of high demand for preschool places. That will be a complex issue. In Strabane, in my constituency, there is a rise in demand for preschool places, and parents are finding it difficult to access places in the district. All providers of preschool education are valued equally, and I acknowledge the significant changes in preschool provision since 1997. I

welcome the previous Minister of Education's funding of £200 for each child for statutory nursery provision. I believe that we can all agree here today that early intervention is best. The nought-to-six strategy has addressed that issue.

As a Member mentioned earlier, no statistical data is available on future provision. Mechanisms need to be put in place so that data can be collected to ensure that the same issues do not arise year in, year out. We also need to instil confidence in parents that we can provide for the sector. To meet the needs of parents for full- and part-time provision, we need to be flexible. Preschool advisory groups in the education and library boards, whose job it is to plan and implement, need to review provision at local level to ensure that people's unmet needs are provided for and that allocations to voluntary and private sector providers meet the needs of the area. There is no doubt that we all recognise the importance and benefits of good preschool education. I finish by acknowledging the high quality of work provided for our children by dedicated preschool teachers and staff.

Mr Craig: I support the motion and the amendment. This issue is very important not just locally but for the wider constituency of Northern Ireland. I read with interest the foreword to the 'Early Years (0-6) Strategy', published by the Department of Education, in which the former Minister said:

"Early years are vital years in our children's lives. They are unique in terms of children's intellectual, emotional, physical and social development and the formation of children's ability to interact successfully with the world around them, both in early childhood and in later life. They are the springboard for creating confident learners and participative citizens."

Unfortunately, however, many parents have approached me after their child has been refused not their first but their second and third choice for a preschool place. The process has not been as smooth as it should have been for what is an important transition for any child and an anxious time for any parent. Speaking as a parent — all parents are of the same opinion — early years is the most important stage in a child's development, and we worry about it. We want the best for our children. However, many parents find that they cannot access provision and have to start from scratch once they have been knocked back by the system.

Early years education is a vital part of every child's future. That has been highlighted not only by the Department's early years strategy but in various other reports, including those from the European Commission and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

I have a difficulty with the previous Member saying that the facts and figures are not there — they are. One has only to track the statistics on birth rates to which the Department has access: where children are, the number born and even the sex and orientation of some of them. All that information is held by government, and it is held three years in advance of someone looking for an early years preschool place. Why has the Department got it so wrong? Why is there a complete mismatch of provision for those in need of the service? We have had that situation for two years in a row. I appeal to the new Minister to go back to the Department and bang a few heads together, because there should have been a three-year intervening period for the Department to look at the statistics, match them to areas and say that there is overprovision in some areas and underprovision in others.

As my colleague Mr Givan said, there is serious underprovision in the Lisburn area. Why was that allowed to happen? I will leave that question with the Minister, who I hope will give us some idea of how the Department works out the numbers. Nevertheless, I appeal to him to knock some heads together at the Department and ask those people to use the information and statistics that are available to them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Jo-Anne Dobson, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mrs Dobson: I am extremely pleased to have the opportunity to make my maiden speech on nursery provision, an issue about which I feel passionately. I believe that every child should be entitled to a nursery-school place. Therefore, I support the motion and the amendment, and I thank those who tabled the motion for affording me this opportunity to speak. It is both an honour and a privilege to speak to the House, and I will for ever owe a debt of gratitude to the voters of Upper Bann who have bestowed on me this position of service.

3.45 pm

In speaking to the debate, I bring to the attention of the House the very personal story of three-year-old Lily-Pyper Davison, who is a little girl from my home village of Waringstown. Lily-Pyper suffers from cystic fibrosis, has two holes in her heart and has to endure a serious kidney condition. Her father has not been able to work due to a serious industrial injury, and her mother is presently training to become a paramedic due to the family health problems. Sadly, like hundreds of children across Northern Ireland, Lily-Pyper has recently been refused a place at nursery school. Her parents are at a loss to understand why she has been refused, especially as her elder brother, Ethan, who does not have health problems, gained a local nursery place last year. Like countless parents across Northern Ireland, they quite rightly blame the Department of Education's current criteria for allocating preschool places.

The Davison family, under the current rules, does not qualify as being socially disadvantaged. They do not claim benefits and do not wish to do so. I visited them shortly after they contacted me and would defy anyone here not to feel for them as they go through what must be a very difficult period. I have launched an appeal on their behalf with the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) as, so far, no acceptable outcome has been offered to them. In making my maiden speech today, I dedicate my election victory to that brave little girl, Lily-Pyper Davison.

The story is not unique: it is one of many across Northern Ireland of countless angry and frustrated parents whose children have been let down. Denying a child a nursery-school place could seriously disadvantage them throughout their school years and into later life. I believe passionately that early years intervention is key to our children receiving the highest quality of educational experience. Nursery school is, after all, a child's first step on to the educational ladder. Our children are the future of Northern Ireland; we owe it to all of them to provide a firm educational foundation.

Furthermore, the Department's present system of identifying the demand for increased nursery provision is fundamentally flawed. Waringstown is a growing village, but, despite having almost 5,000 residents, it does not as yet have a nursery school. Since being elected to

Craigavon Borough Council last year, I have led the campaign on behalf of parents to establish a nursery school at Waringstown Primary School. Indeed, the decision lies presently with the Minister. I have been overwhelmed by the support of local people, parents and grandparents, who believe that every child should be entitled to a nursery place. My party is committed to giving every child the best start in their educational journey. Central to that commitment is a universal entitlement to preschool education. The present system of allocating places boils down to little more than a lottery and must end. Therefore, I support the amendment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Karen McKeivitt, I remind the House that the convention is that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Mrs McKeivitt: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to address the House. I am pleased to have the opportunity to make my maiden speech on such an important issue. It impacts on so many lives, and it is a particularly important matter for my constituency.

I express my gratitude to the good people of South Down who elected me to this position. I am truly honoured, and I look forward to doing my best to serve my constituency to the best of my ability. I also thank my party colleagues, who have helped me to settle into my role. I make special mention of my predecessor, colleague and friend P J Bradley. He served the people of South Down with distinction. Although his retirement from elected politics is certainly well earned, his contribution will be greatly missed.

As a mother of five children, I have hands-on experience of how important nursery education is. I know that the early years of a child's life are of critical importance for the child's future development and well-being. Nursery education is a critical part of a child's life as they develop personally, emotionally and physically. Friendships can be made, and the foundations of language skills and learning are laid.

It is not an easy task for any parent to hand their child over to a stranger to be educated, but when they choose a local preschool and are guaranteed a place, it makes it much easier. That is why I am dismayed to hear of families in distress because their children did not receive a place in their local preschool and were not

offered a place in any preschool near their parish. Coming from a mainly rural community presents immense difficulties in childcare and employment, particularly for women who work. It was no surprise to me that the Northern Ireland Childminding Association has reported that the number of women who report that they are prevented from seeking work due to family commitments has risen by 50% to 15,000 in the past nine months. That drastic increase highlights just how important the issue is. The SDLP is committed to supporting children and supporting early years provision that is accessible, close and realistic.

The criteria for selection are hugely important. It is important that parental choice be offered in all cases — no excuses. Children and their families should have a legal right to preschool provision in their parish. We need the Minister to have a proactive approach to ensure adequate provision in future to allow the community to grow and to allow children to grow with their peers. A statutory right to preschool education is the only way of ensuring equality of access to education. We want every child to have the right to preschool education. We should not play politics with the issue, which is why we are calling on all sides to support every child's right to a preschool education. After all, school days are supposed to be the best days of their lives. Let us get it right. I support the motion.

Mr Irwin: This issue gains more importance with each passing term. Over the past few weeks, like many other public representatives, I have received calls from frustrated parents who are angry because their applications to have their son or daughter admitted to a full-time, funded preschool place in their area has failed. All the cases that I dealt with involved parents who both worked. Most of those parents came to the conclusion that they were being penalised for going out to earn a living, and their child was being filtered through the admissions process and dropped out at the other end without a preschool place or receiving only a part-time place. That should alarm the Minister, as parents who wish to go out to work to improve Northern Ireland's economic outlook are being disenfranchised through an unfair admissions system.

Most people want to work and earn a living; that is good and proper. However, I want to know why those same people are being disenfranchised

when they apply for a funded preschool place. It is right and proper that the socially disadvantaged are assisted; no one disagrees with that. However, we must look more closely at how the admissions criteria are applied. I have major concerns for the parents who are in full-time employment but are left with only a part-time slot for their child. The time frame is much too short. Parents have told me that their only option is for one parent to stop work. That is a massive retrograde step. It is obvious that the admissions system needs to be overhauled to meet today's economic reality of both parents needing to work to make ends meet.

In my constituency, there is a feeling among parents and staff that funded provision is well below the level required. I agree with the motion. Unmet need must be addressed in the short term and further ahead. Preschool provision should be a right for every child, regardless of their circumstances. It is important that the new Minister gives the issue the required detailed consideration. What is best for a child should lie at the core of any review, and in the short term there is a massive onus on the Department to ensure that demand is met. I support the need for additional funding places in my constituency. Before the new term commences, there is time to address any shortfalls. Given that many hard-working parents depend on this need, I expect it to be met. I support the motion.

Mr B McCrea: This matter is of great concern to people, particularly as the majority get places but the few who do not feel aggrieved — rightly — about the matter.

Many Members used the debate as an opportunity to make their maiden speeches. I congratulate them all for the way in which they expressed their points of view. Many brought their personal concerns and issues to the fore. It is right and proper that a maiden speech should be used for that purpose.

However, I was somewhat disappointed when the proposer of the amendment chose not to take an intervention. Surely when you are trying to persuade Members to accept your amendment, you want to give them some idea about why they might accept it. I am at a loss as to know what point was being made. The leader on this policy issue has informed me that our party will support the amendment.

Mr A Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I will not give way. No, sorry, I have changed my mind. I will give way.

Mr A Maskey: I appreciate the Member's willingness to give way as he normally does. Do you accept that Mr Flanagan gave way during his contribution earlier today and that the intervention used up all his time? It is unfair for an experienced Member to chastise a new Member who had already given way in his earlier contribution.

Mr B McCrea: I am happy to take the chastisement about chastising. The point is that, if you are going to propose an amendment as opposed to making a contribution during a speech, or if you are making a maiden speech, you have certain privileges. However, this is an important issue. As the Member commented, I normally take interventions and treat them properly and respectfully.

I want to make a point that is germane to the debate. When the proposer of the amendment outlined the decision that he and his wife took about sending their child to a local centre, I wanted to ask him whether every set of parents in Northern Ireland should have that right. Should it not be the case that parents are entitled to send their children to the school of adequate provision that is closest to their home? What is appropriate for one family is surely appropriate for another. The proposer of the motion pointed out that there are basic inequalities in the system. In layman's terms, this is an unfair system that has not been tackled. I hope that the Minister, who has oft-times mentioned the tackling of inequalities, will deal with this provision when he responds to the debate.

I have spoken many times on the issue. If we are serious about tackling educational underachievement and preparing our young people for a prosperous and peaceful Northern Ireland, we must make the investment at the very start of their learning careers. That requires that all people be treated equally, without fear or favour.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. He referred to all children being treated equally. Is there not an irony in the situation? I listened to the debate. On the one hand, the Department's ideological position is that all children go to their nearest school on post-primary transfer, but when it comes to preschool provision, it is happy to justify the ludicrous

situation whereby children are shipped from Ballycastle to Larne.

Surely, there is an irony there. At the end of the day, the parental choice element has to be protected. It is not being protected in either case.

4.00 pm

Mr B McCrea: It is worth taking my last minute to speak to the serious points that Mr Storey has raised. A complete nonsense of an argument has been put forward by people who say that children should go to their closest school but will not resolve nursery provision. The issue needs to be debated properly at another time. I agree with Mr Anderson's point that it is inequitable that people who work hard for a living cannot get their children into a school. Those people are not being treated fairly. It is an unfair system. Any party that advocates equality as its central thesis should deal with this now, and it should deal with it first. I think that I have made my point.

Mr Allister: I declare an interest as the chairman of the board of governors of Moorfields Primary School, to which some of my remarks will relate. The school is situated between Ballymena and Larne. We had the good fortune to have a new school building not so long ago, but, despite a 20-year campaign for a nursery unit, the parents in that area are still bereft of that provision, with the consequence that that large, sprawling rural area goes largely unserved for nursery provision, certainly in the state sector. Therefore, I will focus on the rural deficit in nursery school provision, at least in that part of north Antrim. That has been highlighted many, many times, yet neither the board nor the Department has been at all moved to deal with it.

Today, I make a fresh plea in that regard. Why should my neighbours and constituents be treated as second-class citizens when it comes to the provision of nursery facilities for their children and grandchildren? They ought not to be, but, to date, they have been because of a lamentable failure on the part of the Department and the board. A number of Members have made the point that that, of course, is compounded by the fact that many hard-working parents face huge expense when they can find, at some distance, a private facility or some other facility that can take their child. That huge expense of trying to take up that

provision eats into the viability of their working at all.

In the provision of nursery places, we have got somewhat out of kilter the prioritising of the social need element. If we are not going to provide what we ought to provide, namely a statutory right to a place for every child, we certainly need to make sure that the places that are available are provided on a more equitable and sustainable basis. We can talk about the application of the policy, but, if the places are not there in a particular geographical location in the first place, it does not matter what the policy is, because no one is getting a place.

The essential prerequisite is planning that will provide nursery units. I look around an area not so far away from the Moorfields Primary School, and I see overprovision. However, when I come back to that rural hinterland, I find that there is not just underprovision but no provision. The whole ward of Glenwhirry, one of the largest, sprawling wards in north Antrim, is totally without such provision. If we care at all for the future of our children, that cannot go on. It is time that the Department grabbed hold of issues such as this, and, instead of wasting time, money and effort on chasing ideological moonbeams, let it chase things that really matter to parents and, my oh my, the provision of nursery units and places certainly matters to parents.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am happy to be here this afternoon to respond to the debate, and I am pleased that we are debating a topic as important as preschool education so early in the new Assembly mandate.

I will respond in detail to Members' comments as I go through the debate. However, it is important that we remember that we are debating preschool education. It is set in a number of different formats for a variety of reasons, but, no matter where preschool education is provided, we have to ensure that it is of high quality. That is achieved through the commitment of staff. It is also governed by the Education and Training Inspectorate, because any unit, whether statutory, voluntary or community, that provides preschool education is inspected, and, through those inspections, we are raising standards right across providers. That concern has been raised in the motion. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the

motion refers to nursery school provision, and the debate has been peppered with references to nursery school provision as if it were a different or better type of educational provision. Reports from the inspectorate call many of our nursery schools outstanding; however, it will not and cannot be the case, either financially or socially, that we can provide all our preschool education in nursery places. It simply cannot be done.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for giving way. Will he also look at the issue, which he is well aware of from his time on the previous Education Committee, that some provision in the sectors is not meeting the inspectorate's standards? That needs to be looked at, and those improvements need to be made if there is to be continued funding.

Mr O'Dowd: I certainly agree with the Member, and he will be aware that, across our educational provision — preschool, primary and post-primary — there are educational facilities that cause concern. The inspectorate works with them to ensure that they raise their standards. If they do not, measures can be taken to ensure that the children in those schools are given proper education or that the provider is closed down. That is the worst-case scenario, and we do not want to reach that stage. However, if we have to, we will.

The preschool expansion programme was introduced in 1998. It provides one year of free, quality, funded preschool education in the year before compulsory education. A debate is going on — it will no doubt enter this Chamber — that perhaps we send our children to school too early here. I have no firm position on that, but I am sure that we can agree that, if there is an ongoing debate about whether four or five is too early, sending our children to school at three is far too early. Therefore preschool education is not the formal setting that we perhaps think —

Mr McNarry: I want some clarification, Minister. I am inclined to agree with you about sending children to school too early, but can you define what level of school you mean? I think that that is what the public needs to hear, and I certainly would like to hear your definition.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his intervention. I emphasise that I am not making a definitive statement. However, when we talk about "school", we mean primary school and the formal setting where children are set a

curriculum to learn. Some experts will tell you that that formal setting is too soon for some children. I am cautioning this: let us not slip into a system where we send our children to school at three.

Children are sent into preschool education for a variety of reasons. One reason is to prepare them for formal education. However, it also allows children to develop their social skills and play skills and to learn through play. That is the scenario in which preschool education is provided. I caution Members who rally to the cause of a nursery school and claim that it is a better provider than preschool education in a community or voluntary setting. We will judge each development proposal on its merits and each community and voluntary sector provider on its education inspectorate reports. If we can get to a place where that provision is excellent, we will have achieved the best for young people.

The rate of expansion has been due to a partnership approach and to recognising and utilising existing provision that has been developed in the voluntary and private sectors. It does not make economic sense to ignore or displace quality provision where it exists and has benefited from public investment and has many strengths to commend it. There are currently 8,000 children in preschool places in the community and voluntary sector. That supports numerous jobs and community initiatives in that sector. Mr Allister referred to the rural community: many settings in the rural community are provided through the community and voluntary sector. In fairness to that sector, we should say that it stepped in to provide for the rural community when statutory agencies had failed it. Therefore, let us be careful not to undermine the provision offered in those settings, whether they be rural or urban, and let us secure those places and jobs.

Expansion of the range of providers also allowed for new nursery schools to be built in early years provision, including new units to replace reception provision, and facilitated choice for parents. In 2011, there are 22,503 children in funded preschool places. Naturally enough, you do not meet the parents of those children. Those parents are lucky enough to have been provided with preschool places for their children. Therefore, they are not in constituency offices using the services of local MLAs and councillors. Parents who are disappointed are perfectly entitled to go to their elected

representatives. I encourage them to do so because it is one way that the Department can pick up on underprovision in an area. However, almost 98% coverage is being provided: 22,503 children are being provided with preschool places on both a part-time and full-time basis. Educational research shows that there is no proven educational benefit to full-time rather than part-time —

Mr B McCrea: The real point of the debate is that, if 98% of people get what they require, why are the 2% who do not penalised? I am simply using your figures. I could understand the argument that special provision has to be made for those who live in rural communities. Obviously, there are certain issues that we want to consider. However, people who come into our constituency offices live in the middle of towns and are being offered places elsewhere. For example, someone who lives in Lisburn might be offered a place in Newtownards. That does not make sense. Surely, the Assembly should try to ensure that, in the interests of equality, the 2% get exactly the same service as the 98%.

Mr O'Dowd: We have to strive towards that goal. The question is whether the motion before the House allows us to achieve that. The amendment allows a review to take place; it does not quash the sentiments of the motion. It certainly allows it to be expanded and for the Assembly to move forward in an informed fashion.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will in just a moment. The Department has limited financial resources. It wants to ensure that those resources are injected into education properly. I do not accept that people are being penalised, but I certainly understand the frustration and, perhaps, the anger of parents whose children have no provision. However, if we are to tackle social disadvantage and the cycle of poverty and long-term unemployment, one way to do that is to ensure that young people who come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are given an advantage in education.

The Department has let down around 100 people this year according to figures that it has. I have noted comments in this morning's edition of 'The Irish News'. I have asked officials to contact the five boards that are mentioned to find out why they have given different figures to 'The Irish News' than they gave to my

Department. I am a firm believer in the freedom of the press —

Mr McNarry: Who is right?

4.15 pm

Mr O'Dowd: I hope to find out who is right. I want to know whether the 'The Irish News' is getting more reliable information than I am. Certainly, somebody has been getting the wrong information.

We accept that, as part of the expansion programme, we have to target 100%. That is the ambition that we have set ourselves. It is a question of how we do that. People have asked why the Department does not know where the children reside. They say that the Department knows the birth rates. Yes, we know the birth rates, but a birth certificate does not tell us where a child will reside in the next three years. Demographics change, and there are population shifts. The movement of 30 or 40 young people into an area over a period will change provision in that area. That is where I challenge the proposer of the motion, who rightly stated that there was an Assembly debate on the subject around this time last year but also stated that nothing had changed. Things have changed in the past year. The previous Minister injected £1.3 million into the service, which allowed the community and voluntary sector to respond almost immediately in areas where there was severe underprovision. She brought in a two-stage policy, which ensured that children in the qualifying age bracket were dealt with first, while other children were dealt with at the second stage. Therefore, things have changed.

The Department and I, as Minister, will not be satisfied until we ensure that we inject 100% provision into the sector and that all young people who wish to —

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Give me one second, so that I can finish this point. A percentage of parents still do not want to send their children to preschool. There is a variety of reasons for that. A Member asked me whether there was research on that. Research was carried out on the reasons behind that decision, following publication of a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report in October 2010, and Mr McDevitt outlined many of them. One of the reasons why we cannot be satisfied with that is that parents have too far to travel.

That is not a reason but an obstacle. We have to remove that obstacle for them. I would like to see the review remove that obstacle.

Mr McDevitt: I appreciate the Minister giving way. He will be aware that the European Commission believes that universal access to preschool education should be in place across the European Union, so the question remains. I do not think that anyone in the House is in disagreement about the need for a statutory right. Why, therefore, have you tabled an amendment through your party colleagues that would turn it not into a statutory right but a statutory luxury? It would be, in other words, a right that we can have if we can afford to have it, like the DVD player or the Xbox. That is not the way to set and realise your ambition of 100%. Minister, why will you not join us now in saying that we will make this a legally binding obligation and, therefore, force the state and the system to meet that obligation?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not sure if there is agreement around the House that statutory provision is the way forward. I am not arguing against it, because the research is not there to dictate to the House, the Executive or my Department that we should spend an extra £30 million on that provision and possibly £40 million on capital provision. That is £70 million in a very strapped budget. I want to be assured and I am sure that the House wants to be assured that, if we are to spend £70 million on that provision, it is the right way to spend that money.

We have to ensure that there is provision on the ground. If it becomes a statutory right, you will still run into this problem. If my figures are right and there are still around 100 people displaced, they will still be displaced if we bring in statutory provision. They may still have to travel 10, 15 or 20 miles down the road. Statutory provision will not change the distance that someone has to travel.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not giving way any further, because I am running out of time. The key to this is to review the procedures and the statutory requirement that you have introduced and to look at the financial situation and the most important part of the equation — the educational benefits of bringing in statutory preschool education. Let us look at that. As Ms Cochrane said, a certain percentage of parents

do not want to send their children to preschool. How do we deal with that in statute?

I also want to touch on the question around the 2006 review, to which Mr McDevitt referred, and that around July and August birthdays. That matter needs to be dealt with, and legislation is required to deal with it. The previous Minister had hoped to bring it through in the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) legislation. I will not rehearse that. Mr Craig suggested that I knock the heads of my officials together. I am pretty sure that I am not allowed to knock their heads together, and I am pretty sure that some of them would knock me straight back. I will meet my officials in a more diplomatic way and discuss how we can bring about the necessary legislation to remove that anomaly and the barriers that exist. We should be able to work at that.

I appeal to Members — I am not looking to undermine anybody's proposal — to vote in favour of the amendment. It will allow the proposer, the Executive and the Assembly to move forward in an informed way and will ensure that the review that they all want, which will include a review of the implications of statutory provision and will take the focus away from simply being on nursery schools, takes place. Let us admire the provision that we have out there, be it in the statutory nursery sector or the community and voluntary sector. As long as that provision is made in an excellent way, the children under that supervision will be provided with a first-class start in life.

Mr McKay: I support the amendment and thank the Member for tabling the motion. I think that this has been a worthwhile debate, and there is broad agreement about the issue across the House.

As we all know, preschool places are a useful and beneficial resource, and the community and voluntary sector, in particular, offers a valuable contribution to education through the provision of such places. My colleague, the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone Phil Flanagan, outlined the importance of that sector in his local community and in meeting the needs of his family. So, we should be cognisant of the benefits of that sector, especially for those from a rural background.

The Minister outlined the aims of the preschool education expansion programme, which provides one year of quality preschool provision through

the statutory nursery sector and funded preschool places in the voluntary and private sector. Preschool education is clearly beneficial to children, and the number of parents who wish to see their children avail themselves of it clearly demonstrates that. Research also shows that it has significant benefits for children at the early years stage.

The proposer of the motion expressed some concern about the use of social criteria. Judith Cochrane and Paul Givan also touched on that issue. However, we should bear it in mind that the research demonstrates that children from disadvantaged circumstances benefit most from preschool education. It is important that we put on record the benefits of those criteria and their implementation.

Sydney Anderson outlined the difficulties faced by many parents in his constituency, and that theme was also adopted by Judith Cochrane, David McNarry and Michaela Boyle. David McNarry said that there should be universal entitlement to preschool provision, and I agree. However, we, of course, need to strive towards that and to take into account all the necessary factors. Judith Cochrane said that research showed that part-time places have equal value to full-time places. Indeed, the EPPNI report states that full-time attendance has no benefits for children's cognitive development at the start of primary school when compared with part-time provision. The Minister also touched on that theme.

Paul Givan outlined that there should be statutory provision. However, it is important to consider the financial implications of that. Michaela Boyle, Jonathan Craig and many others raised the importance of being able to forecast demand. However, we, of course, need to recognise that there is great difficulty in doing that.

The Minister outlined the importance of ensuring that we provide high-quality education and raise standards of preschool provision across the board. He made an interesting point about the starting age for pupils, about which there has been some debate. I think that the Education Committee, in particular, should look at that and take it forward. We in the Committee should strive to make a measured assessment of the benefits or otherwise of reviewing the school starting age for pupils.

The Minister touched on a factor that was not discussed during the debate: the number of jobs in the community and voluntary sector and, indeed, all the sectors that make early years provision for children aged three and four. We should be cognisant of the decisions that we make in regard to that and of the impact that those decisions might have on jobs in rural and urban communities. He also said that there should be a focus on the anomalies and that we should look jointly at how we can remove the barriers to preschool provision. We should commit ourselves to looking at that.

I would support the motion as amended. Children clearly benefit immensely from the preschool provision that exists across the community. Preschool provision is important because the capacity for growth and development in children that age is intense. That being the case, we should ensure that parents can access places for their children and should assess through a review how we can legislate for a right to preschool education and the benefits and impacts that that has.

Mr P Ramsey: On behalf of the proposer of the motion, I thank Members for their contributions. It has been a very positive and constructive debate on the way forward, and many Members, whom I will mention, are coming at this from a personal, constituency basis and making clear reference to issues on the ground.

I welcome the motion. This is something that was a high priority for many of my constituents during the election, and I am pleased that it is being debated early in this Chamber. I welcome the Minister's presence today, and hopefully he will, diplomatically, shake heads or whatever he needs to do in the Department.

I will concentrate, if I may, on the effect that the criteria for admission are having on families across the region. If we had more spaces than applicants, the same criteria would still be prevalent in the minds of many parents and applicants. In the 2006 review of preschool education in Northern Ireland, many respondents, including the Western Education and Library Board, which operates largely in my constituency, stated that the social disadvantage criteria should be removed or reformed to include families who may be on benefit or receiving some form of tax credit. As I said, that was a key issue on the doorstep for many families in Foyle, especially families who

are working and are not in receipt of income support or jobseeker's allowance. They felt that the system was disadvantaging them and their children, as many Members said, because they were working. I am aware that the Department of Education has said that, after the review, it will look into other ways in which the criteria could be reformed, but, as yet, that has not been the case. I ask the Minister to perhaps take that into further consideration as part of the motion and give an early indication of how that reform could take place.

It is accepted the world over that children who have had the opportunity to have early years education progress more quickly than their classmates who have not had the same opportunity. They are more social and independent in primary school, which is something that every parent wants and something that we in this House should strive to enable them to undertake through a right to preschool education.

According to departmental figures and projections, from this year until 2016-17 almost 6,000 children will be in either full-time or part-time nursery schools. I wonder what percentage that is of the overall demand for early years provision in our communities. This needs to be given priority attention by the Department and the Minister.

I will go over Members' contributions. The proposer of the motion, Conall McDevitt, spoke with great passion and good knowledge of the system, recognising the need for children's places and for again reviewing the criteria. He talked about the basic inequalities facing children and parents, clearly emphasising the stress and pressure that parents are under at such times, a point that a lot of Members made. The postcode lottery is a concept that is still there and still worrying. He talked about the basic right of access to preschool education, which has, I think, united so many Members in the Chamber today.

In moving the amendment, Phil Flanagan spoke of the rural perspective. He spoke of the dedicated, well-trained, effective and passionate staff in his community. He talked about the contribution that the community and voluntary sector makes, but a place for every child is what we want.

In supporting the motion, Sydney Anderson said that the issue of nursery places has been

around for a long time and that the policy for funding nursery schools leaves a lot to be desired. I think that we all can say that, hand on heart. He made the point that offering a child a place up to 60 miles from their own home is unacceptable.

4.30 pm

David McNarry said that developing new opportunities for early intervention was crucial. He also said that literacy and numeracy are things that we should all be concerned about if we do not have early years development in children. He said that cross-cutting early years programmes are necessary. During my short time on the Committee for Employment and Learning, when we were carrying out the NEETs inquiry, it was the people who did not get early years education who became vulnerable and who suffered badly from literacy and numeracy problems. The effect of that is that there are 40,000 young people across Northern Ireland who are NEET. An education partnership between parents and schools was the key message from David.

Judith Cochrane, in her maiden speech, talked from her personal perspective in east Belfast. She said there is a particular problem regarding stress among parents who cannot find a place for their children, and that what was also required was quality provision for children. She also spoke about the roles of the private and voluntary sectors and said that we need to plan for the future.

Paul Givan said that early years intervention is critical in determining and assessing learning disabilities. This morning, we attended a meeting of the all-party group on learning disabilities, and it is obvious that the earlier a child can get an assessment the better chance it will have to get the means of affecting and addressing the learning disabilities it may have.

Michaela Boyle said that it is vital for children that there is early years intervention. Again, she spoke of the experiences and difficulties that parents have in Strabane and the 0-6 strategy. She also acknowledged the good work of the community and voluntary sector in Strabane.

Jonathan Craig made the point that, although it is important locally, it is an anxious time for many parents across Northern Ireland who are worrying and wanting the best for their children. He said that early years provision is vital for

children and talked about under provision in Lisburn, in his constituency.

Jo-Anne Dobson is not here at the moment, but in her maiden speech she talked about every child being entitled to a nursery place. She talked passionately about Lily-Pyper Davison, a child with special needs who was refused a place and with whom she is still working to get a place. When we talk about people in our community, it is those who are most vulnerable, particularly people with special needs, who deserve the places. It is a crying shame that nothing could be found for her.

My colleague Karen McKeivitt, in her maiden speech, talked about an issue that is of huge importance to her. She said that it was critical that there was hands-on experience and that that was important for the well-being of the child in its personal, emotional and physical development. She talked about the families she has been in close contact with and who are in distress, and, like other Members, she talked about equity in the rural community.

The DUP's William Irwin said that he had been receiving constant calls from parents who are stressed, frustrated and under pressure because their children did not get a place. He talked about the criteria and about children being penalised because their parents are working.

Basil McCrea said that it was a matter of grave concern for families whose children did not get a place. After chastising a Member, he was chastised for daring to intervene. He talked about an unfair system that has not yet been tackled. I am sure that the Minister, in his early days and early years, will make an effort to try and redress that.

Jim Allister is not in the Chamber, but he spoke from his experience as a member of a board of governors in his constituency who have been trying for 20 years to get provision where there is none. He highlighted many times when there was no help from the Department of Education or the Minister. Perhaps he will seek a meeting with the Minister to explore opportunities.

The Minister spoke about preschool education and places. He talked about the importance of children having quality and high-quality education. He talked about the Education and Training Inspectorate and about how outstanding nursery-school provision is across Northern Ireland. He said that the community and

voluntary sector provides 8,000 places and spoke of the number of jobs being created in that sector as we go forward. Again, he referred to the rural community. He said that he may require more than £30 million revenue and £40 million capital.

In his winding-up speech, Daithí McKay said that it was a very worthwhile debate, and we would all agree. He said that there was a lot of agreement around the Chamber and that rural communities needed direct access and equality. He said that preschool years were clearly beneficial, and he referred to research that showed that it was children from disadvantaged communities who benefit most on the targeting social need ladder.

It was a well-respected and constructive debate. I appeal to Members to support the motion.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that adequate nursery school and preschool provision are available for all children; to conduct an immediate review of current provision to ensure that unmet need in areas of high demand is addressed in advance of the next school year; to undertake a wider review to ensure that there is adequate provision in future years, with increased attention to early years education and with a focus within the review on the educational benefits and financial implications of bringing forward legislation giving a statutory right to preschool education.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The House will take its ease for a few moments while the Deputy Speakers change over for the Adjournment debate.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair)

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Mid-Ulster Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately seven minutes.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Business Office for allowing this Adjournment debate, which is an important subject for someone who represents Mid Ulster. I thank Members for showing support by attending it. We have a number of MLAs whose neighbouring constituencies are affected. Everyone knows that the services at the Mid-Ulster Hospital affect not only the mid-Ulster area but the neighbouring constituencies, particularly the Antrim constituencies, because of the effect that they have on Antrim Area Hospital. So many units have been piled into Antrim Area Hospital that it is overloaded and its facilities are being diluted.

In November 2008, I voiced concern about the accident and emergency unit at the Mid-Ulster Hospital. At the time, the Health Minister dismissed those concerns as invalid and scaremongering. Other parties said that my concerns had no justification and supported the Minister. However, in 2010, the Minister and the Northern Trust took the decision to close the A&E department at the Mid-Ulster Hospital and replace it with a minor injuries unit, which only opens from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays and other holidays. We were told that the service would cover 70% of the patients who had presented at the Mid-Ulster A&E department in the past and that the remainder would be catered for in Antrim Area Hospital. At the time, the Minister was extremely vocal in insisting that there would be no problem and that Antrim Area Hospital could cope with the influx. He pledged additional beds and resources to ensure that that would happen. Of course, none of that happened; it all stayed the same.

Sadly, that has been the case throughout. Antrim Area Hospital is unable to cope with the increased numbers, and there is evidence that it was already overstretched before the accident and emergency department at the Mid-Ulster Hospital closed. Also, it could not cope with the generality of the hospital overall. When I raised those issues with the Minister at the time, they were dismissed as though I had a grudge against Antrim Area Hospital. I do not have a grudge against any hospital; in fact, I respect the staff who try to cope with the circumstances in their hospital.

Antrim Area Hospital did not get its newbuild, just as people had predicted. Now, it is proposed that Portakabins be put in place to try to accommodate the influx of new patients.

Statistics released by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) recently show that the number of people forced to wait for more than 12 hours in A&E departments across the North has risen by almost one third. It is not surprising that patients attending Antrim Area Hospital A&E have had the longest waits. Unbelievably, between January and March this year, 1,451 people spent more than 12 hours waiting to be seen. That is simply not good enough. It is not acceptable and surely cannot be deemed safe, as others said in the past. It certainly cannot support the argument that 70% of patients who would have been treated at the Mid-Ulster Hospital for minor injuries are being catered for. How could they be?

Despite the closure of A&E units at the Mid-Ulster and Whiteabbey Hospitals, there have been no changes or newbuilds. The minor injuries unit opens only between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm on weekdays. It caters for those who are about during the day but does not provide a facility from Friday to Sunday or on holidays. Those are the times when young people in particular participate in different activities and sports. The farming community may also be involved in accidents at work. Some of those injuries are minor and could be treated at the minor injuries unit if it was open, but it is not.

Some years back, there was a similar situation in the hospital in Dungannon, when the minor injuries unit was open between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm. At that time, the argument was that there was no reason why it should be open for longer because the numbers did not justify it. However, when the hours were increased, people

started using it, and, as a result, the numbers justified the extension of those hours.

Some individuals take part in particular sporting activities. The Mid Ulster constituency is a rural area in which people enjoy various sports, including GAA and soccer. Over the weekend, none of those people can be catered for by the minor injuries unit. As we can see from the figures for Dungannon, Monday morning is the busiest time for the minor injuries unit there.

The minor injuries unit at the Mid-Ulster Hospital is not seen as offering a reasonable and safe service. It is not seen as being available, and people have to consider their situation before they go to the unit. Bank holidays are excluded from the opening hours. That is a time when children are off school and people are off work. Do-it-yourself enthusiasts get to work, and that is when accidents can happen, but there is no facility to deal with them.

We are told that the volume of people using the service would not justify an increase in opening times, but people do not regard that as a real service. They do not see it as being as available as a hospital should be, or a place where people can be treated when injured.

First, individuals must assess whether their injury is serious enough that they need to go to accident and emergency at Antrim Area Hospital, or whether it could be treated in the minor injuries unit. The individual could have a cut finger or an injury requiring an amputation to be carried out. Various issues could affect the situation. After performing a self-assessment, people must consider the time of day and whether they would make it to the minor injuries unit at the Mid-Ulster Hospital before closing time, or whether they should go straight to accident and emergency at Antrim Area Hospital. After 5.00 pm, they have to do that anyway. People do not judge that as a good or reasonable service for a general hospital to offer.

The whole hospital provision is being eroded, downgraded and declared unsafe. Departments are then closed. Over time, the hospital's acute services have been run down. First, they came for the surgical procedures and maternity services, then they came for the medical beds and high-dependency unit, and now they have taken A&E. One by one, services are being reduced, and the remaining wards will gradually end up in the same situation.

Those are not my words. The briefing paper issued by the Department gave reasons why those services were moving. It stated that the Mid-Ulster and Whiteabbey Hospitals had no access to acute surgical services, no modern technologies, no cardiology service, and so on. Once those services had been taken away, the Department said that, as those services were not offered, the hospitals were unsafe and should not be maintained in that condition, and so they were gradually run down. As each piece is removed, the next piece is considered unsafe, because the cover is not there.

We have seen a gradual push, which is making Antrim Area Hospital unworkable and pushing it towards breaking point. We need to reinstate the A&E at the Mid-Ulster Hospital to ensure that the pressure is taken off Antrim Area Hospital.

4.45 pm

It is the planning process that is wrong. The Department, the board and the executive within the board set targets and met dates. However, they did not assess whether it was safe or whether it provided a good service and healthy environment for people. That is where the fault seems to lie.

At different times, different MLAs and MPs met the previous Health Minister, Michael McGimpsey, to try to persuade him to hold off on making decisions to close down wards and to first look at what is in place. However, he refused to listen. I was present at a number of those meetings, and the Minister told me and others that he had no money and that there was nothing that he could do. Gradually, the services were run down.

Mr I McCrea: The Member has said that money was an issue for the previous Minister. However, in some of the meetings that I held with the trust and the Minister, it was suggested that money was not the reason why the A&E at the Mid-Ulster Hospital was closed. Although funding was always an issue for the previous Minister, and will no doubt be an issue for the current Minister, it is important that we clarify that the acute services were removed because of so-called health and safety issues, not because of the funding.

Mr Molloy: I accept that the closure of the A&E department was not as the result of funding. However, the point that I was making was that there was a running down of services and the

various different structures beforehand, which had an added effect. The previous Minister stated that it was the clinicians who had decided that the unit was unsafe and required different services and had then put pressure on him. By doing so, the Minister was saying that it was the clinicians and not him who made that decision.

The limited services that remain in the Mid-Ulster Hospital fall short of what other areas have and can expect. For example, the minor injuries unit at the South Tyrone Hospital is open from 9.00 am to 9.00 pm seven days a week. That unit caters for work and sporting accidents, and the figures for the number of minor injuries dealt with by that unit are very interesting. In December there were very low figures and in January there was an increased number due to the frost and snow. I am not a great advocate of the minor injuries unit in the South Tyrone Hospital, and I argued against it for the same reason, which was that it would dilute acute services and replace them with a minor injuries unit that was not up to the job. In all of that, we must remember that the staff involved have tried to do their best and have tried to provide services with the limited resources that they have.

It is time to call an end to the downgrading of the healthcare facilities at the Mid-Ulster Hospital. All the elected representatives from Mid Ulster, from all the parties, have been fighting for proper acute hospital facilities and for an increase in the size of the minor injuries unit. The Mid Ulster constituency, which takes in areas of County Tyrone and County Derry, has no acute hospital provision. The centre of the North is completely bare of services. We have clinics and daytime hospital services, but we have no acute hospitals. Instead, those are found around the periphery and the coastline, so we need to look at where acute hospitals are provided.

These are not just my words about the issues that we have; the clinicians, the medics and other serious people also say it. The Department and the Northern Trust told us that the minor injuries unit at the Mid-Ulster Hospital provides a great service and has been a great success. How they can make that claim is difficult to understand, because their own figures show that 1,400 people were left waiting for more than 12 hours for treatment in May 2011, and a senior medic, Dr Brian Patterson,

made the point that the A&E at Antrim Area Hospital is at breaking point.

That is not me as an MLA saying that, but a top medic, and he clearly attributes that to the closure of the casualty departments at the Mid-Ulster Hospital and Whiteabbey Hospital 12 months ago. He is clearly identifying where the problem is and how it should be resolved. All along, medics said that it was unsafe to move those services without alternatives being put in place and a provision being available for what Antrim Area Hospital is unable to cater for at present.

I am heartened that the current Minister, Mr Poots, is here. I thank him for attending and for saying that he will review the situation, although he has not made any promises about its outcome. That at least provides an opening for people to come together and put the case again with a different view and consideration of the situation. An accident and emergency department is required in a rural area such as mid-Ulster to provide a service for a wide catchment area.

We also want enhanced opening times in the minor injuries unit, from 9.00 am to 9.00 pm, seven days a week, including bank holidays, and so forth. We also want as many medical services as possible to be located on the Mid-Ulster site to enhance it in every way possible. Out-of-hours doctors, for instance, should be located there so that there is doctor cover when the hospital is not otherwise up and running. However, the main thing is to try to enhance what we have until we rebuild, to get to the desired position of having an accident and emergency department on that site and to bring about that change.

I take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Mid-Ulster Hospital — the doctors, the nurses, and other staff around the hospital — for their work under the worst of circumstances over the past number of years.

Mr I McCrea: I suppose that this is one of the few occasions on which I will thank the Member across the way for something, but I certainly thank him for securing today's Adjournment debate.

I make no apology in joining him and, I hope, every other Member — that is, those of us who are still left in the Chamber — in opposing and voicing my opposition to the previous Minister's

decision to remove acute services from the Mid-Ulster Hospital. I also make no apology if my colleague is offended by my opposition to any decision that he makes or does not make, depending on what way it goes for the Mid-Ulster. I am elected by the people of Mid Ulster to represent their views, and during the election, not one person said to me to support any further removal of services at the Mid-Ulster.

I do not want to go over many of the issues to which Mr Molloy referred because he had 15 minutes to deal with them. However, it is important to go over the gradual removal of services from the Mid-Ulster Hospital undertaken by the trust and previous government officials. Mid Ulster is a rural constituency that needed, and continues to need, an accident and emergency service. However, the removal of services, whether maternity or surgical, brought us to a point at which acute services were unsustainable. They were never going to be retained and were certainly never able to be sustained in the long term.

The Mid-Ulster has a minor injuries unit. That is what we have been left with. The Member opposite referred to the opening hours of 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, five days a week, and 9.00 am to 9.00 pm at the South Tyrone Hospital, seven days a week. I ask the Minister to look at that. Mind you, I asked the chief executive of the trust to consider that issue and I am still awaiting a change. I hope that the Minister has more influence than I or any of the other elected representatives who have made that request.

The minor injuries unit opened on 24 May last year. The headline of the trust's press release was, "Minor Injuries Units — a new era of care — Mid Ulster Hospital". I am not disputing the quality of care provided by the hospital; the care that those responsible, including nurses, provide is excellent. I have known many of the doctors and nurses in the Mid-Ulster Hospital for many years and, on many occasions, have thanked them for all their help with the injuries that I received when I was much younger and fitter and was able to play football. The staff there do a good job, but the difficulty that the people of mid-Ulster have is that there is not an appropriate level of service to cope with their needs.

Mr Molloy referred to enhancing the services at the minor injuries unit, and I ask the Minister to look into that.

My colleague to my left is a representative for the Antrim area. Although he and I jest about whether Antrim Area Hospital is looking after the patients of mid-Ulster, some, including me, question whether it is capable of coping with them.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Member for giving me the opportunity to intervene. I know where his train of thought is going. It is not the case that the staff are unable to care for the people of mid-Ulster when they come to Antrim Area Hospital; the issue is that the facility in Antrim was not designed to cater for the additional patients that are being brought to it. The professionalism of the staff who work in the hospital cannot be questioned. The problem is that the Antrim facility was never designed or built to cater for people from Whiteabbey Hospital, the Mid-Ulster Hospital or other hospitals in which departments have been closed.

Mr I McCrea: That was certainly my train of thought. The professionalism or the staff's ability is not in question; it is the fact that the people of mid-Ulster and their representatives were told, prior to a decision being taken, that they would be sent to Antrim Area Hospital only when it was able to cope with the additional patients from the mid-Ulster and Whiteabbey areas. I would like to see the Mid-Ulster Hospital get back its accident and emergency department, and I ask the Minister to consider that.

The decision was premature. The proposed newbuild, if I can believe what I am told, is close to commencing. I will watch that with interest. The important issue is to get back some trust in the trust for the people of mid-Ulster. We have been told many a story about what we will get and what we will not get — more often about what we will get. Dates are set, but they mean nothing. I ask the Minister to ensure that any future dates set by the trust are adhered to. I ask him to ensure that any services that we have are retained and enhanced, as other Members will no doubt call for.

5.00 pm

Mrs Overend: I welcome the opportunity to take part in the Adjournment debate, and I thank the Member for tabling the topic. I am pleased that we have representation from all sides of the House, and I note the interest of those in the Public Gallery this afternoon. During my election campaign, health was certainly one of the most

important issues raised on the doorsteps, and I said at the time that I would represent those concerns in this place. I took an early opportunity to write to the Health Minister on this issue, and I am glad that he is here this afternoon.

I was born in the Mid-Ulster Hospital, as were my two brothers and my sister, and the only reason that I have been admitted to hospital again was to have my three children, who were all born in the Mid-Ulster Hospital. All my antenatal care was provided there, and my experiences of the hospital were very positive. The care and attitudes of the staff, midwives and nurses at that time were second to none. I was naturally disappointed that, within a year, the maternity ward was closed.

However, in October 2010, I was very pleased to be present at the launch of the midwifery-led antenatal service at the Mid-Ulster Hospital. That service is good news for pregnant mums in mid-Ulster, as it is aimed at those in the low-risk category. It is fantastic that they can attend antenatal appointments locally and know that they will continue to see the same midwives throughout their pregnancy. That means less stress for mums and increased confidence in a successful pregnancy.

Good teamwork is key to the success of the service between the Mid-Ulster and Antrim hospitals, and it will ensure good continuity of care during pregnancy. Midwives have a lead role to play throughout pregnancy, and the service will give an even greater confidence to midwives and others. Teamwork between hospitals is a key concept, when the Mid-Ulster Hospital now lacks the essential A&E services and provides only a minor injuries unit in their place. Good teamwork is essential because people still go to the Mid-Ulster Hospital needing emergency care. They are afraid that they will not make it to Antrim on time. What are the medical staff at the Mid-Ulster to do when that happens?

When the medical decision was made to remove A&E services from the Mid-Ulster Hospital, there was a huge outcry from my constituents, entirely understandably. We all want to receive the best possible care in our emergency time of need. We want the best consultants, the best doctors and the best possible care. However, it was deemed impossible to get that at the Mid-Ulster Hospital because not enough consultants

wanted to work there. Can we improve our teamwork between Antrim and the Mid-Ulster so that A&E provision can return to mid-Ulster? Can the Minister find ways to attract consultants to rural areas such as mid-Ulster?

Better teamwork is also needed with the Ambulance Service for mid-Ulster. It must be improved to meet the demands placed on it. The geographical spread for the Ambulance Service that covers the Northern Trust area is much too big. An ambulance could be driving from my local depot in the heart of mid-Ulster to Ballycastle and, mid-journey, take a call to divert to another emergency in Coagh. I ask the Minister to re-examine the methods used in that department.

In conclusion, there is a fear right across mid-Ulster that, should they need emergency services, people will not have time to receive the care that they need, either because they will not make it to Antrim Area Hospital on time or because, when they do get there, there will be huge delays before they can access help. It is the Minister's responsibility to restore confidence to the people of mid-Ulster and to consider better ways of delivering a first-class Health Service to my rural constituents.

The Patient and Client Council report launched this morning recognised that there should be no difference between the service received by those who live in a rural community and those in an urban community. The people of mid-Ulster need assurance and reassurance from the Health Minister. I can safely say that the Minister might need more money, but we need better teamwork in order to meet the people of mid-Ulster's demands and deliver better health services for them. It is a matter of life or death for far too many.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr Molloy, who brought the matter to the House, for the opportunity to speak on an issue that is very close to the hearts of many, not least of everyone in my own family. I and my family live in very close proximity to the Mid-Ulster Hospital. Indeed, in the past, we have had to call upon the services of that hospital. I pay special tribute to the staff and doctors who have worked on site at the Mid-Ulster Hospital for the service that they have given to the locality.

Mr McCrea referred to the assurances that were given to us, as elected representatives, that

there would be no dilution of services at the site in Magherafelt until a supplementary service was available in Antrim, but that assurance fell through.

It is opportune that a Patient and Client Council report called 'Rural Voices Matter' came out just today. There has been coverage about that report on the radio, and I took some time to read it. One of the key issues that it refers to is that the three services given the most average or poor ratings by rural dwellers are A&E, GP out-of-hours and outpatient.

Figures on outpatient waiting times were provided to me today. The indices are that no patient should wait longer than nine weeks for a first outpatient appointment. At 30 April 2011, 9,292 outpatients in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust were waiting over nine weeks. An additional 98 patients were waiting over nine weeks for ICATS, which apparently stands for integrated clinical assessment and treatment services, and 172 patients were breaching the agreed backstop positions for the likes of visiting consultant specialities. In fact 1,516 patients were waiting over nine weeks for those visiting consultant specialities. That is it all boiled down. That is the human face of it. Those are the people who, at election time and in our constituency offices, mention waiting times and the problems that they have had.

I am glad that the Minister is with us here today. I know from working with him in the last mandate that he is a person who is prepared to listen and work with people. Unfortunately, that was not the case with the previous Minister in the previous mandate. On 14 May 2010, I e-mailed the then Health Minister requesting a meeting with him about the situation at the Mid-Ulster Hospital. He would not meet me. On 4 June 2010, I got a reply that this was because of alleged diary commitments and pressures. He suggested that I meet the chief executive of the Northern Trust, whom I had met anyway. The Minister did not have time to meet us about an issue of clear concern to the community.

On 26 May, I wrote to the First Minister and deputy First Minister asking that they place provision of acute medical services and hospital provision on an agenda for discussion at the Executive. On 22 June, I received a reply from the First Minister and deputy First Minister stating that it was an operational matter for the Health Minister. That is the same Health

Minister who would not meet me. Therefore, Ministers had fobbed it off again.

On 25 June, I wrote to the First Minister and deputy First Minister again. I feel that it is important that I place on record the sentiments that I expressed in that letter.

“Dear Ministers, further to your letter of 22 June, I am dismayed at your response, in which you categorise acute medical services and hospital provision in mid-Ulster and west of the Bann, because the whole of Tyrone and south Derry has been denuded of these acute services and hospital provision, which is so required. The current situation and lack of provision of these services raises equality issues, disability issues, rural issues, children’s health and safety, as well of that of the wider public. These are equality matters that fall within your remit as First and deputy First Ministers, and I feel your dismissal of this important issue is extremely disappointing. You may be aware that the Minister of Health has refused to meet me on the decision to close the A&E in the Mid-Ulster Hospital and that there is significant evidence that Antrim Area Hospital’s A&E department is not fit to cope, particularly as planned changes and improvements are far from complete. Further to this, there is concern about ambulance cover across the Northern Trust area.”

Mrs Overend rightly referred to that today. My letter continued:

“My constituents in mid-Ulster feel that they are being treated as second class citizens by the Minister, and, if the Executive do not address the lack of provision under these criteria, they too will be failing the people of mid-Ulster. So, I would ask that this matter is brought before the Executive as a matter of urgency.”

Again, it is fob-off time; fob the matter off to the Minister or to someone else again, and do not land it on my plate.

Here, this evening, I look to the Minister and other Members for support. We have a situation in which Antrim Area Hospital is under serious pressure. Patients turn up at Magherafelt to a minor injuries unit that cannot and does not serve them. After they have been referred there, the Mid-Ulster Hospital has to refer them back up the road to Antrim. We have inadequate ambulance cover. A huge, scattered rural area is not being provided with services that other areas, be it Derry or Belfast, take for granted. I am sure that people there have their concerns about shortcomings in those areas.

I have requested a meeting with the Minister, and I trust that he will facilitate that. I am sure that he will, because fob-off politics is not his style. The people of mid-Ulster require an adequate service for themselves, their families and their children, as do the people of Tyrone. It is a major issue for the people in the Mid-Ulster Hospital’s catchment area. We have just the same rights and entitlements as everyone else in the North. I look to the Minister to help to improve that state of affairs and bring about a situation in which rural people no longer contribute to reports such as the one I mentioned earlier, in which they say that they do not have confidence in waiting times and so forth. We do not want to have to read quotes such as the ones in that report, in which people say that waiting times in A&E are horrendous.

I thank the Member for securing the debate. It is unfortunate that we have to have a debate on an issue such as this, where an area has been totally discriminated against when it comes to hospital provision. I look forward to the Minister’s response and, in future, to some of the actions by the Health Department to help to alleviate the situation.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank Members for their comments, from which it is clear that the services provided by the staff in the Mid-Ulster Hospital are greatly valued by the people of Magherafelt and the surrounding area. I add my appreciation of those staff members and others across the Northern Trust area who are clearly committed to providing high-quality, safe and effective health and social care to the people in that community.

I recognise the importance of local access to timely and effective emergency care services for rural communities. Indeed, I was at this morning’s launch of ‘Rural Voices Matter’, the Patient and Client Council’s report on the needs of rural communities. I want to assure the Assembly that my primary objective in reforming and modernising health and social care services is to ensure that we drive quality upwards, enhance the patient experience and improve health outcomes for the people of Northern Ireland. I want to involve people and front line staff in that decision-making process. That will require mature debate, and tough decisions will have to be made on improving productivity. We will have to do the right things right.

I want acute services to be provided on the basis of evidence of effectiveness, by skilled staff in modern buildings using modern technology, diagnostics and equipment. Yes, we are also looking for value for money. To do that, however, we must be prepared to take the hard decisions. In some instances, those will be to discontinue some services and interventions that are not necessarily sustainable in the long term.

I understand that the decision to reconfigure services at the Mid-Ulster Hospital was taken many years ago. Initially, we had the 'Developing Better Services' document, which outlined where we were going in the future and has been applied across hospitals. In addition, following a risk assessment on the sustainability of local services, it was found that there are significant risks to patients in sustaining acute services and facilities that do not have access to modern services, such as intensive care facilities, appropriate anaesthetic cover and 24/7 specialist radiology services.

5.15 pm

Access to appropriate clinical expertise and new technologies is essential to improve patient outcomes. In the view of medical experts, an acute service with a relatively low number of patients — say, an out-of-hours service — that cannot recruit and retain staff at the appropriate clinical grade is not a good service for patients. That is why the Northern Health and Social Care Trust took the decision and why, on that basis, the shift of services and experienced staff was considered to be in the best interests of patients. In doing so, it was recognised that the provision of a minor injuries unit at the Mid-Ulster Hospital would still provide access for the majority of patients living locally.

Given the difficulties faced by the emergency department at Antrim Area Hospital, we owe a debt of gratitude to staff in that department and on the wards who have been working under severe pressure for some time. It is my intention to visit the hospital in the near future to hear from front line staff, patients and senior management about the issues that concern them and about what they have done to improve access to services that are under pressure.

Mr T Clarke: I request that, when the Minister gets an opportunity to visit, he does not necessarily do so in conjunction with the chief executive and senior management. His visit should be unannounced, because we

have heard of high-profile visits in the past that afforded people an opportunity to tidy up departments and make sure that things were set nicely and looked pretty for the day. I suggest that the Minister goes in unannounced, particularly over a weekend, without notifying the chief executive — unless the Minister wants to ring him just before he goes in the front door — to see first-hand many people's experience. Given the startling figures that we have heard today, including the number of people who have had to wait for more than 12 hours, the only way that the Minister will get a real appreciation of the situation is if he goes in unannounced.

Mr Poots: I have made it clear that I want to see the emergency department, warts and all. There is no point in seeing something that has been dickied up for a short period and where the general public do not get that same equitable treatment throughout time.

I welcome the fact that, since last year, we have moved from 343 people having to wait for more than 12 hours — that is an unacceptable time to wait — to 209 this year. However, I still regard 209 people having to wait for that time in March/April as unacceptable, and we certainly want to continue to drive that number down.

As I said, I want to visit the hospital in the near future. Temporary measures are welcome, but they are acceptable only as part of a bigger plan. It is about managing demand and capacity and changing the way in which we do things. For example, do all patients who present themselves to an emergency department need to be there, or could they be managed in a different clinical setting? Could the role of GPs, pharmacists and specialist nurses be expanded in the community, and what further contribution might the community, voluntary and private sectors make?

Having had an opportunity to look at things, I think that too many people go to hospitals for services that should be provided by GPs. We need to enhance the service that is provided at a local level by GPs and primary care clinics. By developing those clinics, which are far more cost-effective and based locally, we can accommodate many of the needs of people who may currently be sitting for 12 hours in order to get something fairly minor done while people who come in with much more significant needs have to be dealt with first. We need to screen out many of those who end up in emergency

departments so that they receive care in the appropriate locations. We also need to look at what further contribution might be made through the community, voluntary and private sectors. In addition, we need more intermediate and community care and rehabilitation to maintain people in their communities, and we need to have timely access to acute care where people need it.

To some extent, I am coming to this situation with some people calling for the door to be closed after the horse has bolted. We have to recognise that there has been a run-down of services at the Mid-Ulster Hospital and that it will be very difficult to get those services back. In respect of reorganising things across Northern Ireland and the Northern Trust, we have to look at the Mid-Ulster Hospital, the revision, and how it can best fit into that future to ensure that the people in that area receive equity of treatment.

As regards Antrim Area Hospital, what we have been looking at up to now is a short-term contingency plan with a focus on a longer-term solution for the whole of the Northern Trust. Clinical leadership will be key to the success of any plan, and I look forward to hearing what clinicians have to say when I meet them in the near future. We will be looking at increasing bed capacity in Antrim in the short term, which will deliver an additional 14 medical beds temporarily. Those will be in place by November 2011. There will also be an additional 24 medical beds at a capital cost to my Department of £5 million. Construction for that will be completed by the end of 2012. Those new permanent beds will provide excellent facilities for patients; they will all be single rooms and will reach the highest standard in infection control.

In 2013, a new emergency department, at a cost of £9 million, will also be available. It will cater for 90,000 attendees per annum and will have state-of-the-art facilities for resuscitation, major and minor trauma and paediatric patients. All those things are far better dealt with at a trauma centre at a major hospital. It is in the interests of the public if those who suffer strokes or heart attacks, those who are in serious car accidents, including children, and those who take serious knocks to the head and so forth, are dealt with in a centre that has all the skills base available. That skills base will be able to provide the additional diagnostic

facilities for X-rays and imaging and will have a new clinical decision area.

That is not about saving money; it is about saving lives. It is important that segregation take place among those conditions and the minor injuries and those conditions where others can be served. We need to look at provision in the Mid-Ulster Hospital, its timing and what is appropriate. Some Members suggested that it may be worthwhile opening beyond nine to five and opening the hospital at weekends. That is something that I am prepared to discuss. Mr McGlone indicated that he had requested a meeting, as has Mr McCrea, both verbally and in writing. More recently, I received a letter from Mrs Overend. I am happy to meet all the Members together. I offer that invitation to Mr Molloy, as well as those whom they deem appropriate to bring with them from the community to make the case. Let us discuss what best meets the needs of people in mid-Ulster.

The environment in an emergency department is important to improve patient outcomes and the patient experience; it is also important for staff to improve patient flows in their working conditions. However, we must look at the bigger picture across Northern Ireland, which is why I expect the Health and Social Care Board, working in collaboration with the Public Health Agency, to bring forward a plan for reorganised emergency departments for Northern Ireland.

I expect that plan to be submitted to me by no later than December 2011. I trust that it will be done in conjunction with what the Ambulance Service can provide. At that point, I will be able to engage fully with the public and to be in a position to take final decisions on the future direction of all emergency department services in Northern Ireland. In the meantime, we are where we are in respect of the Mid-Ulster Hospital. I am prepared to look at how we can best meet the needs of the people of mid-Ulster into the future, although I suspect that that will not involve the reinstatement of services at the Mid-Ulster Hospital. However, there are opportunities to look at what is being provided at the Mid-Ulster Hospital to see how we can maximise the service to the public and best meet the needs of that community.

Over a long time, from the decision in the first Assembly to close Omagh Hospital and run down the services there to the decision of the Royal Colleges to remove many of Dungannon

Hospital's services and now Mid-Ulster Hospital, the area south and west of Lough Neagh has had an awful lot of medical services removed from it. We are in a different time now, and people are looking at doing things differently; nonetheless, we have a large geographical area, and it is important to ensure that its needs are met.

The decision to remove services in the Mid-Ulster Hospital saved the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety no money whatsoever. It actually cost us money because an additional £875,000 was given to the Ambulance Service to provide further services. Therefore, it was not a money-saving exercise. It was something that the Northern Trust did because it believed that there would be better clinical outcomes. Nonetheless, as I indicated, I am happy to have further discussions with the public representatives here today and with members of the community who can bring something to the table.

Adjourned at 5.27 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 13 June 2011

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matters of the Day

Mr Brian Lenihan

Mr Speaker: Mr Patsy McGlone has sought leave to make a statement on the death of Brian Lenihan, a matter that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Mr McGlone to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I will then call a representative from each of the other parties, as agreed with the Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes in which to speak on the matter. There will be no opportunity for interventions, questions or a vote. I will not take any points of order until the item of business is concluded. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Agus mé i mo sheasamh anseo, tá mé iontach brónach as ucht bhás Brian Lenihan. Ar son an SDLP agus go pearsanta, ba mhaith liom mo chomhbhrón a dhéanamh lena bhean Pádraigín agus leis an teaghlach uilig. Ba mhaith liom mo chomhbhrón a dhéanamh fosta lena pháirtí, Fianna Fáil, agus leis na cairde a rinne sé trasna na bpáirtithe agus taobh amuigh den pholaitíocht. Sárlaoch agus duine uasal a bhí ann.

On behalf of the SDLP and at a personal level, I extend sincerest sympathies to Brian Lenihan's wife, Patricia, on the sad and untimely death of a person who had yet so much to offer. Our sympathies also go to his entire family circle and his party, Fianna Fáil, to which he dedicated so much and gave so much of his time. I sympathise too with his many friends from across the party spectrum and from outside politics: a true politician and a gentleman. Ar láimh dheis Dé go raibh sé.

Mr Wilson: On behalf of the Democratic Unionist Party, I express condolences to the family of Brian Lenihan. I did not meet Brian Lenihan until

I was appointed Finance Minister, and I am not sure that his first impression of me was all that good, because I committed the unpardonable sin of stealing his seat. I went into the room first and took his seat. When he came in, he stood and looked at me for a moment or two and then graciously went and sat in another seat. I did not even realise that I had taken his seat.

Over the years, we had a very good working relationship. I found him to be a very genuine individual, someone who warmed to the job that he did and genuinely wanted to work with politicians from Northern Ireland to ensure that we had the best arrangements between the two countries on this island. He bore a great burden during the last couple of years, both in respect of the work he had to do because of the state of the economy in the Irish Republic and because of the ill health that he suffered. Yet, in all the dealings I had with him, he always had a bouncy optimism, both in regard to his own health — he said that things were getting better and he was recovering — and in what could be done for the economy in the Irish Republic.

During that time, I appreciated the informality that he brought to the job. On many occasions, it was a case of him saying, "I think you and I should talk this over. We don't need officials present. Let's get things sorted out". This was his attitude: "You have a problem, we have a problem. So let us sort it out". That was refreshing in the relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic. He was a very warm individual and a great conversationalist. It was sometimes hard to get a word in edgeways when sitting at a meal with him. *[Interruption.]* I think he won on most occasions, which is saying something. That is an indication of the warmth of the individual. He always wanted to visit Stormont, but, because of ill health and other circumstances, he had been unable to do so. So I was very pleased that, on the last occasion we met, it was in this Building. We had a good

time, even with the crisis going on that day in the Republic.

On behalf of the Democratic Unionist Party, I express our sympathy and condolences to his family. He will be a great loss to politics because he died at such a young age, and he had great intellect and ability. He will be a loss to politics in the Irish Republic. I trust that, at this difficult time, his family will know that our thoughts are with them.

Mr M McGuinness: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I extend our deepest sympathy to Brian Lenihan's family: his wife Patricia, his son Tom, his daughter Claire, his brother Conor and his aunt Mary.

It was with deep sadness that the First Minister and I learned, at the meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council on Friday, that Brian Lenihan had lost his very courageous battle against illness. He was a huge figure in Irish politics. He followed his father into politics, became a Government Minister and was part of an Administration who were responsible — along with ourselves and others — for changing the political landscape and history of this country and bringing about agreements that were eminently in the interests of all the people we represent. He found himself in the position of Finance Minister at a very difficult time but always showed himself to be prepared to face huge challenges. He matched his battle against illness with a battle against the dire economic circumstances that people in the South faced as a result of a world economic recession and other matters that impacted on the economy of the South.

It was always very clear that he had a great *grá*, a great love, for the North of Ireland. He recognised that our economic fortunes were interlinked. He worked hard and diligently with our Finance Minister, particularly in relation to the potential effect of National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) on our economy if there was a fire sale, but he constantly reassured us that he would not allow that to happen.

He will be a huge loss. Apart from being a first-class politician, he was a very decent human being. He was very affable, good-natured and kind-hearted and was always willing to listen to the debates and discussions that were taking place. He will be sorely missed, and all of us who worked with him will remember him as

someone who made a positive contribution to life on this island. My heart goes out to his wife and children, to his mother, Ann, and to the entire family circle at this very sad time.

Mr Cree: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I shall say a few words on the untimely death of Brian Lenihan. Regardless of our political allegiance, there is no doubt that Brian Lenihan has left an enormous political and personal legacy. He sought to save the Republic of Ireland from fiscal collapse by entering into a long-term agreement, which exists today. As the Republic's Finance Minister during the deepening economic crisis of late last year, he sheepishly had to go to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union for the €85 billion rescue package that has since kept the Republic afloat. Pumping billions of Irish taxpayers' euro into a banking system that most Irish people had blamed for bringing the country to the brink was, no doubt, a deeply contentious move. Although the bailout effectively prevented the banks from collapsing, we all know the impact that it has had on the fortunes of his party. Nevertheless, he was still able to buck the trend and was successfully re-elected, the only Fianna Fáil representative in Dublin.

When he first made public his illness, in late 2009, he won admirers from all shades in the Dáil. He also showed great bravery in the face of intense media, public and political pressure while battling a personal struggle for survival. On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I convey my sympathies to his wife and children and to the wider family circle.

Mr Ford: On behalf of my colleagues, I add our condolences to Brian Lenihan's wife, children and family circle. He was one of those politicians who came from a lengthy family dynasty, with his grandfather, his father, his aunt and his brother also all Members of the Dáil. In many cases, that can be viewed in a fairly negative way, yet what we saw of Brian Lenihan was someone who was recognised for commitment to public service, good humour and a willingness to shoulder the most difficult job in the Irish Government a couple of years ago, despite all that he was suffering with his own illness. It speaks volumes for the man that he was not there merely because it was the family thing to do; he was there to do the best conceivable job for his constituents, his party and the people of Ireland. Indeed, as others

have said, he also recognised the responsibility that he bore in North/South contacts.

He will be sadly missed, because political life could do with many more people like Brian Lenihan to carry that sense of obligation and commitment alongside that sense of good humour, partnership and willingness to relate to other people. On behalf of my colleagues, I express our condolences to the entire Lenihan family circle and Fianna Fáil on their loss.

Mr Agnew: I express my condolences and those of the Green Party to Brian Lenihan's family. Cancer has taken from us a talented politician but, perhaps more importantly, at the young age of 52 a son, a husband and a father. Cancer will affect most of us at some stage of our life, whether directly or indirectly. As some Members may know, I recently lost a very dear friend to cancer. I know the devastating effect that it can have on those who suffer the illness and on their friends and family. It is important to mention that this week is Men's Health Week, and Action Cancer is highlighting the need for men to "Get a Grip" and be proactive about taking care of our health needs. Our thoughts today should be not only with the family of Brian Lenihan but with all families whose lives have been devastated by cancer.

12.15 pm

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh: Ninetieth Birthday

Mr Speaker: Mr Jim Allister has sought leave to make a statement on the ninetieth birthday of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, a matter that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Mr Allister to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I will then call representatives from the other political parties, as agreed with the Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes to speak on the matter. Members know the convention: there will be no opportunity for interventions, questions or a vote, and I will certainly not take any points of order until the matter is dealt with. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr Allister: As we move from marking one life cut short to celebrating a long and continuing life, I take this opportunity to convey personal condolences to the Lenihan family on the loss of a father and husband.

Last Friday, His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh celebrated his ninetieth birthday. The achievement of that milestone for anyone is a significant event, but when it is achieved by someone of such singular relevance and importance in the life of a nation and is completed as part of long-standing and continuing service — indeed, on the very day of his ninetieth birthday, he completed three public engagements — it indicates the unique character and commitment of the man, the Duke of Edinburgh. Therefore, as his life has been celebrated and this achievement has been marked across the nation, it is right that this devolved Assembly of this United Kingdom should, likewise, mark that important event.

In his own right, the Duke of Edinburgh is a man of great achievement. He had a very distinguished naval career. Of course, most of his life has been devoted to being the steadfast consort of Her Majesty The Queen. However, through his public work, he also has created many very worthwhile causes. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme is one that stands out in particular. As an abiding tribute to his practical interest in young people, he created a scheme that is quite marvellous in its concept and very attractive in how it works. It has given many young people a direction and a sense of achievement and has instilled in them values,

ethics and life skills, and many look back on it as a very worthwhile endeavour.

Of course, he has a common bond with many thousands of families in Northern Ireland, because, like so many in the Province, he suffered the loss through IRA terrorism of a very close relative when his aged uncle Lord Mountbatten was murdered, a dastardly act that was justified at the time by those who carried it out and is still defended by their acolytes. What a contrast with the dignity and forbearance with which the Royal Family —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to come to a close.

Mr Allister: What a contrast with the dignity and forbearance with which the Royal Family bore that tragedy.

When speaking about the Duke of Edinburgh, I cannot sit down without commenting on the unique style that he brought to public life.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Allister: I, for one, have a lot of time for someone who is prepared to speak his mind and kick against the traces of political correctness. Many a time, he brought a smile to our faces.

Mr Speaker: Order. I must insist. I have given the Member quite a bit of latitude, perhaps too much.

Mrs Foster: I also rise to mark and celebrate the outstanding service of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh to the United Kingdom and, indeed, his support to Her Majesty The Queen. He is, of course, the longest-serving consort in history.

By all accounts, he had quite a tough childhood, and he went to that character-building school at Gordonstoun. As has been mentioned, he then moved into the Royal Navy and had a very good career there. Indeed, he was mentioned in dispatches in the latter stages of World War II.

The love story of Prince Philip and the then Princess Elizabeth captured the nation back in the 1940s. Since then, he has been a constant support to Her Majesty The Queen, particularly since their marriage and her ascension to the throne in 1952. The career that he has chosen in support of Her Majesty The Queen has not been without sacrifice. He gave up his career in the Royal Navy, and that is why it was most

fitting that Her Majesty The Queen should award him the accolade of Lord High Admiral of the Royal Navy as a token for his ninetieth birthday. Always one step behind Her Majesty, as protocol dictates, he has always been on hand as a sounding board for her. Indeed, she has indicated that that has been invaluable to her in her long reign.

Of course, Prince Philip has a very witty sense of humour. I remember, some time after devolution, when most of the unionist Ministers were at a garden party, he was going along the line, shaking hands with all the Ministers. My husband happened to be behind me. "And what do you do?", the prince asked. My husband said, "I am just her husband", to which the prince replied, "Don't rub it in". I thought that that was a witty response.

In 2012, we will celebrate 60 years of Her Majesty The Queen's reign. As we look forward to those celebrations, we should also reflect on the role that His Royal Highness has played in her marvellous reign. I hope that we will continue to enjoy seeing him in his supportive role for very many years to come.

Mr Kinahan: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I would like to take up the honour of speaking on this happy occasion. May I remind Members that the monarchy is there for those on the left, the right, the far left, the far right and, indeed, even anti-monarchists. The monarchy is vital to our government systems. That family remains totally non-political.

Today, we are here to cheer one of the rocks behind the monarchy, one of its backbones. We have much to be grateful for. We are grateful to those who, 89 years ago, put Prince Philip in an orange box and got him out of Greece when there was a republican coup. We are grateful to him for his service and for his exceptional fighting during the last world war, which was mentioned in dispatches. We are grateful to him for the six decades during which he has supported the Queen. He has made 600 visits to 140 countries. He is still going strong in support of our monarch and making us all extremely proud. We are also grateful to him for all his work in the charity world; for example, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which has been mentioned, the World Wildlife Fund and some 300 other organisations. He is a tireless patron of some 800 organisations.

We are grateful to him for his humour. If I may, I would like to borrow a story from Ed Miliband. The Prince commented to the matron of a hospital that he visited in the Caribbean, "You have mosquitoes; I have the press". There are many stories. He has seen out 12 Prime Ministers. The Ulster Unionist Party would like to wish the Duke of Edinburgh a late ninetieth birthday and the very best health for the future, keeping in mind that it is only 10 years until he should get a telegram from his wife.

Mr Lunn: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I also wish His Royal Highness a belated happy birthday and every good wish for the future. It is a sobering thought for some of us of a particular age that the Duke and Her Majesty The Queen were married at around the time that I was born. That will give you a clue as to my age. It is remarkable. As other Members have said, during that time, he has been totally supportive in his role as consort to the Queen. He continues to fulfil that role. On Saturday 11 June, he attended the trooping of the colour. He has said that he is not so much retiring from public life as cutting back. For a 90-year-old man to admit that it is time to cut back but not retire is totally remarkable. I wish him every success. I have absolutely no doubt that, in 10 years' time, some of you will be standing here and congratulating the man on his 100th birthday, because he is undefeatable.

Others have commented about his sense of humour, and I will join in. He came to Lisburn City Council a couple of times. On one occasion, he was going round the guests, and he came to Edwin Poots's father, Charles Poots. He asked Mr Poots what he did for a living, and Charlie said that he was a poor farmer, at which point the duke said, "What instrument do you play?". Work it out. We will never know whether he misheard or whether it was a quip; we just do not know. It was very funny, and he was well known for it. We in the Alliance Party wish him well and join in the congratulations with everybody else.

Assembly Business

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your guidance on Matters of the Day or a motion regarding an issue that I wish to raise. Over the past few days, we have noticed the commemoration of the thirty-eighth anniversary of the bomb in Coleraine, where six people were murdered, and, at the same time, the appointment by Sinn Féin of a Sinn Féin councillor to the post of Mayor of Limavady. That person, of course, was convicted for his part in that bombing. That is a particularly insensitive and inappropriate appointment. Will you give us some guidance on what would be the most appropriate way to raise the revulsion of the wider community at those events?

Mr Speaker: I was asked one time in the House what a Matter of the Day was. I told Members of all sides that, when I hear a Matter of the Day, I will tell them. I advise the Member that the Business Office will steer and direct Members who may have a difficulty in where they might be going.

Before we move to the next item of business, I wish to advise Members that the Minister of Finance and Personnel has written to me this morning to say that he will be attending the funeral of the former Republic of Ireland Finance Minister Brian Lenihan and will be unable to be in the House tomorrow to move the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill or attend Question Time. Minister Foster will respond on behalf of Minister Wilson at Question Time tomorrow, and the Bill stage will be rescheduled for next Monday, 20 June.

Executive Committee Business

Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes

Mr Speaker: As the next two motions relate to Supply resolutions, I propose to conduct only one debate. I shall call the Minister of Finance and Personnel to move the first motion. Debate will then take place on both motions. When all who wish to speak have done so, I shall put the Question on the first motion. I shall then call the Minister to move the second motion, before putting the Question without further debate.

The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to four hours and 30 minutes for the debate. The Minister will have up to 60 minutes to allocate as he wishes between proposing and his winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have 10 minutes in which to do so.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £8,141,695,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2012 and that resources, not exceeding £8,656,468,000, be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2012 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 3 (b) and 3 (a) of table 1.3 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Estimates 2011-12 that was laid before the Assembly on 6 June 2011.

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £23,278,781.13, be granted out of

the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for the year ending 31 March 2010 and that resources, not exceeding £17,836,994.70, be authorised for use by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Education teachers' superannuation, for the year ending 31 March 2010, as summarised for each Department in Part II of the 2009-2010 Statement of Excesses that was laid before the Assembly on 6 June 2011. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

12.30 pm

In my opening remarks, I will address the two Supply resolutions before the House today. The first resolution seeks the Assembly's approval for the 2011-12 spending plans of Departments and other public bodies, as set out in the Main Estimates, while the second resolution seeks the Assembly's approval of Excess Votes for two Departments for 2009-2010, as detailed in the Statement of Excesses for that year. The Main Estimates and the Statement of Excess were laid in the Assembly on Monday 6 June 2011.

The first resolution relates to the supply of cash and resources for the remainder of the current year, 2011-12, as detailed in the Main Estimates. A Vote on Account was passed by the previous Assembly on 1 March, and that provided initial allocations for 2011-12 to ensure the continuation of services until a Budget was agreed and those Main Estimates were presented to the Assembly for approval. That first resolution and the business of the Budget Bill, which I will introduce later today, now require a balance to complete the total cash and resource requirements of Departments and other public bodies for 2011-12. The balance to complete amounts to over £8 billion of cash and £8 billion of resources. Those requirements reflect the first year of the Executive's Budget for 2011-15, which was approved by the Assembly on 9 March 2011, as well as the demand-led annually managed expenditure (AME).

I now turn to the second resolution, which seeks the Assembly's approval for Excess Votes for two Departments for 2009-2010. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) exceeded the cash and resources approved by the previous Assembly for 2009-2010 by over £23 million and £14 million respectively, while the Department of

Education's teachers' superannuation scheme exceeded its resource limit by almost £3.7 million. I draw Members' attention to the explanations given in part two of the Statement of Excess for each Department. Those excesses were reported to the Comptroller and Auditor General. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) considered the reasons and recommended that the necessary sums now be provided by Excess Votes in the Assembly. On behalf of the Executive, I request and recommend the levels of Supply set out in those two resolutions under section 63 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

I now turn to the Budget for 2011-15. As the new Assembly takes up its mandate, I am glad that we commence with the stability of an agreed Budget, which is now in place for four years. Today's debate is about the first year of that Budget. We are all well aware of the difficult fiscal climate in which the Budget was agreed and of the challenges that lie ahead. However, I want to remind the House and new Members of some of those challenges that we will have to tackle during the lifetime of the expenditure plans before us today.

First and foremost in all our minds is Northern Ireland's economic recovery from the current recession. That continues to confront us as we enter a new mandate and must be at the forefront of the new Executive's agenda. We need to rebalance the Northern Ireland economy towards higher value-added private sector activity. We have always recognised that the private sector is too small. We must drive export-led economic growth. Encouraging exports and supporting firms and their local supply chains in doing business outside Northern Ireland will provide access to larger markets with greater trade opportunities. Exploiting such opportunities during 2011-12 will enable the private sector to grow, increase wealth and employment in Northern Ireland and empower economic recovery.

On that note of rebalancing the economy, I want to take a moment to touch on the subject of corporation tax. I very much welcome the consultation document 'Rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy', and I encourage all sectors of the community to respond. However, although a reduction in corporation tax has suddenly become the panacea for all economic ills in Northern Ireland, we must not lose sight of the fact that there are other factors that influence investment and other economic levers

available. We must explore all options and tackle economic recovery from every angle to help us to grow and rebalance our economy. I signal to the House that the proposed reduction in the rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland would have implications for our block allocation and, hence, service delivery. It is vital that we protect already hard-pressed public services in Northern Ireland. There is much to discuss and negotiate with the Treasury during the financial year before we will be in a position to make any decision on this matter.

Still in the vein of helping our economy, during 2011-12 I will continue to liaise with the banking sector with a view to encouraging improved lending facilities for small and medium-sized businesses. In light of the heavy exposure to developments in the banking sector in the Republic of Ireland, I will continue to keep a watchful eye on any restructuring plans within the Irish banking sector to ensure that those do not adversely impact upon the Northern Ireland operations of Irish-owned banks, a condition that we requested be attached to the UK's bilateral loan to the Republic, and one that was granted. At the same time, I will continue to liaise with the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA)'s Northern Ireland advisory committee on loans located in Northern Ireland, especially in light of further acquisitions as part of the conditions of the recent EU/IMF loan packages. As recently as last week, I met the Republic's new Finance Minister to discuss North/South banking and a range of wider economic issues, including NAMA.

I turn now to the welfare reform programme and the impact that that will have on annually managed expenditure. As we progress through 2011-12 and the remainder of the Budget period in this mandate, the UK coalition Government will be tackling the fiscal deficit. Although we have already experienced pain in our block allocation through Barnett consequentials resulting from the spending review, I must warn that further pain lies ahead. As the coalition Government progress the welfare reform programme, that will have a significant impact on our hitherto demanded funding — that is, on annually managed expenditure. In the past, we have tended to take funding from Westminster for granted while focusing most of our attention on the assigned departmental expenditure limits. Plans announced in the UK spending review for welfare reform, including reducing welfare spending in

real terms over the next four years, will impact on the annually managed expenditure part of our block allocation. The coalition Government confirmed in their March Budget that they are considering options for strengthening control of AME by increasing the amount of spending that is managed within fixed budgets. Of course, social security spending is our most significant component of AME that would fall within that increased control. In particular, the planned abolition of the social fund and of council tax benefit in GB to be replaced by localised schemes in April 2013 may have significant repercussions for Northern Ireland.

Difficult negotiations and decisions lie ahead in this area over the next four years; negotiations and decisions that will require maturity, skill, wisdom, decisiveness and a corporate approach by this Administration on behalf of those who we have the honour to represent.

We also have a number of issues that we wish to progress with Her Majesty's Treasury. The challenges in relation to the impact of welfare reform, which I have touched upon, are only some of the challenges that confront this Assembly. As we move into 2011-12, there are many key financial issues to address on several fronts. Those are issues that must be tackled head-on and upon which decisions must be made by the Executive to aid the turnaround of our economy and the continued delivery of effective, efficient public services to our people.

Among those are various issues that must be progressed with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on behalf of the Executive. As well as the important issues already mentioned — corporation tax, banking issues and the impact of welfare reform — we must urgently pursue a better outcome on the successor to the end-year flexibility (EYF) system, known as the Budget exchange system. In my view, the proposed scheme undermines the concept of devolution and does nothing to aid sound financial management. Any new scheme must encourage sound management of public expenditure and provide for some discretion in carrying forward end-of-year underspends at block level.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence, as I appreciate —

Mr Allister: So that my understanding is clear, is it correct that the Supply resolution today will, among other things, authorise the public salary,

pension and other entitlements of the convicted murderer Mary McArdle as a special adviser in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL)? Is that the sort of expenditure that we are being invited to vote through today in the Supply resolution? If so, does the Minister accept that any MLA who is genuinely offended by the obscenity of employing such a convicted murderer will have good cause not to vote for that motion?

Mr Wilson: I have listened to the intervention, and I share the view that my party has already expressed on the appointment of the adviser to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. That is a decision that the Minister made, and she will decide how the part of the Budget that she has been allocated will be distributed. Indeed, I am undertaking a review to seek to ensure that issues like that are addressed in the future.

The Member knows very well the implications of what he is saying. Is he saying that, in order to make the point that he has made in this Assembly, he would prefer to see the Supply resolution not being voted through so that — let me make it quite clear — there will be no spending on salaries, on grants, on service delivery, on capital projects or on the whole range of things that this Executive and Assembly are responsible for? Is he saying that he wants to vote, and wants the Assembly to vote, in that way so that Northern Ireland grinds to a halt? I suspect that he does not want that to happen. I suspect that he wants to stand Pontius Pilate-like, wash his hands and say that he will not vote for this motion but that he hopes that all the rest of us will vote for it because he does not want Northern Ireland to grind to a halt.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: No, I will not give way. He has made the point, and I have answered it. That is the kind of politics that we get from the Member, who is quite happy to engage in posturing and climbing on his soapbox but who hopes to goodness that nobody else responds. It was the same before the election when he said that he wanted to bring the Assembly down and get back to direct rule, but, at the same time, he was hoping that that would not happen. He has the ability to make all these —

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: No, I will not. The Member will have 10 minutes later.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should not persist, as the Minister obviously has no intention of giving way on the issue. I say that to all sides of the House. Members should not persist if other Members or Ministers do not want to give way.

12.45 pm

Mr Wilson: He may now wish that he had not raised the point. Nevertheless, he has, and I will give him the answer, which is: the alternatives are to allow the Member to do his soapbox posturing while all the rest of us get on with the business of making Northern Ireland work, or we all follow, lemming-like, his type of politics and wreck Northern Ireland. The fact that people do not want those wrecking tactics is the reason he has only a single Member in here today and why his own vote was so reduced in North Antrim.

He could have picked out lots of other things, things that I do not particularly like in the Assembly's spending programme. Nevertheless, as a coalition, we had to come to compromises on how money would be spent. As I said, I am seeking —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will in a moment or two. There has been a request for my Department to review how special advisers are appointed in future, and I am seeking ways of avoiding the situation that he described.

Mr A Maginness: Thank you. The Minister raised the issue of end-year flexibility. Will he enlarge on his comments on that? It is particularly important for us as a devolved institution to have certainty in relation to that. It seems a bit of a cheat for Westminster to take away moneys that should rightfully be spent here and, indeed, in other devolved institutions. Will the Minister enlarge on that position?

Mr Wilson: As the Member will know, Westminster has already taken away £315 million that we had accumulated in end-year flexibility. By the way, we were encouraged to build up such an accumulation. Rather than simply spend money recklessly at the end of financial years, if some money was left it was to be carried over and we were to apply to spend it in a much more constructive way in the following year. That money simply disappeared at the stroke of the Chancellor's pen.

The new scheme will require us to declare in September or October what our likely underspend was going to be before the end of the year. At that stage of the year, you cannot possibly do that. Because you do not know until February what the unplanned underspend is going to be, we are likely to find that either the money will be returned to the Treasury, from which, do not forget, it was allocated in the first place because it deemed that we needed and were entitled to it, or it will have to be spent recklessly, which is not good and prudent financial management. I hope to have discussions with the Minister to put forward some constructive suggestions from Northern Ireland as to how we can ensure that that money is used in a much more responsible way. However, as it stands, we do not have an end-year flexibility scheme that we believe is workable. Indeed, the Administrations in Scotland and Wales also agree that that is the case, so there is work to be done and it is important if we want to manage the resources available to us.

Therefore, I look forward to a lively debate on the issue. We have —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: Yes. I am going to go round everybody giving way in a minute or two.

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I have a fairly pointed question to follow up on his statement and to seek a little bit of clarification. There are profound implications to the decision to include AME in what will, essentially, become managed expenditure. I am not sure, Minister, if it was quite clear to people the impact that that will have on our ability to manage resources, because AME is down to expenditure that you have to incur. I think that the Minister is suggesting that, if there is pressure on us that goes beyond budget, it may have an impact on departmental expenditure limits — and that, of course, makes it difficult to manage. Am I correct?

Mr Wilson: That is absolutely right. With demand-led expenditure — for example, benefits — we are not exactly sure what elements of welfare spending etc are going to be included in the Government's proposal to try to put annually managed expenditure into a fixed sum.

The Government are not clear on that yet, and it is one of the things that we want to talk to them about. If, for example, they were to include unemployment benefit and jobseeker's allowance as part of a fixed amount of money allocated at the beginning of the year, a sudden rise in unemployment towards the end of the year could wreak havoc with the planned Budget. That is the kind of problem that we face. Until we are clear what elements will be included in that fixed sum and what allowance there might be if there are sudden changes, we will not know what the impact will be. However, we know that where there is demanded expenditure and you try to corral that into a regime that has a fixed amount of money, you have difficulties. To a certain extent, we already see that with, for example, student finance and school finance, where increased demand at stages can lead to budgets having to be revised. If you put that into the wider scale of the thousands of millions of pounds that are currently annually managed, you can see the problems that we are likely to have.

I request Members' support for the first motion in order to approve further supply for the 2011-12 financial year to enable vital public services to continue beyond the current provision in the Vote on Account. I also ask for Members' support for the second motion in order to regularise the excess expenditure of cash and resources in 2009-2010 by DARD and the Department of Education teachers' superannuation scheme.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): On 1 June 2011, senior officials from the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) briefed my Committee on the Main Estimates for 2011-12, the Excess Votes and the associated Budget (No. 2) Bill, which gives legislative approval to the Estimates and is to be introduced in the Assembly following this debate. Advance copies of the Main Estimates for 2011-12 and the Statement of Excess for the year ending March 2010 were made available to Committee members prior to the briefing.

The Main Estimates and the associated Budget (No. 2) Bill are based on the first year of the previous Executive's Budget 2011-15, which was agreed on 9 March 2011 during the previous Assembly mandate. The previous Finance and Personnel Committee published its comprehensive report on the Executive's

draft Budget in February. In order to inform its recommendations, the previous Committee undertook a considerable evidence-gathering exercise, which included canvassing views from the other Assembly scrutiny Committees, as well as a range of leading economists, academics and representatives from the business and voluntary sectors and the trade unions.

The report was a critical but constructive response to the Executive's draft Budget proposals and included 45 key findings and recommendations at strategic and departmental level, as well as numerous supplementary observations and proposals. Many of those applied to the medium to longer term, and the new Committee has agreed to continue with its predecessor's work in that regard. I have, therefore, written to the Minister to ask that he champion the strategic and cross-cutting recommendations with the wider Executive. Additionally, the Committee expects that the recommendations will be taken into account in the important work of the Budget review group. The Committee has requested that it be kept informed of progress and the implementation of recommendations, and looks forward to working closely with DFP on that.

It is clear that robust financial management in Departments will be essential. In addition to the £4 billion real-terms reduction in the block grant over the next four years, Members will be aware that, as part of the 2010 spending review, the Westminster Government unilaterally decided to remove the end-year flexibility system. That was an important mechanism that enabled the devolved Administrations to carry forward unspent resources for use in future years, and its removal has resulted in the loss of over £300 million of EYF stock accumulated by the Executive. I have heard the Minister express his views on that in his contribution and in his response to a question. It will take a robust response from the Finance Department, perhaps in conjunction with the Finance Departments of the other devolved Administrations, to the Treasury to deal with the issue.

The Committee has asked for more details on the replacement mechanism for EYF, the Budget exchange scheme. However, from the brief details given, Departments will have to flag up their projected underspends as early as October, which is far from ideal. The Minister indicated that he has made some representations to the Treasury on how the scheme might be improved

and has undertaken to keep the Committee informed on any relevant discussions. Regardless of those practicalities, Departments must do all that they can to keep underspends to a minimum.

I will now speak to the second motion, which is on the Supply resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes. Departmental officials advised the Committee of a Statement of Excess in 2009-2010 for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Education. Members were told that the matter had been reported to the Public Accounts Committee by the Comptroller and Auditor General and that, having considered the issue, the PAC recommended that the necessary sums be provided by Excess Votes in the Assembly. The Committee subsequently wrote to the relevant Statutory Committees to draw the matter to their attention. Both noted the PAC recommendation and indicated that they will liaise with the PAC to ensure that any financial management concerns around the Excess Votes are addressed by the respective Departments.

There may be some concern that the risk of overspending will increase in view of the current constraints on public expenditure and that the Assembly will be required to give retrospective approval to more of these Excess Votes. I believe that DFP can play a vital role in monitoring spending in that regard and in leading the drive for improved financial management across Departments to minimise the risk of overspends and significant underspends. That is reflected in the Department's business plan, which states that DFP will:

“secure, plan, manage and monitor public expenditure in line with the Executive's priorities”.

It is also reflected more generally in the Department's overarching function of supporting the Executive in the effective strategic management of public expenditure. Committees, too, will play an important role in scrutinising the financial management performance of their respective Departments, and the provision of timely and accurate information by all Departments will be essential in enabling that scrutiny.

The Committee supports the motions, and I have no doubt that other colleagues, particularly from my party, will make their own commentary.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I speak, if I may, as Chairperson of the Agriculture and

Rural Development Committee. The difficult economic climate in which we find ourselves cannot be denied. Although the four-year Budget that the Executive managed to agree in the second week of March was rightly regarded as a significant political achievement, I do not think that any of the Ministers managed to get the resources that they wished for. That means that there will be challenges over the Budget period, and there will be immediate effects for those who live and work in rural areas. That is already apparent in the funding available for 2011-12.

Prior to, during and immediately following the election, there was much speculation about which parties would choose which portfolios, and the media made much of what might be read into that. I do not know whether it was a coincidence, but the First Minister and the deputy First Minister both spoke around that time at separate engagements at one of Northern Ireland's premier events, the Balmoral show: the former at the Assembly and Business Trust breakfast on the Wednesday of that week, and the latter at the Ulster Farmers' Union breakfast on the Thursday. Both stressed the relative importance to Northern Ireland's economy of agriculture generally and the agrifood sector specifically. That was reflected in the fact that the agriculture and rural development portfolio was selected as one of the early choices in the formation of this Executive and the appointment of Ministers. The portfolio was fifth pick, which is a contrast with previous mandates, when DARD was the final pick. That gives the farming community hope that it is climbing the ladder of priorities.

The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee will not be shy in reminding the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, if needs be, that the agrifood sector is critical to the Northern Ireland economy. I am sure that the Committee will also want me to ask the Finance Minister to remember that, especially when it comes to handing out finances. However, it will also be important for it to be remembered when the Executive sit down to agree a Programme for Government so that the agrifood sector can play its part in our economic recovery.

The Committee has had an opportunity to meet only twice in the new mandate, but it is no surprise that one of the early briefings that it sought was on the implications of the Budget settlement. The Committee was told that the Department has to find around £40 million

of cash savings to help fund pressures. That is a challenge, but I welcome the fact that, during the Budget process, the former Minister was able to recognise the validity of calls to continue to support local agricultural shows and that, subject to the submission of a suitable business proposal, grant aid would be renewed for the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster.

The Committee has been advised by officials that the Department will be able to spend more than £240 million net in capital and current expenditure, in addition to the £250 million that it will provide to farmers and rural dwellers in single farm payments.

I hope that that is consistent with the figures provided by the Minister of Finance and Personnel in the Main Estimates and that it allows for the complications of departmental expenditure limits and AME. I do not mind if he has given more, but I would certainly have a problem if it is less. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department have a wide range of programmes to fund.

1.00 pm

On the plus side, an opportunity exists for the agrifood sector to play its part in Northern Ireland's economic recovery, and that should be nurtured and supported. The Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association's 'Manifesto 2011' contains some interesting facts and statistics. According to that manifesto, the agrifood sector is the largest contributor to the sales, external sales and employment of the Northern Ireland manufacturing sector. Some £3.2 billion worth of local produce was sold last year, 67% of it externally, and 92,000 people are employed in agrifood-related jobs. On the down side, the rising costs of cereals and fuel will have an impact not only on the farming community, but on the entire community in Northern Ireland, as they will, for example, create higher food prices.

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development is concerned that fines imposed by the European Union could have a detrimental effect on the Northern Ireland block in general and on the budget for agriculture and rural development in particular. The Committee is pleased that it will have the opportunity at its meeting tomorrow to explore with the Minister her priorities and intentions and how those can be funded to best effect.

I know that the Minister of Finance and Personnel is a strong advocate of introducing efficiencies and ensuring that funding goes to front line services. I can assure the Finance Minister that the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development will continuously explore how that can best be achieved and urge the Department to take suitable action. However, I must stress that I regard efficiencies as standard and routine good practice, whereas I view savings as a different matter with different implications.

The Department indicated that it expects to achieve some efficiencies and savings through the greater use of technology. There was also a suggestion of scope for making further savings somehow through those staff members who worked on the four pieces of primary legislation enacted in the previous parliamentary session. However, I am somewhat sceptical about savings coming from either area. Departmental officials told the Committee that 87% of applications for the rural development programme were made online. Quite how improving that figure to 100% will produce significant savings is beyond me. However, perhaps there is scope for improving similar figures in other programmes. I am also puzzled about the staffing point. Surely, at least some of those staff members are permanent employees of the Department and will continue to count against its wage bill. However, it is early days, and I expect the Committee to get into the detail in the weeks and months ahead.

As I said in my opening remarks, no Minister got everything that she or he wished for in the Budget settlement. Such is life, and sometimes we must just be thankful for what we have. I congratulate the former Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of Finance and Personnel on their efforts to provide the Department with a budget for 2011-12. The Committee will do all that it can to ensure that it is spent wisely.

I now wish to say something in my capacity as the agriculture spokesman for the DUP. As a Member for North Antrim, agriculture will always be high on my list of priorities. My party has displayed that time and time again. Previously, two former North Antrim MLAs, Ian Paisley and Ian Paisley Jnr, took up the role of Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. We know the strengths and weakness of the industry and what it means to Northern Ireland. In this critical period, it is vital

that farming and all its associated industries are supported 100%.

The Minister has her work cut out for her in evolving the Department into something much leaner, but, I hope, not much meaner. When it comes to getting the best deal possible for farmers and fishermen, she will need all the help that the Executive, the Committee, the Assembly and the industry can give her. It is critical that we get such a deal on single farm payments during the forthcoming negotiations on CAP and the common fisheries policy (CFP) reforms, as that will have a major impact on the economy and could have major ramifications for future debates like this. In the short time that I have had responsibility for agriculture and rural development in my party, it has become clear to me that the Minister must get her own house in order before we go to Europe or the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to represent our industries. The Minister must also act swiftly and decisively, because she does not have much time.

At my first opportunity to address the House, I give the following commitment to the Minister: if she moves fast in the correct direction to make the Department fit for purpose in this ultra-modern age, listens to the farming community and understands what it is saying, why it is saying it and acts on it, and truly fights for their rights at a national level with DEFRA, at a European level in Brussels and globally, my party and I will support her, and I will say so in the House and in the media.

I give her that commitment. Why? Because the farming community demands it. They want Northern Ireland plc to work together, and as long as Northern Ireland is moving forward, and as long as we are moving the agrifood sector, the farming industry and everything around it forward, we should all welcome that. However, I also plant this warning —

Mr Allister: In his capacity as Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, will the Member give the House the benefit of his opinion on the wisdom of the Department's policy of prioritising a new headquarters for itself over other spend? Is he also satisfied that the gaping hole left in the budget by virtue of the EU penalties that have been imposed can be met through mere efficiencies?

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for his comments. Yes, he is quite right when he talks about

the HQ and, of course, the gaping hole. The Committee will be looking at that over the weeks and months ahead. I take his point about that. Funding for the HQ is in the fourth year of the budget, so there is time for the Committee to influence the Minister's decisions on that. We have to make sure that we fill any gaping hole, or any hole at all, in the budget. We should not be looking at efficiencies only in times of austerity but on a year-to-year basis, and as Chair of the Committee I hope to do that.

However, I plant this warning to the Minister —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Frew: I am not good at planting anything, because nothing ever grows when I plant it, but she must move fast and listen to the people who know best. That is what the farming community and this party are doing —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Frew: — and I will represent them to the best of my ability.

Mr Cree: I welcome the opportunity to speak as a member of the Finance and Personnel Committee and to thank the Minister for his detailed opening remarks. Although this is an important debate in that it is a necessary precursor to the Budget (No. 2) Bill, which will be brought by the Minister later today, it mainly provides the legal authority for Departments to draw from the Consolidated Fund and do what is set out in the Estimates.

Having studied the process, I find the system cumbersome, convoluted and repetitive. It is good to know that the Executive, in their wisdom, have agreed to change it. The new strategic objectives are to align the Budget Estimates and accounts as far as practicable, to improve transparency and to synchronise the presentation of the Budget, the Estimates, departmental expenditure plans, the Budget Bills, rates legislation and the accounts to create a single, co-ordinated public revenue and expenditure process. However, that may take the whole of the current mandate to complete.

The Budget for 2011-12 was passed by the House earlier this year. The Ulster Unionist Party was unable to support the Budget for several reasons. It did not set out the rationale and principles behind the proposed departmental allocations and how they had been applied to

Departments, and not enough resources were provided for the Health Service. The draft Budget should have been accompanied by a draft Programme for Government and an updated investment strategy. There was also little information on the realisation of capital assets.

We still have concerns, but to reject this motion puts at risk the ability of Departments to draw money from the Consolidated Fund, and we will not do that. I will leave it to other Members from my party to detail, in what was going to be tomorrow's but will now be next week's debate, some of the specific concerns that we have about Departments.

I want to discuss the second motion: the Supply resolution for 2009-2010 Excess Votes. Departments must make sure that expenditure does not exceed the limits and restrictions set by the Assembly. Any expenditure outside those limits results in an Excess Vote.

I see that two Departments are subject to such an Excess Vote this year. First, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has an excess resource expenditure of £14,140,142.57 arising from certain liabilities for EU financial corrections. The financial penalties from the EU are undoubtedly something that DARD, under the scrutiny of the Committee, needs to work to reduce. However, perhaps more worrying is the fact that DARD also has an excess net cash requirement of £23,278,781.13. That was seemingly down to a clerical error, due to an increase of £45 million being recorded in relation to creditors, instead of a decrease of £45 million. That is a serious issue that needs to be tackled.

I see three main questions arising from that information. Why did the clerical error occur in the first place? Why was £45 million owed to creditors by the Department? How was the figure of almost £23.3 million excess cash requirement arrived at? I certainly hope that those questions may be answered during the debate, either by the Minister or by the Chair of the Committee for that Department, because we can ill afford to replicate such expensive mistakes at a time of fiscal constraint.

Secondly, the Department of Education had an excess resource expenditure of £3,696,852.13, due to its failure:

"to operate adequate internal controls to manage effectively the alignment of the budgeting and Estimates process."

The wording of the motion states that that excess relates to teachers' superannuation. That inefficiency within the Education Department must be stamped out and the internal controls mentioned in the '2009-10 Statement of Excess' must be put in place. That excess expenditure within the Education Department also puts into perspective the praise that the former Education Minister received from some quarters for her budgetary discipline.

I will finish by reiterating that the Ulster Unionist Party will be supporting the two motions, as we recognise their legal importance in the budgetary process, but we also recognise the debate that needs to be had around these issues.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Caithfidh mé a rá go bhfuil an-áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht thábhachtach ar an rún soláthair agus ar na vótaí ar bhreisceachteachas. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate on the Supply resolution and the Excess Votes. I think that everybody agrees that the budgetary settlement is the most difficult ever. The loss of £4 billion from the block grant certainly puts huge pressures on all Departments. The situation has been worsened by the unilateral withdrawal of the end-year flexibility stock of over £300 million.

As well as that, the situation on the capital side is dire, and it serves to underline the need for the Executive to continue to push the Westminster Government not to renege on the amounts owed to Northern Ireland in capital funding, which remain to be paid in the final two years of the investment strategy up to 2017, in line with the previous Government's commitments. I invite the Minister to update the House on that issue when summing up.

Other contributors have referred to the replacement of the end-year flexibility scheme by what is known as the budget exchange scheme. That reduces the number of in-year monitoring rounds to three, and requires Departments to make surrenders on possible underspends in October. That will require much more exact financial monitoring and planning than is the case at the moment and it will be a huge challenge for individual Departments if money is not to be

lost. I suggest to the Minister that there is room for further negotiation on that issue.

1.15 pm

The exactitude in financial matters demanded by this change contrasts sharply with the two Excess Votes that are before us today. One of those is to the tune of over £37 million, combining liabilities for EU financial corrections and an accounting error in the 2009-2010 spring Supplementary Estimates on behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The other is in excess of £3.5 million, and, as Mr Cree pointed out, is the result of the Department of Education's failure to operate adequate internal controls to manage effectively the alignment of the budgeting and estimate process.

In combination, those errors have taken £40 million out of an already depleted pot and are of such a scale that we can ill afford them presently or at any time in the future. The Finance Department needs to ensure that such errors do not recur, and I ask the Minister to reassure the House on that account.

The SDLP has fully engaged with the budgetary process to try to ensure that we take every possible step to ensure that the effects of the cuts are mitigated and that our citizens, especially the most vulnerable, and front line services are protected to the fullest possible extent from the severity of austerity measures. We have passed our proposals to the Minister for his consideration. The Minister will remember that we have engaged robustly with him, and I hope that he continues to give our proposals due consideration. The Minister has said that the Budget is not set in stone, and I take him at his word. If that is so, it behoves all of us to continue to mould and shape this Budget to ensure that it best fits the needs of our people.

We continue to hold our view, expressed in the previous mandate, that the Budget should have been based on a revised Programme for Government for 2011-15 and an updated investment strategy. That would demonstrate how strategic policies are driving financial allocation and not the other way around, with financial considerations driving policy directions.

The Minister told us in December that this Budget was the best possible Christmas present for Northern Ireland. However, I think that we all realise that it is difficult to be joyous about

it now that it is unpacked. The £1.6 billion of revenue-raising measures have not been realised. The Minister has said that he has included in the Budget only those revenue-raising measures that he is sure can be realised. Those amount to £862 million and are very welcome. However, I would be interested to hear from the Minister what progress has been made in relation to the realisation of the remaining £738 million in possible revenue. If the Minister has any news for us on that front, I would welcome hearing it today.

We have all placed much faith in the Budget review group to deliver further revenue. It is important that that group continues to work to deliver further revenue-raising measures. As I said, of the £1.6 billion predicted, £738 million has still not been realised. I hope that that group will continue to work on the possibility of realising that potential. We cannot afford to sit back and view this Budget as something that is done and dusted for four years. We must continue to enhance it at every possible opportunity to ensure that we maximise every possibility to mitigate the effects of the cuts through further revenue-raising options: capital asset realisation, alternative sources of finance and preventative spending.

When the SDLP met an Taoiseach and an Tánaiste last week, we underlined the need for the National Asset Management Agency — NAMA, as it is known — to be mindful of the possible effects of any fire sale of its assets in Northern Ireland.

I know that the Minister of Finance and Personnel had taken the opportunity to raise the matter with the former Minister for Finance in the South, the late Brian Lenihan. I join colleagues here in expressing my sympathy to Mr Lenihan's family. I am sure — I hope — that the Minister has raised the issue with the present Minister for Finance in the South at last Friday's North/South Ministerial Council meeting. If he did so, I hope that he will update us.

Much has been said about a reduction in corporation tax, and it has been headlined recently in the news. It is a lever that the SDLP believes, along with others, can be an important tool in our economic kit. Although we recognise that a reduced rate of corporation tax is not a silver bullet, we believe that it could, if introduced through a phased approach, act as an important incentive to foreign direct investment and help to stimulate indigenous industries. It could,

along with other measures, be an important element in the process of rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy. However, I understand that the House will have the opportunity to debate the issue of devolving responsibility for corporation tax later this month, so I will reserve further remarks until that time.

I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for affording me the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I look forward to the contributions of my party colleagues on individual Departments.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I will speak first as Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, and then, with your indulgence, Mr Speaker, I will add a few of my views as an Alliance Party MLA.

The Committee received a departmental briefing on the Budget for 2011-15 at its meeting on 9 June. Members heard that the Department of the Environment, like all others, is facing many pressures on its budget, with the actual current expenditure pressure for this year, 2011-12, amounting to £11.7 million. That is a significant amount for a Department with a relatively small budget. Income from planning receipts has dropped dramatically, with a 45% decrease in the past three years. The Department now finds itself in a situation in which it has to cut costs across a range of functions, and I will touch on those now.

The Committee is particularly concerned with the funding cuts to the voluntary and community sector and to non-governmental organisations (NGO). It is well recognised that those sectors perform vital roles at a fraction of the cost and that they represent value for money. In fact, they often use their grant money to lever in considerably more money than government could ever do, and what might look like a £100 cut on paper could in reality be a £300 cut. Those sectors are easy targets for Departments. I urge not just the Department of the Environment (DOE) but all Departments to try to limit the funding cuts as best they can, as it may cost more to bring some of the services that they provide back into the Departments. My Committee has asked for a list of all groups funded and their levels of funding, and it feels that, if there are to be cuts, the groups involved need to know as soon as possible to allow them time to prepare and seek other funding sources.

Another area of concern was the cut in the road safety funding. At a time when, thankfully, the

number of deaths and serious injuries on our roads is decreasing, it is a bit disappointing to see cuts, albeit relatively small ones, in the road safety advertising and research budget. The new road safety strategy for 2010-2020 is only beginning to be rolled out, and we hope that the cuts do not affect its potential effectiveness.

Earlier, I mentioned the fall in planning receipts and the effect that that has had on the Department's budget. We heard from officials that they have taken measures to redeploy more than 200 planning staff. The Committee also heard that consultants are now working on a workforce model, something that the Committee has long called for. Although I would welcome the completion of a workforce model, which would hopefully improve efficiency in planning, I am concerned that consultants are being used to develop it. In an era of austerity, is it really necessary to spend funds on consultants? Does the Department not have the skills and experience within its staff to complete the work? In the coming months, the Committee will keep a very keen eye on that area.

The review of public administration (RPA) and local government reform is a major area of work that still needs to be completed. Members are aware of the potential savings with the review of public administration, and they are keen that the process is progressed as soon as possible, but we need assurances that funding and resources will be provided to enable it to come to fruition.

Undoubtedly, DOE budget cuts will lead to a reduction in the services that it is able to provide, and we heard from officials that the impact of cuts will be felt across the board, with less money being available to maintain country parks and for the Environment Agency to conduct its enforcement activities. Members have always been vocal about issues such as fly-tipping and illegal waste, and the worry is that less funding to tackle those serious environmental issues will see problems escalate and cause untold damage to the environment.

The plastic bag levy is the final issue that I wish to mention. At the 9 June meeting, departmental officials confirmed to members that HM Revenue and Customs has refused to collect the levy. That is a big concern, because it will inevitably lead to delays as the Department has to find a way to collect the levy. It would seem that there is still a lot of work to be done on the issue, and the anticipated £4 million that is due

to be removed from the Department's budget from 2012 does not give officials much time to fully implement the collection of the levy. The Committee has requested further information on work with the European Commission to establish whether the plastic bag levy will be considered as a tax or an incentive to change behaviour. The Committee will continue to scrutinise the issue very closely.

I now wish to say a few words as an MLA for South Belfast. As I said, NGOs play a significant role in society, and the voluntary sector is a very important stakeholder in delivering the DOE's remit. I would like to place on record some of the comments that I have been sent. In addition to some of the aforementioned observations from the Committee, Friends of the Earth is concerned about the Department's reduced programmes on climate change; adaptations to climate change; joint nature conservation; the waste resources action plan; and the slowdown in the rate of declaring areas of special scientific interest (ASSIs).

I also heard from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), which is worried that river restoration and marine resource programmes will be suspended or postponed and that their delivery will depend on money from the plastic bag levy. The DOE's draft budget suggests that a severe lack of funds has been allocated to implementing the water framework directive. RSPB pointed out that that may risk infraction proceedings from the European Commission.

The RSPB is also concerned at the £1 million reduction in natural heritage grants and the maintenance programme budget, and the potential impact of that on nature reserves, outdoor education work and the designation and management of the ASSI network. The decision to slow down the rate of declaration of ASSIs is of great concern. As a result, some of the best sites for wildlife will remain undesignated.

Finally, the Department needs to take account of the very real risks in cutting front line environmental services. It could be disastrous for Northern Ireland's wildlife.

1.30 pm

Mr Spratt (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): I welcome the opportunity to speak to today's motions as the Chairperson of the Committee for Regional

Development. My Committee has received a very strategic overview of the departmental budget in the short time in which it has been constituted in this new mandate. In that period, however, the Committee has suggested inputs to the debate, and I will gladly relay those to the House today. At this stage, I relay our thanks to the previous Committee members for their in-depth scrutiny of the Budget process in the previous mandate.

At the outset, it is important to link the departmental request for resources descriptor, or the objectives, with the amount of moneys that is to be allocated to the Department for Regional Development (DRD). There are two objectives, the first of which is:

"Supporting the economy by planning, developing and maintaining safe and sustainable transportation networks; promoting airport and harbour services; addressing regional imbalance in infrastructure; and shaping the long-term future of the region".

The total net resource that is required to implement that objective is approximately £804 million, or a cash requirement of £974 million, whenever that figure is adjusted for working capital and depreciation. That is just under £1 billion, which is a very significant amount. "Supporting the economy", "maintaining safe ... networks" and "shaping the long-term future" are very aspirational objectives. It is unfortunate, therefore, that we begin the new comprehensive spending review (CSR) period with the knowledge that we plan to fail on that objective. We are continuing the habit of stacking up problems that, without very significant investment, will achieve the opposite of the stated objectives: it will stifle the economy and will continue to put people's lives at risk. In the long term, it will ensure that Northern Ireland will have a second-rate transportation network.

I make those claims on the basis of the briefings that the Committee has received in this new mandate. I fully accept that that is not a significant period. I also fully acknowledge that major resources have been allocated to new capital projects that are planned for this mandate, principally the A5 and A8 proposals, which I will not debate today owing to the fact that they are currently the subject of public inquiries.

I base my assertions on the June monitoring round paper that was received from the Department and discussed in Committee on 1 June 2011.

The paper detailed a request for two high-priority bids for structural maintenance to our road network, totalling £53 million. That was to bring the total budget up to the minimum level of £116 million that was independently assessed as necessary to maintain our roads each year. It did not, nor does the allocation contained in the Estimates today, address the backlog that has accrued in the roads structural maintenance programme. It is estimated that, in the event that the bid made to top up that budget is not granted, the backlog will rise to an astonishing £826 million. That is some £26 million more than the total net resource identified for the Department in the Estimates.

How can allowing an escalation of the problem contribute to an economy that relies on its road network for transporting people into and around our economic hubs, for transporting import and export freight throughout Northern Ireland and for supporting the tourism industry that has been steadily built up over the past number of years? How can it be safer, for example, in our rural communities, where unlit roads, coupled with the policy of patching up potholes, have unfortunately seen an increased risk of injuries and fatalities for car users and pedestrians alike?

Professor Austin Smyth and Stephen Wood's submission on the draft budget to the Committee stated:

"On the basis of this review the Department's proposals do not represent best use of taxpayers' money ... The large capital spend on new road infrastructure at the expense of maintenance of the existing deteriorating roads will require further additional reconstructive expenditure in due course."

I am not commenting on any proposed new roads. I merely wish to point out a further independent assessment of the condition of our roads, a further suggestion that moneys are not necessarily being spent in the most appropriate manner and a further indictment of the escalating deterioration of our roads.

Although significant investment has been made in our railway network stock, and some additional £145 million is planned in this CSR period, infrastructural improvements have not been as significant as wished for. For example, the Enterprise service between Belfast and Dublin has seen real investment in the quality of the stock, with trains having the potential to travel at 90 mph. However, the track is such that the average speed for the journey is around 50

mph, so a journey by train from Belfast to Dublin takes over two hours. A similar journey by car takes around one hour and 40 minutes.

Highways, roads and railways are an indispensable part of our lives. They link one end of Northern Ireland to the other, and we use them each and every day for every conceivable purpose. The days in which the departmental budget could be cut at the beginning of the budgetary period and topped up at the end to soak up moneys surrendered by other Departments are over. Budgets are tight. However, at a time when we hear that the Programme for Government will focus on rebuilding the economy, let us not forget that investment in the economy is not just restricted to new companies being enticed into Northern Ireland or the resetting of corporation tax, important as that is.

Writer Catherine Helen Spence states:

"I had learned what wealth was, and ... of the value of machinery, of roads and bridges, and of ports for transport and export."

Roads and rail, harbours and ports, with the proper investment, will contribute to the wealth of our economy. The key is to ensure that proper investment is available and is injected into our arterial routes.

I will briefly address the second objective in the Estimates:

"Contributing to the health and well being of the community and the protection of the environment by maintaining and developing the policy and regulatory environment which facilitates the provision of sustainable, high quality water and sewerage services."

I will be brief because the Committee is due to have its first briefing from Northern Ireland Water only at its meeting on Wednesday. I am also conscious of the fact that colleagues from the Public Accounts Committee are in the process of completing an inquiry on matters associated with Northern Ireland Water.

The total net resource required for 2011-12 is just under £231 million, which is not an insignificant amount. We are aware of the problems that have been experienced over the past year or so. Again, I do not wish to discuss those, due in part to the fact that some matters are sub judice. I will advise the House that the Committee will keep a close eye on the proposed investment to ensure that appropriate

governance controls are in place to meet the stated objectives.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá cónaí orainn in amanna eacnamaíochta atá an-deacair. Tá imní ar dhaoine ar fud na hÉireann faoi conas a fócaidh siad a mbillí, conas a dtéifidh siad a dtithe, conas a gcuirfidh siad bia ar an mbord agus cad iad na poist a bheas ar fáil lena chinntiú go mbeidh seans ag a gcuid daoine óga cónaí agus obair in Éirinn. Caithfidh an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin seo gach a dhéanamh lena chinntiú go gcosnaíonn sé agus go gcruthaíonn sé poist agus ag an am chéanna tacaíocht a thabhairt dár seirbhísí luachmhara tús líne.

We are living in very difficult economic times. People right across Ireland are worried about how they will pay their bills, heat their houses and put food on the table and about what jobs will be available to ensure that their young people have the opportunity to live and work in Ireland. The Executive and the Assembly must do everything to ensure that they protect jobs and create new jobs while supporting our valuable front line public services.

We have an agreed Budget, which was signed off during these difficult times. Despite Tory cuts, the Assembly and Executive managed to secure extra resources and ensure that areas such as health and education did not suffer in the way that they could have done. Collectively, we identified the potential to raise further significant resources. I look forward to an early progress report from the Budget review group, which is tasked with suggesting efficiencies for arm's-length bodies. From my time as Minister of Education, I know only too well the negative effects of having nine organisations administering education. That is a waste of the resources that could be used in the classroom, and that is repeated right across the North — one of the many ill effects of direct rule.

The Budget review group continues to meet and has the important job of identifying new resources that will mean that we can build new schools, new health centres, new housing projects and new infrastructure projects. We all know the difficult situation concerning the capital budget, and that is only one effect of the Tories' renegeing on international agreements that were signed by their predecessors. It is essential that, collectively, we continue to identify further resources so that we can build

the schools and support our essential Health Service and protect the vulnerable.

Tá mé ag dréim le tuairisc luath maidir leis na heagrais fad láimhe agus leis an ngrúpa athbhreithnithe ar an mbuiséad.

I look forward to an early report on the Budget review groups' three key areas: new revenue, efficiencies and arm's-length bodies.

Caithfidh gach Roinn gach a dhéanamh lena chinntiú go gcosnaítear seirbhísí tús líne, go ndírítear ár gcuid acmhainní ar bhonn riachtanais oibiachtúil agus go bhfuil níos mó cothromas ann ar fud ár sochaí.

It is essential that all Departments do everything that they can to ensure that front line services are protected, that we have a developing and fair economy, that the resources that we have are targeted on the basis of objective need and that there is far greater equality across society.

Mr Easton: I congratulate the Finance Minister on his reappointment to the position, and I wish him every success in meeting the challenges ahead, of which there are many. He is the one person in whom I have great confidence to deal with that. If anyone needs to be reminded of the serious situation that the United Kingdom is in, they need only look across the water at the Southern Cross care home company, where more than 3,000 staff are to be axed. In Northern Ireland, 26 homes could be affected, which would be 10% of the available provision. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) is monitoring that closely.

I will deal solely with the issue of health and address the challenges that we are faced with. I am pleased that my party took the Health Department under d'Hondt, and it was a position that no other party seemed to want.

Edwin Poots, as the new Health Minister, will be proactive and hands-on when it comes to dealing with the difficult issues that the Health Department faces, as all Departments do. We are the party that is prepared to face up to the funding challenges, which we must remember were forced on us by the Tory-Lib Dem coalition Government in London.

1.45 pm

Last October, in the comprehensive spending review, we were faced with deep cuts when our block grant was cut by £4 billion. We also faced

a 40% cut to our capital budget over the next four years, which will put hospitals, never mind schools and roads, under significant pressures. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will be responsible for delivering 16% of the overall capital investment, which will total £851 million over the next four years.

The following key capital projects are planned for progression or completion over this Budget term: the new south-west hospital in Enniskillen; the new Altnagelvin radiotherapy unit, for which the new Health Minister, Minister Poots, has given the go-ahead; the continued redevelopment of Altnagelvin, the Royal Victoria Hospital and the Ulster Hospital; a new-look hospital complex at Omagh; new health and care centres in Ballymena and Banbridge; continued investment in community-based facilities for mental health, disability, elderly people and children's care across Northern Ireland; investment in information technology to improve productivity; and continued investment in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.

Under the DUP, the Health Department has never been better off, with spending increasing since 2007 at a rate at which it never has before. That was reflected once again in the Assembly Budget published last December, in which the Executive granted the Health Department an 8.3% increase in its budget over four years. It was one of only three Departments to get a real increase. The Department is responsible for 42% of the overall budget granted to Northern Ireland. No one, however, can deny that, over the next four years, the Department faces significant shortfalls due to rising demand for services.

There is a plan to deal with that; one that is no different to that of a company in the private sector that faces rising costs but has less money to allocate to combat them. Indeed, the same applies to the family home in hard times. The House and the people of Northern Ireland have an assurance that front line services will be protected, and that guarantee remains. Savings will be generated from efficiency measures, including the universal introduction of generic prescribing, which could generate an extra £30 million to £60 million. That is one measure that was not fully implemented by the previous Minister. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will also look at the performance and efficiency delivery unit's

recommendations, which will go a long way to ensuring that we get best value for money and protect front line services.

Although there are challenges ahead, I have no doubt that the House can face and resolve them in a mature fashion. The House can be assured that the new Health Minister will not play politics with this important portfolio. The Health Service in Northern Ireland will not grind to a halt, as, prior to the Assembly election, some liked to protest would happen. I am sure that, with the support of the Finance Minister, we will meet the challenges ahead in the health budget and meet the demands and needs of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Elliott: First, I add my condolences to the family of Brian Lenihan after his illness. Our thoughts are with them.

I am not speaking on behalf of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, but I will refer to a number of issues in that Department, the first of which is the regeneration of sites. Most of those sites are former military bases, and some of the discussions have been going on for some time. In Londonderry, the site at Ebrington, as you will be well aware, is progressing significantly. It is behind schedule to some degree, but we look forward to more progress there. We want that to progress along with Londonderry's being the UK City of Culture, which will be of huge benefit to the north-west.

In the previous round of funding, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) noted that an extra £1.27 million was bid for Crumlin Road jail. I assume that the requirement for additional funding for the regeneration of sites will come up quite often.

I will move on to discussion about the Maze/Long Kesh. The Ulster Unionist Party has been hugely concerned at the lack of progress on the Maze/Long Kesh site. In 2007, I visited the site. Last week, I visited it again with the Committee. I must say that the progress that there has been within a four-year period is extremely limited. If things are happening, we would like to see more evidence of that on the ground.

I have a concern about the listed buildings on the site. I have asked that some of those listed buildings be delisted. I do not see any architectural reason for keeping some of those specific buildings listed; in particular,

an H-block and the prison hospital. I look forward to progress on whether the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) can establish the base that it seeks at the site. I hope that that can be developed within a short period. Last week, I noted that there was talk about a rural centre of excellence. I am not sure exactly what that entails. I do not know whether the new Agriculture Minister has any thoughts about building a new headquarters at the site. There is money in the Agriculture budget for a new DARD headquarters. I look forward to hearing what progress has been made. As I emphasised last week with regard to the rural centre of excellence, I do not want to see services being displaced from other parts of the Province. I do not want to see services come out of Fermanagh, Loughry or Greenmount to be placed at the Maze/Long Kesh site. If there is to be a rural centre of excellence, new services need to be established there that do not do away with other services that already exist.

Obviously, I am concerned that we may end up with a terrorist shrine being built at the Maze/Long Kesh. I note that a funding application has been made for European Union Peace III funding for that project. I have not been able to get sight of that funding application. I have asked for a copy of it, but I have been told that I cannot get it. I would like to find out somewhat more about that proposed project in order to establish whether it actually fits in with the broad political strategy in Northern Ireland or whether the public can make best use of it. I also note that, if the funding comes forward, there will be a requirement for match funding from the Northern Ireland Executive. We need to know from which Department that funding will come. Will it all come from OFMDFM or from other Departments? Will new funding be required? I am also concerned that there has been no formal consultation process to establish the basis of the shrine or conflict resolution centre. A number of different names have been suggested for it. Whatever it is called, I am concerned that there will be some sort of terrorist shrine.

Other issues in OFMDFM include the social investment fund that is coming forward. Obviously, we are looking forward to that money being spent and developed proactively and positively so that it is not simply a carve-up that is utilised by the two main parties in the House, the Chamber and Northern Ireland to fan out towards their specific projects. We hope that

it will be much more broadly based and wide-ranging than that.

I will move on to victims' issues. Obviously, for some time, we have talked about establishing new processes and new bodies in the victims' sector. I must say that it has been a very slow process. When funding of £36 million was announced back in 2008, we hoped that a victims' service would have been established within a short timescale. However, that has not been progressed. We continue to stream funding mainly through the Community Relations Council (CRC). I hope that we can come to a reasonable conclusion on that in the near future. However, I have concerns about how some victims' groups have been treated in the run-up to that. An audit has been carried out on some of those victims' groups, although, I must say, not all of them. I think that it has been termed a risk-based audit. I would like to establish the criteria that were used to determine why some of those groups were picked for audit and others were not. Again, I have not been able to establish why that was the case. Some of the groups seem to have become immune to that, whereas others seem to be subjected to very strenuous audit processes.

Mr Allister: In that regard, is there also room for very deep concern about the potential for political influence from the office of the joint First Ministers in respect of CRC, which has been conducting those audits? The start of the process seemed to be a political e-mail from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, way back in February of last year, which has given rise to a snowball of audits apparently motivated by political purposes.

Mr Elliott: There is, obviously, a lot of concern that some of the audits are politically motivated. I hope that that is not the case. We need to have some upfront answers to some of those questions. Otherwise, there will be suspicion throughout that sector. There are concerns among some of the people involved as to why they were picked out.

I am also concerned that we continue to allocate funding within Departments, whatever Department that might be, without the establishment of a proper Programme for Government. At the end of the previous mandate, we asked about the Programme for Government on a number of occasions. At one stage, I was told that there was a draft Programme for Government, of some

description, in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, but, even though it is a number of weeks since the election, we have not seen any draft Programme for Government. If we are going to match funding to the ways that we are going to develop in the next number of years, we need to see that Programme for Government. Otherwise, we will be quite a way through this funding year and the overall four-year funding period before we see it. It is important that we can bring forward that Programme for Government in the very near future so that we, as Members, can have a say on how it is developed and can try to pinpoint what is required. Otherwise, the overall Budget may have to be reallocated in various sectors.

The First Minister and deputy First Minister also explained to us that they are hoping to increase the funding from the European Union by 20% over the next number of years. We need more explanation on where it is hoped that that funding will come from, and, more importantly, on where the match funding, if it is needed from the Northern Ireland Executive, will come from.

Mr McLaughlin: I support the motions before us. The Assembly had a significant and substantial discussion about those financial resources and the impacts of the CSR last year. We have an agreed position through to 2015, but we will always seek to improve or to add value to the agreed spending profiles at departmental level. We will do that through a range of agreed mechanisms. I suppose that the obvious one is the monitoring round process, which is designed to ensure that any variations in projected or planned expenditure will not result in the loss or surrender of resources to the Treasury.

In his opening remarks, the Minister directly addressed the issue of the Budget review scheme, which is to replace the EYF. It will not substitute or restore the £315 million lost in last year's smash-and-grab raid, but we should be attentive to the detail of the Budget review scheme. It is already having impacts due to that lack of precise agreement on the detail, because Departments are, some might think wisely, making contingency plans in case there is no agreed position and we see a drift back to the days of the splurge at the end of the financial year.

I very much hope that that consequence can be avoided by having, if not a totally satisfactory arrangement, at least a workable arrangement

that allows for the maintenance of what I think is a very good standard for financial projection and management that was set in the previous term and I am anxious to see continued.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair)

2.00 pm

The Minister and a number of Members addressed the issue of corporation tax. The point has been made over and over again that simply having the power to vary corporation tax is not a silver bullet, given the extent of our economic and financial difficulties. Wider fiscal powers may need to be considered to ensure that we rebalance the economy and there is strategic and sustainable growth going forward. Perhaps the Minister will indicate whether he has considered advancing the argument and developing the case for picking up on the recommendations about the Barnett formula that emerged from the review that was concluded last year.

My understanding is that the House of Lords Committee, which actually visited here, came out in support of the introduction of a needs-based element. That in itself would ensure a fairer settlement and would go some way towards mitigating the impact of the powers being devolved, meeting EU concerns about state aid and ensuring that we actually got the best opportunity in every way to succeed in rebuilding and rebalancing the economy and, in so doing over a period of time, reducing the current dependency on subvention. All of that involves win-wins.

We are not simply an economy that exists to service the Treasury's needs; we have our own Programme for Government. All the parties have particular priorities and expectations. Many of us are faced with the reality that the Budget does not stretch that far. If we seek to invest in recovery and to create the mechanisms to rebalance the economy, we need to equip ourselves with the tools to do so. They do not exist at present. We may not be the Treasury's highest priority — it has its own challenges, and I suppose that we should acknowledge that, in fairness — but arbitrary decisions taken at Westminster are not always the best that we can do for the economy here.

We should be looking at all the possibilities. I, therefore, ask the Minister to consider — he may not be in a position to comment today —

whether we can put forward a stronger argument at Westminster for introducing a needs-based element into the Barnett formula. That would at least give us an intrinsically fairer settlement than the one we have at present. Go raibh míle maith agat

Mr McDevitt: I start off by adding my personal tribute to the former Minister for Finance, Brian Lenihan, who was lost to this world in the past few days. As a young political activist, I had the great privilege of sharing a constituency with Brian Lenihan. In fact, I had the misfortune of directing another party's election campaign when he came to the Oireachtas in 1996. As was the case with his father before him, you would have to travel a very long way to meet a more genuine and honest man, a bigger gentler or a person with a more keen intellect, which — I know that Minister Wilson will acknowledge this — he brought to his job. He was just a naturally curious individual who sought the truth in facts and was never afraid of a good debate or argument. Of course, we are blessed to have a similar type of Minister in our region. He is maybe a little too keen on the argumentative side of debate. Nonetheless, we obviously hope that you will not be lost to us for a very long time.

I want to make a couple of general observations and then talk a bit about education. I share Mr Elliott's concerns that we are again discussing an important budgetary motion without a new Programme for Government. In all honesty, we are committing ourselves to another block of expenditure that will take us to the end of this financial year in March 2012, but we still have no firm view of the Executive's collective vision for expenditure and public policy priority in the next four years or, indeed, four months. That is hardly the way to do business at any time, but it is a particularly unfortunate approach to budgetary planning at a time when we are all, whether in government or in a scrutiny role, facing unpleasant choices about the need to prioritise expenditure in our region as our coffers become increasingly bare.

You would think that the next Programme for Government would put the creation of sustainable jobs and the stimulation of our economy at its heart. However, in the absence of that, we can only fall back on the existing Programme for Government, which, of course, IREP — the independent review of economic policy, chaired by Professor Richard Barnett

— found very flawed in its ability to deliver a joined-up or strategic economic programme for our region.

With regard to the education budget, it is a matter of some concern that an Excess Vote motion is to follow the Supply resolution today, part of which deals with some pensions obligations in the education sphere. The Committee for Education has had no opportunity to scrutinise properly the extra millions that will probably be approved through the Excess Vote. One feels very unsettled by the idea that that mechanism is being used in this interregnum between an old and new Executive and an old and new Assembly and that this matter is not subject to full scrutiny through the departmental Committees. I trust that the use of the Excess Vote will become the exception rather than the norm in the mandate ahead. Perhaps the Minister might want to reflect on that in his response.

Education faces some big choices in the months ahead. In fact, if you scrutinise the education settlement under the current comprehensive spending review, you will find that most of the pain is to be experienced in the first two years. Major cuts are envisaged to the education transport budget, cuts that will, undoubtedly, impact particularly hard on rural children, affect the viability of many school routes and force some unpleasant choices on education and library boards in the next six to nine months.

That those cuts are necessary is a bad thing, but that they are necessary when there is such duplication in publicly funded transport in our region is even worse. In many towns and streets across the North, education and library board buses, post office transport, health board transport and Ulsterbus and Metro buses are going down the same roads at different times of the day and being paid for and funded from different budgets. However, still no one is ready to start talking about the need to join those up. I am disappointed that we face a headline cut in the education transport budget, but I am particularly upset that we face it when there is an opportunity for much greater co-operation and yet still, apparently, no great ability in the Executive to force that co-operation.

Another education budget that is taking a significant hit is information and communication technology (ICT). That, too, will unsettle many inside and outside the House. The promotion of computer and technology skills has been at

the heart of our new curriculum and is identified as a major strategic priority in the Programme for Government, the skills strategy, the MATRIX report in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and nearly every Department of Education document that one would care to read. Yet we are talking about a fundamental reorganisation of ICT provision in schools — £90 million worth of reorganisation. That is a mean reorganisation, and it suggests either that the provision is exceptionally unfit for purpose, as has been the case to date — there have been significant issues with the management and expenditure of the ICT budget — or that it is no longer a priority. Either way, we are all rightly concerned, and, during this incoming year, I am sure that we will want to return to the issue.

We all accept that we have more schools than we need in this region. We also accept that we have a complicated education system that is a product of our history and a reflection of our cultural, political and religious identities. It has grown up to meet the difference in our society but, at the same time, to provide the very best for every child in our society.

I do not wish to reopen a much bigger conversation about the future of education in our region during a Budget debate, but there is so much that we should and must do together. That is why it is appropriate, even on a Supply resolution motion, to say that the time for an Education and Skills Authority (ESA) has come and must not be allowed to pass. It is a damning indictment on us all that we are missing the opportunity to achieve the necessary efficiencies through shared services, better administration and improved culture across the education estate. We must resolve to address it in the early months of this new mandate. We may not be able to answer all the big questions in the next year or the year after, but we can surely deal with most of the management issues and practical issues around getting a single authority in place, which will allow us to achieve the efficiencies that we all know are necessary in the system.

In the next year, teachers will lose their job, and there is not a huge amount that a lot of us will be able to do about that. However, we need a major assurance that, if teachers leave the system, they do so because they are surplus to requirements, not because the system cannot afford to pay the teachers who are needed.

Some of the stuff that we have had to debate in public over the past couple of days has left that question a little too open in my mind. Again, whether it is through an ESA or another vehicle, we need some certainty in this House that, when tough decisions are being asked of us all and when we are being asked to behave maturely and responsibly as legislators and custodians of a very large pot of money, we are being asked to do so in a way that upholds the fundamental right of every child to the standard of education to which they are entitled in statute.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. On the issue of efficiency savings, schools and good education, does he agree that, given that there are 50,000 empty school places right across the North, tough decisions have to be made but we need to ensure that the teacher: class-size ratio is at the optimum level recommended by educators?

Mr McDevitt: Mrs Kelly has probably ended in the way that I would have wished to. It is about upholding the child's right to education and ensuring that there is a positive balance between a teacher and his or her pupils.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): I welcome the opportunity to address the House for the first time as Chair of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, particularly on such an important matter.

As Members will be aware, it is an inescapable fact that, proportionately, DCAL has the smallest budget. That means that even small changes to the baseline can have a disproportionate effect, not just on major capital projects but on smaller projects designed to create initiatives right across the spectrum of culture, arts, libraries and sport. Given that situation, it is extremely important that scrutiny of the Budget by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure was regarded as a top priority. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Committee chose to request a briefing on the Budget at the first available opportunity. On 2 June, the Committee was briefed by officials on the final allocations of the Budget 2011-15 and June monitoring.

2.15 pm

The final allocations for DCAL resulted in an additional £4.8 million resource and £4.2 million in capital. DCAL officials explained that an extra £2.8 million of resource was allocated to the

Arts Council in direct reaction to the number of responses to the consultation calling for a fairer deal for the arts. I welcome the fact that the consultation made an impact in this instance. It put paid to cynics who say the budget is a fait accompli when a consultation process begins. In that regard, I acknowledge the work of the previous CAL Committee, which consistently highlighted the case for promoting the arts and for cuts to be fair and proportionate. However, we have to recognise that we are in difficult financial times and that, despite the additional funding, the DCAL budget is very tight. That is particularly evident in capital funding. The Committee wants to closely monitor large capital projects to ensure that targets are met and slippage avoided. The Committee has made a start in that regard, and it will hear from DCAL and the governing bodies of football, rugby and Gaelic games on progress towards regional stadia development, which amounts to a substantial investment of £110 million.

I draw particular attention to the issue of arm's-length bodies, which manage 80% of DCAL's budget. That presents challenges in driving forward much-needed efficiencies. That will be further compounded if the Treasury rules on monitoring rounds come to fruition, reducing the number of monitoring rounds to three, as is expected by the Minister. DCAL officials warned the Committee that that would create difficulties for all Departments but particularly for DCAL, given that it relies on arm's-length bodies to deliver so many of its programmes. In view of that, I stress the need for DCAL's review of arm's-length bodies to progress without delay to stage 2. The Committee has written to the new Minister, requesting that it should be kept informed of that review, which members will want to monitor closely.

It is clear that the year ahead will present significant challenges. The Committee was told by DCAL officials that slippage is under pressure. Unlike other years, the Department has advised the Committee that it cannot assume that it will be given a percentage of slippage. In previous years, DCAL would have anticipated a 15% slippage in its capital programme, but, because the capital programme is so small and limited against the projects, it is much more difficult to manage.

To illustrate the present tightness of the budget, I should say that DCAL has no scope to manage two in-year pressures, one of which is the Live

Site screen for Londonderry. Two Live Sites are planned for Belfast and Londonderry to show the Olympics live from London. It is intended that the sites will provide a focal point for Olympic-related activity during the games, yet, as it stands, DCAL will have to wait until September monitoring to find the funding for one of the sites.

The Committee has noted another significant area where there is no funding or business case in place, and it relates to the UK City of Culture, which was awarded to Londonderry in July 2010. Although there is no doubt that the award presents an opportunity to showcase the cultural offering and local creative talent, the funding shortfall is of great concern to the Committee. We have, therefore, written to the CAL Minister to enquire when a business case by the Culture Company will be submitted and to get her assessment of the situation.

The Committee has raised other areas of concern that present particular challenges in year 1 of the current CSR process. Those include the reduction in W5's budget and questions on how that shortfall will be met. Also, although the additional £2 million of resource for libraries and £2.5 million of capital was provided in direct response to a large number of responses to the consultation on the budget, the CAL Committee is anxious to know how that will impact on the proposals to close 10 rural libraries.

On a final note, I expect the CAL Committee to take an active scrutiny role throughout the 2011-15 CSR period. The Committee has started that process by considering some of the budget issues that relate to year 1 of the Budget. The Committee will want to ensure that the contribution that sport, culture, arts and heritage make to all sectors of society, including health, the economy and tourism — to name but a few — is not undervalued during this mandate. On behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Before we move to Question Time, I wish to advise Members that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have written to the Speaker to say that, due to the funeral of the former Republic of Ireland Finance Minister, Brian Lenihan, the proposed statement on the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting in plenary format will not now be made tomorrow. That statement is to be rescheduled for next Tuesday, 21 June.

As Question Time is due to begin at 2.30 pm, I ask the House to take its ease until then.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Employment and Learning

Mr Deputy Speaker: I advise Members that question 6 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer. Question 15 has also been withdrawn.

Further Education: Inspections

1. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether further education colleges are subject to the same quality inspection checks as schools offering GCSEs and A levels.
(AQO 61/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I thank Mr Craig for his question. Further education colleges are subject to the same inspection framework as the Education and Training Inspectorate use, and that is applied in schools that offer GCSEs and A levels. I should add that the primary focus of further education colleges in Northern Ireland is to offer a wide range of economically focused professional and technical qualifications tailored to meet local needs. As a result, colleges, in the main, do not focus on providing GCSEs or A levels. However, a significant number of young people from schools attend colleges in the evenings to top up the provision in A-level teaching.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for his answer, and he will realise that there was a reason for my asking that question. I have received complaints that, in some instances, there has been a lack of backup staff to cover holidays, etc, taken by those teaching A-level courses. Will the Minister assure me that further education colleges have the same level of backup and support for teaching A levels as secondary schools?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Craig for his supplementary question. It is worth stressing that regular inspections of the colleges are carried out. If GCSEs or A levels are offered by the colleges, that provision is covered by those inspections. Two further education colleges are inspected annually by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

Matters of internal governance and staffing are for the individual colleges. However, the Department has a keen interest in ensuring that standards are met and observed.

Mr Hussey: In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the amount of higher education courses being delivered in further education colleges. Will the Minister outline his thoughts on their future development?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Hussey for his question, which, to some extent, dovetails with question 3 on the higher education strategy. The Department is keen for that strategy to develop. We are reviewing its outcome, with a view to bringing our conclusions to the Executive and the Assembly in the near future. I have no doubt that that the teaching of such courses will feature heavily.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister to his first Question Time and wish him well in his new job.

We are in the middle of a debate on the Budget. Is the Minister aware of any further education colleges still having money in their reserves?

Dr Farry: A financial memorandum between the Department and the further education colleges permits the latter to hold uncommitted reserves of 10% of their income. As a sector, and as of 31 July 2010, income and expenditure reserves and cash reserves were both set at 15% of income. Colleges holding more than a 10% of the threshold are required to demonstrate their plans for utilising those reserves to the Department. It is expected that the sector's reserves will decrease further, with levels falling to below the 10% threshold in the next two to three years.

Pathways to Success

2. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has had any discussions with his ministerial colleagues about forward planning for implementation of the Pathways to Success strategy.
(AQO 62/11-15)

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Byrne for his question. My Department has taken the lead on behalf of the Executive in developing a draft cross-departmental strategy to tackle the issues facing those young people who are not in education, employment or training. Pathways to Success is out for consultation, the closing

date for which is 30 June. During the previous mandate, that draft strategy was discussed by the Executive, and it was the subject of a major cross-party review by the previous Committee for Employment and Learning. The development of the strategy involved seven Departments in addition to mine. Responses to the consultation will help to inform the development of a final strategy, including a cross-departmental delivery mechanism.

Following further engagement with the Committee for Employment and Learning, I intend to bring the strategy to the Executive at the earliest opportunity. At that stage, I expect further engagement with Executive colleagues about forward planning for its implementation, and I will report back on the outcomes of the consultation.

It is through that process that I expect Departments to commit to playing a full role in tackling this important issue. The issue will not be resolved overnight, but I am committed to moving this important work forward in and across the Executive.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister agree that we have thousands of young people in that category in Northern Ireland and it is vital that we have direct intervention to make sure that we give some meaning to their lives? Is it intended to use the Youth Service in some way? We have excellent youth clubs that have great experience in dealing with such people.

Dr Farry: Mr Byrne talks about using the Youth Service. That falls under the Department of Education, which is a matter for my colleague John O'Dowd. This, again, highlights the importance of cross-departmental co-operation on this issue. Although my Department is happy to lead on this, it is something that all Departments that have something to bring to the table engage on. Clearly, the Department of Education is a major stakeholder in this regard.

It is critical to ensure that young people have the opportunity to fulfil their potential, both for them as individuals and for the economy. If people are denied the opportunity to develop their talents to the full, it is not just the people themselves who suffer; we all do. We talk about employment being at about 7.2%, which may finally be below the UK average. At the same time, we should be conscious that in the 18- to

24-year-old cohort, unemployment is around 20%, which should be very troubling for all of us.

Lord Morrow: I listened intently to what the Minister said. He referred to the Minister of Education. The Minister is only a short time in his post, and I wish him well in it, but he has already given a strong hint that there are problems in relation to the fragmentation of our education system. Does he not accept that it is now time that we looked at having a single education system, and will he work strenuously to that end and ensure that our children and adults in further education do not suffer as a result of the fragmentation of the education system in Northern Ireland?

Dr Farry: I thank Lord Morrow for his question and good wishes. We have a system across Government where issues cut across the departmental divides or, indeed, sometimes fall through the cracks. Until we reform the departmental structure, it is important that Ministers work together closely. Under this new mandate, I have been impressed by the increased willingness of Ministers to work collaboratively around issues, including myself and John O'Dowd on educational matters. I am not sure whether I can pronounce too much on a single education system; that is probably outside my direct departmental responsibilities, but clearly there is a wider debate on that in society.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister give an undertaking to work closely with the Enterprise Minister and the Rural Development Minister to address the rural broadband deficit, which is a major obstacle for many students or potential students in relation to employment, education or training? Does the Minister accept that poor rural transport infrastructure acts as another barrier for rural people wishing to access those opportunities?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Lynch for his question. Strictly speaking, matters relating to broadband would be for the Enterprise Minister, and transport a matter for the Department for Regional Development (DRD). Clearly, again, the point highlights the importance of joined-up working between Departments and Ministers. From the training and employment perspective, I am happy to make representations if those issues are becoming barriers to people accessing their training requirements, whether that is going

to college or remote access from home to supplement what they are doing.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that supplementaries should contain only one question.

Higher Education Strategy

3. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consideration he has given to developing a single higher education strategy. (AQO 63/11-15)

Dr Farry: I thank Sandra Overend for her question. Clearly, it would make sense to produce a single higher education strategy for Northern Ireland that would encompass the strategic direction for the sector as well as widening participation. Ideally, that would be set against a stable funding framework. However, it would have to take account of the difficult collective decisions that need to be taken on tuition fees, the consultation on which ended on 10 June.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his answer. The Minister's predecessors, Lord Empey and Danny Kennedy, played a significant role in increasing participation in higher education among those from disadvantaged backgrounds. What importance does the Minister attach to the further growth of those participation rates as part of a single higher education strategy?

Dr Farry: I thank Mrs Overend for that supplementary question. We had a consultation on widening participation, which closed on 3 June. There may have been an argument for bringing those consultations together in one single consultation. As you know, there is a consultation on a higher education strategy as well as one on tuition fees, which has just closed. It is important to stress that we have a good story to tell about overall participation levels in higher education in Northern Ireland, which are approaching 50%. I believe that that is the highest participation level of any region in the UK. However, within the profile of that, certain sections of the community are under-represented. I can certainly give my full support to addressing those gaps, and both the University of Ulster and Queen's University run programmes to try to address under-representation in the profile of their student cohorts.

Mr Campbell: When the Minister looks at furthering and widening participation levels, particularly in further and higher education, will

he ensure that, in those areas where there is significant under-representation and lack of take-up, the mentoring process that is being undertaken, particularly in the northern area, will be replicated across Northern Ireland to try to bring people from working-class Protestant areas into higher education?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Campbell for his supplementary question. We have had a debate on that topic; it was one of the first motions debated in this Assembly mandate, and higher education was part of that. It is worth stressing that all of our higher education institutions are free and open to the entire community and that there are no barriers to participation coming from them. Clearly, however, there are problems with the balance and profile of representation across Northern Ireland, and any schemes that seek to address that will certainly have my support.

Mr Brady: Will the Minister outline the level and type of co-operation that exists between the nine universities in Ireland? As part of an evolving higher education strategy, how much information is being given to students in the North who might be considering taking up places in universities elsewhere in Ireland?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Brady for his supplementary question. It gives me an opportunity to make a number of points. There is already some very good practice in research co-operation between the nine universities on the island of Ireland, and that was referred to at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting on Friday. There is scope to develop that further.

There is also an issue of student flows, both from Northern Ireland to the Republic and vice versa. It is important that, when we look at decisions on tuition fees in both jurisdictions over the coming months, we understand the consequences of whatever decisions might be taken in either jurisdiction and the impact that they will have. It is certainly important that information is given to all students about the choices that exist on either side of the border for their own development.

Mr P Ramsey: Have the Minister's Department and the Department of Education had any discussions about support for students in the transition from school to higher education?

Dr Farry: We have not had the opportunity to have that discussion just yet, but I am more

than happy to take that forward, and I am sure Mr O'Dowd will be equally happy to have a similar conversation.

Tuition Fees

4. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the completion of the consultation on tuition fees, to outline a timescale for a final decision. (AQO 64/11-15)

Dr Farry: I thank Mrs Kelly for her question. The public consultation on tuition fees and student finance arrangements in Northern Ireland closed last Friday, 10 June. My officials have started collating and analysing the responses. I hope, subject to the volume and complexity of responses, to provide a high-level summary to the Employment and Learning Committee before the summer recess. I am aware that we need decisions soon, and my target is no later than September 2011 if there are to be any changes for the academic year 2012-13. It is important, too, that we give early clarity and certainty to future students and their families, the higher education institutions and all other stakeholders.

However, as I am sure you will appreciate, it is also essential that we take sufficient time to consider fully all of the consultation responses before reaching a conclusion on the proposed way forward.

2.45 pm

Ultimately, the Executive and the Assembly face an important decision on tuition fees. There is a collective responsibility on us all to reach agreement as the decision will impact not only on student finance arrangements but on university funding. It is crucial that we get this decision right if we are to continue our proud record of having the best higher education participation rates in the UK for those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, allow our higher education institutions to remain internationally competitive and ensure that the share of funding to the public purse remains affordable.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his answer and wish him well with his portfolio. Is it not the case that the Student Loans Company needs a decision by the middle of July? I believe that that is what the previous Committee was informed. In taking forward the consultation responses, will you take account of the maximum

student number (MaSN) cap and consider lifting it in some of the universities?

Dr Farry: I am reliably informed that September is the date to which we should be working. That may well mean the Executive taking a decision before they go into recess towards the end of July. My officials will prepare a paper to go to the Executive towards the end of June or the beginning of July for that purpose.

The MaSN cap was a feature of the consultation regarding the higher education strategy, and it also impacts on tuition fees. I will no doubt reflect on it over the coming weeks. Of course, any increase in the MaSN cap will place a financial pressure on the Department that is not factored into the current budgetary allocations. The Executive and the Assembly will need to reflect on that.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister outline the difficulties that the universities will face if there is no increase in tuition fees and what he plans to do about that?

Dr Farry: At present, the two universities in Northern Ireland have to find savings of £28 million over the next two years, which amounts to a 12% cut in the public support that we give them. That comes at a time when investment in universities in the rest of the UK is increasing. We have a very strong record of having two world-class facilities in Northern Ireland. It is important that we maintain that and do not fall behind what is happening in the rest of the UK.

If the £40 million gap in the Budget that would arise in the absence of fees has to be passed on to the universities, it would have catastrophic consequences for them and entail a reduction in the number of students and, indeed, the closure of a number of university departments. It would be very difficult for us to sustain an argument that we have world-class facilities. This comes at a time when we are trying to give out a message that Northern Ireland is open for business, that we can grow our own local companies and attract companies from overseas. Those companies will be looking for a guarantee that we will have a highly skilled workforce. That includes highly skilled graduates coming out of our two local universities.

Mr Givan: Does the Minister not agree that the onus should be on the universities and colleges to ensure that they operate a streamlined and efficient management structure? Before he

would even consider going to the Executive, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) should be operating efficiently. The shortfall in funding should be met internally by the colleges and universities themselves.

Dr Farry: I agree with the thrust of what the Member said. Efficiencies are important. I am wholly committed to finding efficiencies in my Department. Both the universities are equally committed to finding efficiencies. It is important to put down a marker that universities are not there simply to act as companies trying to drive out cost to the lowest common denominator. Universities are there to make an investment in the future of society as a whole.

There is a notion out there that both universities are sitting on some pile of reserves that we can tap into to address the shortfall. I have asked my officials to drill down and test those arguments fully. I have spoken to both vice chancellors, and they are prepared to co-operate fully with my Department's examination of those arguments. Both universities have reserves. However, those reserves are committed to capital investment, a lot of which is also contractually committed already.

Furthermore, it is important that Members are aware that, when we talk about the use of reserves to plug a gap, that £40 million will be a recurring cost every year. However, we can dip into reserves only once, after which they are exhausted, and the same problem exists. Even if we had reserves, which we do not, it is not the solution to the overall problem of ensuring a proper funding stream for the universities.

Mr Agnew: Does the Minister agree that, given his Department's current allocation, his choice is between putting up fees and cutting services in higher education? Does he also agree that what is ultimately required is extra money from the Finance Minister to ensure that we continue to have a high-class university education system?

Dr Farry: The paper that I will present to my Executive colleagues will go through a number of different options and consequences. One of those options is the introduction of fees, because the budget is currently premised around that. That is the current default assumption behind my Department's figures. A situation in which the Department is asked to fund internally the shortfall that would arise in the absence of fees would have very serious consequences for other aspects of my Department's budget. The

employment service is already overstretched; it is currently configured to deal with a jobseeker's allowance headcount of 35,000, but there are 60,000 people presently on the books, with another 20,000 to come across as a result of the migration from incapacity benefit under the welfare reforms.

Equally, we have responsibility for further education, essential skills and apprenticeships, all of which are helping vulnerable people, and I would be loath to see cutbacks in those areas. I stress that university funding is an investment for our economy. It should not be borne solely by my Department; it is something that the system as a whole needs to recognise in the collective interest of Northern Ireland.

EU Engagement

5. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what are his Department's priority actions for EU engagement. (AQO 65/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is my intention to further enhance contact between the European Commission directorates and the Northern Ireland Administration through meetings and visits to Brussels during my time in office. I have been looking at that specifically since taking up office. It is clearly important for my Department to maximise the benefits of EU engagement.

As priority actions, I want the Department and its stakeholder organisations, including further education colleges and universities, to continue to build on the very positive foundation created through President Barroso's Northern Ireland task force. I want them to take forward a range of specific activities to maintain and enhance our relationship with the EU in the context of the EU 2020 strategy for jobs and growth. Those will include: participating fully and leading appropriately in the work flowing from the recent visit of the Barroso task force Commission officials last March, especially in relation to the proposed competitiveness and employment, innovation and technology, and social cohesion strands; continuing to identify and benefit from EU engagement opportunities and potential European funding streams such as the framework programme FP7 in order to contribute towards the achievement of the target of increasing drawdown of competitive EU funds by 20% between 2011 and 2015; and, in particular, establishing a dedicated

fund to encourage increased participation by the universities in the European framework programme.

We are committed to maintaining and developing a high level of participation in the European lifelong learning programmes such as Leonardo and Grundtvig. We continue to engage proactively in the implementation of the European qualifications framework and with the UK EU co-ordination group for vocational education and training. We are promoting participation in the Erasmus programme in our local higher education institutions, thereby ensuring that Northern Ireland benefits from its initiatives and activities, and we are managing the Northern Ireland European social fund 2007-2013.

Mr McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for that very comprehensive answer. I congratulate him on his appointment and welcome him to the podium. He outlined, in a substantive way, how he intended to approach the issue. I want to ask him specifically about an issue where, perhaps, this region does not punch its weight compared with other regions. Will he raise with his Executive colleagues the issue of substantially increasing the complement of personnel that we have in the bureau? Compared with other regions, our complement represents a minimal interface, which creates a quite significant disadvantage.

Dr Farry: It is my understanding that a paper looking at European engagement and how to maximise Northern Ireland's return from available European Union funds will come to the Executive in the near future. I have outlined some of the ongoing work, and no doubt the level of representation in Brussels can be explored. Equally, Members will be aware that, outside the context of Executive representation, the Assembly is interested, for similar reasons, in its representation in Brussels.

Mrs Dobson: What plans does the Minister have to promote collaboration between local universities and those in the EU during his term of office?

Dr Farry: There is already a strong record of work on that, and the seventh framework programme is the umbrella under which a lot of that work can be taken forward. The framework programme can be bureaucratic and complex, and one often needs a breadth of partners, so perhaps the process is overly cumbersome. Indeed, that matter is something on which we

can make representations ahead of the eighth framework programme, which will be announced in the very near future. Nonetheless, I am committed to research and innovation, in which our local universities have a critical role to play. As research projects get more complicated and challenging, it is important that universities co-operate on them, and that is something in which I am extremely interested.

Mr Allister: The Minister's first answer was very interesting. However, does anyone in the Northern Ireland Executive's Brussels office have expertise or a background in the Department that he represents, or is that a gap in our present representation?

Dr Farry: We have full confidence in our team in Brussels. Clearly, there is an argument about whether we need more representation, and Mr McLaughlin outlined some of those arguments. Obviously, the representation in Brussels covers a range of issues, and the interface between what happens in the European Union and in a devolved region cuts across a broad swathe of public policy, so it is important that people there have access to a broad range of skills and knowledge.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Education Maintenance Allowance

7. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action he has taken to ensure the retention of the education maintenance allowance. (AQO 67/11-15)

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Maskey for his question, and I pass on my personal congratulations for his recent election as the Member of Parliament for West Belfast. I hope that we will not miss him too much.

First, I should stress that there are no plans to abolish education maintenance allowance (EMA) in Northern Ireland, and the current scheme will operate as usual in the forthcoming academic year, 2011-12.

In December 2010, ministerial predecessors in the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education received the findings of the jointly commissioned review of the education maintenance allowance scheme in Northern Ireland. Officials from both Departments are assessing the findings of the

report, and, therefore, no decisions have been made on the future of the scheme.

The review found that, in the majority of cases, the provision of an allowance makes no difference to young people's decisions to remain in education or training. However, in some cases, it makes a real difference. I am determined that young people from lower income families, for whom the allowance makes a real difference, continue to be assisted to stay in education and training. Furthermore, I can advise that the review report was shared with the previous Employment and Learning Committee, which has, itself, recommended that the allowance could be better targeted.

Any proposals to change the current provision of the EMA scheme in Northern Ireland are subject to public consultation and appropriate equality considerations. They must also take account of the very difficult budgetary position facing my Department.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat arís eile.

Given the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training, does the Minister accept that any changes to EMA must not further alienate or discourage young people from socially deprived backgrounds?

Dr Farry: EMA clearly plays a critical role in enabling some people to remain in education or training, and it is important that we do not lose sight of that. On the other hand, I have to be conscious that there is considerable deadweight in the current scheme. Something like 64% of those who receive it report that it makes no difference to their decision on whether to remain in education and training.

In some respects, therefore, that is dead money that could be better deployed. We need to focus our discussions on how to make the system work better rather than on whether to remove it.

3.00 pm

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Deputy Speaker: I advise Members that Questions 10, 11 and 12 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Employment: Socially Disadvantaged Areas

1. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to increase job promotion and creation within socially disadvantaged areas. (AQO 76/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I am acutely aware of the need to provide support to the most vulnerable, and I am contributing fully, along with my Executive colleagues, to the development of policies and strategies in the next Programme for Government to help alleviate poverty and economic deprivation in our society. That having been said, my Department, through Invest Northern Ireland, will continue where it can to support programmes that are most likely to assist the most vulnerable to enter the workplace. Included in the short-term employment scheme are a number of specific measures that are designed to support job creation in socially disadvantaged areas. Those include a £1,000 business start grant for people resident in one of Northern Ireland's 36 neighbourhood renewal areas who successfully complete the Go For It programme; a £1,500 business start grant for disadvantaged young people not in education, employment or training who successfully complete the Go For It programme; and a range of initiatives that are designed to further develop employment opportunities in the social economy sector.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for that response. I very much appreciate the information that was contained in it. Has there been any discussion between her Department and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) about the social investment fund and how that may be used as an additional stimulus for job creation in such areas?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for that very well-made point. I have been arguing for some time that the matter goes across Departments. Certainly, the social investment fund will be very useful in helping young unemployed people in particular to get back into work. One of the points that I made at the genesis of the social investment fund was that it could be a great help in trying to deal with the difficulties in some areas that lead young people to be unemployed. The social investment fund, along with work that we are doing in our Department

and work in conjunction with the Minister for Employment and Learning, will, we hope, make a difference for those who find themselves unemployed at present.

Mr Swann: Given the Minister's commitment to the promotion of job creation in socially disadvantaged areas and with the upcoming proposed transfer of credit union control to the Financial Services Authority (FSA), will she outline what discussions she has had with the Department for Work and Pensions about credit unions in Northern Ireland accessing the current modernisation funds and how that could increase job promotion and creation in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: On the credit unions, the Member is right: it is a recommendation of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and something that I endorse that regulation and registration for credit unions should be transferred to the Financial Services Authority in the United Kingdom, so that we would be able to access funds that we are unable to access at present through our credit unions. When the transfer happens, I recognise that some of our credit unions will be ready to deal with those matters and others will need help. I am very cognisant of that fact. We will have to work with the credit union movement to identify where those gaps are, and we will try to allow them to take full advantage of the range of services that they will be able to tap in to. I have not had any discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions in relation to that matter; all our discussions thus far have been with Her Majesty's Treasury.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister take into consideration areas such as Limavady in my East Londonderry constituency, where so many jobs have been lost in the past few years, for any future job creation?

Mrs Foster: Of course, I will now listen to a lot of Members who want job creation in their area. I know that the Member beside me would very much welcome the fact that we do some work in Limavady. On a serious point, under the new short-term employment scheme, there are definitely opportunities for areas like Limavady to apply to that scheme to help current employers in the area, whether that is through the short-term assistance scheme (STAS), which we launched some time ago, or the short-term employment scheme. Those 36 neighbourhood renewal areas mean that people can go into the

Go For It programme and be assured that they will have that money to help them to start up and allow them to develop their business with Invest Northern Ireland's new support across the business base. At present, Invest Northern Ireland is going through a Transform programme through which it will no longer have client firms but will instead work across the business base, which will help all areas in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Cochrane: Although it is important to increase jobs within areas, there are also issues about mobility. What plans does the Minister have to assist those in disadvantaged areas to access jobs outside their area?

Mrs Foster: As I have said on many occasions, Northern Ireland is a relatively small place. South Belfast is often held up as an example of a place that gets more attention for jobs coming into Northern Ireland because people travel to that area from nearly every ward in Northern Ireland. If the Member is asking me what I can do to help with the public transport system, I have to say that that, unfortunately, is not a matter for me; it is a matter for the Minister for Regional Development. I will, however, want to speak to him about his regional development strategy so that hubs across Northern Ireland have the connectivity that they so deserve.

Employment

2. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures her Department intends to take to increase job creation. (AQO 77/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Over the next four years, Invest Northern Ireland (INI) will support the promotion of more than 21,000 new jobs. Those will include 5,000 jobs as a result of supporting foreign direct investment and a further 5,000 jobs through helping companies in the local business base to grow and expand. In addition, more than 6,000 new jobs are expected to be promoted through encouraging new business starts across Northern Ireland. I have also announced the short-term employment scheme, to which I referred in my previous answer. It has a total budget of £18.8 million and will promote a further 5,000 new jobs by March 2015. All those measures will be implemented in conjunction with a range of other support from Invest Northern Ireland.

Ms J McCann: Constituencies such as West Belfast still have high levels of underinvestment and a lack of job opportunities. Will the Minister give a commitment that her Department and Invest NI will work positively with political, community and business leaders in that constituency to ensure investment and job creation?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for her question. However, it presupposes that we have not been working with political representatives and business leaders in West Belfast, which we have. Before the election, I had a useful meeting with Delta Print and Packaging. After the election, I visited Ortus in West Belfast, which is doing a lot of excellent work on the interface of the Falls and Shankill roads. We will continue to work in the most progressive way possible to bring jobs to wherever in Northern Ireland because that is what it is about: bringing more jobs and better jobs. That is what I am tasked with and am striving to do.

Mr Humphrey: What is the current state of foreign direct investment, and what impact is it likely to have on Invest Northern Ireland's ability to win new projects for Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. As he will already know, during the last Programme for Government period, Invest Northern Ireland was hugely successful, despite the difficult times in the global marketplace. It set a target of 6,500 jobs promoted, and we hit 7,538. There was a target of 90 job projects, and we brought in 131. Those figures speak for themselves.

The current market remains quite volatile, but there is a good pipeline of new projects, particularly in the financial services, information and communication technology (ICT) and software sectors. Invest Northern Ireland tells me that it is encouraged by the level of interest in Northern Ireland, which we will continue to work on.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Taking on board the Minister's answer, one has to appreciate that Invest NI exceeded its targets last year. However, will the Minister or INI give any consideration to the creation of special enterprise zones in areas of particular social need, such as the north-west?

Mrs Foster: I understand that the previous time that we had specific enterprise zones was in the 1980s, although I stand to be corrected on that. The designation of an economic zone is

a matter for Westminster because it is a fiscal matter for which the Treasury is responsible. Therefore, it is not a matter for Invest Northern Ireland or me. On a number of occasions, the Secretary of State has talked about the need to turn the entirety of Northern Ireland into an economic enterprise zone. Unfortunately, we have not yet been able to get clarity on what that actually means in practice, but part of that will be the lowering of corporation tax, and we will continue to work on that. Along with the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Finance Minister and, indeed, the whole Executive, I believe that the benefits of lowering corporation tax outweigh the costs associated with that. Therefore, we believe that it is a good thing to argue for, and we will want the Treasury to look at the consultation, which closes on 24 June, and to come back to us with a positive message.

Broadband Fund

3. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the progress of telecommunications projects funded through the broadband fund. (AQO 78/11-15)

Mrs Foster: All seven projects that have been funded to date through the broadband fund are now completed. Access to fixed wireless broadband services has been delivered widely across the rural west, Foyle basin, north Sperrins, the north Antrim coast and County Fermanagh. Access to fibre-based services has been delivered in Enniskillen and at 23 cabinet locations in rural areas across counties Antrim, Armagh, Down and Tyrone.

Mr McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for her answer, and I applaud the fact that she has given priority to that vital area of our economic infrastructure, especially to disadvantaged and rural communities, as her answer acknowledged. From her experience as Enterprise Minister, can she give the Assembly an indication of the significance that inward investors attach to the existence of such cutting edge technology?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. In a previous question, I was asked about the infrastructure to connect people physically, and cyberconnectivity is hugely important. That is why Project Kelvin, which links us to North America, was such a key investment for us. In fact, we now have quicker connectivity between New York and Northern Ireland than New York

has with San Francisco. We should be incredibly proud of that.

Aligned with that, when we get people to connect into Northern Ireland, we must have the connectivity within Northern Ireland, and I think that is what the Member was referring to. Undoubtedly, a huge amount of work has been carried out by the industry, and government has invested heavily; £19.5 million has been put into the next generation broadband strategy. We will continue to monitor that. As you know, telecoms is a privatised entity and, therefore, we can act only when there is a market failure and where European regulations allow us to do so. We must continue to monitor what is going on. Members have approached me about difficulties with particular constituents, and I am happy to look into those difficulties. It is only when I hear of those issues that I am able to address them.

Mr Frew: Given the importance of broadband to the rural community, particularly the farming industry, what more can the Minister do to eradicate the black holes and gaps that exist in broadband provision in Ulster? What input does the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) have into that?

3.15 pm

Mrs Foster: As I indicated, £19 million of government funding has been invested in next generation broadband. Of that, £16.5 million was contributed by my Department under the EU sustainable competitiveness programme, and the remaining £2.5 million was contributed by DARD through a mixture of funding from the EU rural development programme and from its core budgets.

Although my primary role is to make sure that businesses are connected, it is important that we realise that a lot of farmers now provide information through the Internet and, indeed, draw down a lot of their forms from it. Therefore, it is hugely important that rural areas and rural businesses — be they farm businesses or a wide range of other businesses — have that connectivity. That area causes the most difficulty. Although there are 420,000 broadband users in Northern Ireland, fewer than 1,000 of them — I think that it is 944 — are connected by satellite. I know the difficulties that some people have with satellite broadband, and there may be a need to look at more mobile applications to deal with those black spots. However, to do that, we need coverage from

the mobile phone companies. We do not have that yet because, at present, there are national targets for coverage and we need regional targets. That is set by Ofcom in the UK, and we have been lobbying very hard to say to it that we need regional targets to get more coverage for our 3G and 4G networks. We need to press on with that.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister's answer has covered several of the points that I wanted to raise. However, I draw her attention to the fact that broadband reception in some rural areas is very poor and needs to be improved. Are there any further actions that she can take or intends to take to deal with the problem?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, his constituency is one of the areas where there are so-called "not spots". That probably has something to do with the Mourne mountains. Having said that, I accept that many people in the area have severe difficulties getting connected. First, with the mobile application, we need to keep pressurising Ofcom to give us regional targets. Secondly, we believe that we have some money available to support a further call through the broadband fund, and we anticipate that we will make a sixth call for projects in early summer. We will certainly look at the areas that have been experiencing difficulties with their broadband connections, and Members should let us know of particular areas.

Mrs Overend: Can the Minister detail what tangible benefits to the local economy have resulted to date from Project Kelvin?

Mrs Foster: The most obvious benefit is to the New York Stock Exchange. I often find that people who work there are better advocates of Project Kelvin than a lot of others who live in Northern Ireland. It allows that company, which has an office in Belfast, to send its technology through Project Kelvin right back to its base in New York so that it can use that technology in a quick time. That is the primary benefit. Project Kelvin also gives us a very good lever when we go to companies in North America to say that we have that connectivity and they will be able to deal very quickly with their offices in North America if they base themselves in Northern Ireland, either for research and development, back office work or whatever they decide to do.

Short-term Employment Scheme

4. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department is taking to ensure the creation of jobs under the £19 million short-term employment measure recently announced by her Department.

(AQO 79/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The core focus of the short-term employment scheme is to promote 5,000 jobs between 2011 and 2015, with 4,000 to be created by March 2014. Invest Northern Ireland is already actively engaging with a broad range of key stakeholders across industry and in other Departments to promote the short-term employment scheme. I intend to discuss the initiative with the Minister for Employment and Learning in the very near future. All of that will encourage widespread uptake across Northern Ireland and ensure that the measure delivers those new jobs as quickly as possible. I am encouraged by the progress that has been achieved to date and can report that Invest Northern Ireland is already at an advanced stage of negotiations with a number of businesses on new investment projects that will lead directly to significant new job creation this year.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for her response. The first few questions all seemed to focus on the same issue. What steps will Invest Northern Ireland take to promote west Tyrone as the location for new business development?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, during the past three years, Invest Northern Ireland has offered assistance totalling £6.5 million to businesses in west Tyrone, which contributed towards planned investment of almost £39 million in the region. That support aimed to create nearly 250 new jobs in the area while safeguarding 56 existing jobs. During that period, significant announced projects of which the Member will be aware included Euro Auctions, Grosvenor Shirts and Waste Systems Limited. In addition, 577 businesses have been assisted indirectly through our Start a Business programme. We will, therefore, continue with those elements. However, as I indicated in my earlier answer, we will also look at neighbourhood renewal areas to deal with Go for It participants, who can then avail themselves of available grants. As I said, we are looking for opportunities in the agrifood sector, the social economy sector and call centres that we may not ordinarily support. Therefore, there

are opportunities for every area across Northern Ireland to take advantage of the short-term employment scheme. I very much hope that west Tyrone will be one of those areas.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I wish Mrs Foster well in her new term as Enterprise Minister. There will be a wee bit more parochialism with my question. We are all aware and would probably all argue that a proposed reduction in corporation tax will not be the major benefit to growing the economy, which is very reliant on small indigenous businesses. What safeguards will be put in place in the Department to ensure that the benefits of the short-term employment measure will be widespread across the North and will not be focused on a few geographical locations?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, the whole point of the short-term employment scheme is that it is spread right across Northern Ireland. That is why we will take into account neighbourhood renewal areas. It is why we believe that working with the social economy sector is a key part of what we do. Indeed, as regards corporation tax, the Member will know that the argument is that not only will big companies benefit from the lowering of corporation tax, but all the smaller companies that are in the supply chain to the bigger companies will benefit because more work will be available to them. I must say that one of the best social enterprise schemes, which the Member will know well, is in Irvinestown. Last week, I was absolutely delighted to welcome the Prime Minister to Irvinestown to visit the ITEC Centre and the Arc Healthy Living Centre. They are great examples of how social enterprise can make a difference to one town and, indeed, one area. I hope to see more of that type of social investment being pulled right across Northern Ireland.

Mr A Maginness: The Minister referred to the short-term employment measure as spreading jobs around. In my constituency of North Belfast, there is an apparently intractable problem of long-term unemployment and, indeed, short-term unemployment. Does the Minister agree that concentration is needed on areas such as north Belfast, where there clearly is a jobs black spot?

Mrs Foster: Unfortunately, I am at a loss as to whether there are any neighbourhood renewal areas in north Belfast. I am sure that there are. We will concentrate on neighbourhood

renewal areas because we realise that there are difficulties in those areas. It is important to say that we are working with DEL on the short-term employment scheme. It has an employer subsidy scheme to provide additional support to workers. My Department believes that it can augment that support with the short-term employment scheme and thereby keep people in jobs that, perhaps, they would otherwise have lost. Therefore, the scheme is about working with other Departments to ensure that we get the maximum out of government money and do not displace each other but, in fact, augment each other.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board: Event Funding Programme

5. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the success of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's event funding programme. (AQO 80/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) events programme for 2011-12 received 112 applications requesting £5.2 million from a total of £1 million available to the events industry. After a thorough assessment process in which events had to demonstrate by example how they met 10 key criteria, NITB funded 57% of all eligible events that were seeking funding. Events tourism contributes £98 million to the local economy, and the funding provided by NITB will increase visitor numbers and spend to the Northern Ireland economy and support the objectives in the draft tourism strategy for Northern Ireland 2020.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she be reviewing the decision by NITB to cut funding for the Foyle Cup and the Milk Cup?

Mrs Foster: As the Member knows, an application was put in for the Milk Cup and the Foyle Cup, and, unfortunately, NITB decided not to fund them this year because they did not score highly enough. The appeal process has taken place, and that is still the position. The Foyle Cup was offered a feedback session to explain why its application for funding was not successful, and, unfortunately, to date the Foyle Cup organisers have not taken up that offer. I understand that the Tourist Board has met representatives from the Milk Cup to explain why its application was not successful and to provide advice on how future applications for funding support could be developed.

Mr D McIlveen: Is the Minister involved in any plans to support the World Police and Fire Games, which are coming to Northern Ireland in 2013, given that that event is larger than the Commonwealth Games? Will the Minister give an update on how NITB is working on that?

Mrs Foster: We are very much looking forward to the 2013 games. The Member is right: they are bigger than the Commonwealth Games. We need to be ready for the influx of visitors who will come — not only the competitors but their friends and families. We had discussions with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) during the previous mandate about how we can move this issue forward. I am very much looking forward to having further discussions so that we are ready to promote Northern Ireland in a positive way when the games come.

Mr Allister: Minister, I have to express disappointment that you have no good news for the Northern Ireland Milk Cup. Do you, as Minister with oversight of the Tourist Board, agree with its decision? It seems to beggar belief that the Northern Ireland Milk Cup could score only half the marks available on branding as a Northern Ireland venture. If you do not agree, what steps will you take to make sure that the great wrong done against the Northern Ireland Milk Cup is made right?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. One key factor in why the Milk Cup and Foyle Cup did not score highly is that they are, primarily, sporting events, notwithstanding the fact that they bring a number of tourists to Northern Ireland and the greater north-west. Because of that and because my good friend and colleague Gregory Campbell has been lobbying me on the issue, I have asked my officials to discuss alternative funding arrangements with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and Sport Northern Ireland. However, the long-term sustainability of both events has to be considered. That is the key point in all of this. Certainly, we will look to be positive and to find a solution in relation to this year, but, in the long term, public funds cannot be permanently guaranteed for specific events. Therefore, we need to plan for the medium to longer term, but I have asked officials to have a look at the matter for this year.

Construction

6. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she has taken to address the impact of the economic downturn on the construction industry. (AQO 81/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The construction industry has seen the largest decline of any sector of the economy. It has declined by 28.8% since its peak in 2006. Support for the sector has been based on meet-the-buyer events, focused around major construction events or sectors where there is still spend anticipated. That includes events associated with the London 2012 Olympics and supply chain events with local companies that have secured significant projects in external markets. My Department has also proposed short-term employment measures aimed at boosting employment, and, as I have already said, those measures will result in the promotion of over 5,000 new jobs by March 2015.

3.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £8,141,695,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2012 and that resources, not exceeding £8,656,468,000, be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2012 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 3 (b) and 3 (a) of table 1.3 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Estimates 2011-12 that was laid before the Assembly on 6 June 2011. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £23,278,781.13, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for the year ending 31 March 2010 and that resources, not exceeding £17,836,994.70, be authorised for use by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Education teachers' superannuation, for the year ending 31 March 2010, as summarised for each Department in Part II of the 2009-2010 Statement of Excesses that was laid before the Assembly on 6 June 2011. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Health Committee met the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for the first time on 8 June. At that meeting, we explored with the Minister some of the challenges facing the Health Department with the 2011-12 Budget. The Minister told the Committee that he is facing a shortfall of about £177 million this year, and that is after cutting back on previously planned spend for the year to ensure that spending will focus on inescapable pressures and the requirement to meet statutory obligations.

The Health Minister clearly has a tough job ahead of him if he is to balance his books by the end of the year. However, the Committee was pleased to hear the positive and proactive way in which the Minister intends to go about tackling the issue of his budget. For example, he intends to cut his Department's prescribing bill by further reliance on generic drugs; a common sense measure that is to be welcomed. The Minister recognised that such measures alone will not bridge the gap to allow him to live within his current budget and that further efficiencies will have to be identified. To that end, the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) has been brought in to the Department and will report in September. The Committee welcomes that news and is hopeful that a fresh eye will, indeed, help the Department to find the additional savings required.

The Committee was also pleased to hear the Minister say that he would consider further North/South co-operation on the provision of services. The Minister acknowledged that co-operation can reap massive rewards by creating the necessary critical mass for specialist services and providing a much-needed revenue stream for the Department. I think that we can all see the potential benefits of the planned radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin for people living in the border areas, and similar opportunities should be explored. In fact, the Committee had a presentation from Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT) at one of its first meetings. I believe that much can be done to work better together, and that will benefit all of us.

The Committee encourages the Minister to look particularly at areas where savings can be made that will not impact on the provision of front line services. For example, clinical

excellence awards made to consultants in the form of what we know as bonuses are costing the Department around £11 million a year and are paid to consultants on an ongoing basis over and above their salaries. The Committee notes that a review is being conducted and is due to report in July. We hope that, pending the outcome of that review, the Minister will be in a position to take decisive action on the issue.

In this economic climate, hard decisions obviously have to be made about where to invest the resources that we have. However, I make the point that when Bairbre de Brún was Health Minister back in 2002, she had a budget of approximately £2 billion. Since that time, the health budget has doubled to some £4 billion. We really need to ask ourselves whether we are seeing the results, in terms of people's health, that we expect from that level of investment.

The Committee is concerned that the latest figures show that the Department is spending only 1.7% of its budget on the public health agenda. The Committee believes that there has to be a serious rethink about shifting the focus of the Health Service towards wellness rather than sickness. By that I mean that we need to concentrate resources on keeping people well and out of hospital, which means more services being provided at a local level and a greater reliance on primary healthcare facilities.

The direction of the Health Service and spending on health and social care are interlinked. We need to spend the money where we think that it will yield the best outcomes for people. Health needs to be understood in its widest sense, and we want to look at innovative ways of providing services to people, including helping those who care for relatives in the community. Domiciliary care is often unpaid and unrecognised, but it plays an essential role in the health and social care system. When the Minister briefed the Committee last week, he said that we must stop doing what does not work. I endorse that statement and take it further: we have to start doing what will work.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. On that point about what the Minister said, what about the fact that he is not prepared to support Home-Start throughout Northern Ireland? Everyone in the Chamber knows about the excellent work of Home-Start, but the Minister is not prepared to support it. In fact, he has passed the buck to the Department of

Education to try to see whether it can support Home-Start. Does the Member agree that that is not the proper way to ensure that front line services are delivered? The Minister talked about early intervention. Here we have a case of early intervention, and he is not prepared to fund it.

Ms Gildernew: I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree with him. We do have to join up; we have to work together and utilise limited resources in a way that benefits families and children. Both Home-Start and Sure Start have played an integral role of all our constituencies through supporting families and children. Every pound spent on a child at the early years stage — that early intervention — is equivalent to £17 spent at the third level education stage. I concur with the Member that, when the proper services are provided for families and children, it really is excellent value for money. We will all need to watch that issue carefully and ensure that the two Departments work together. We spoke to the Health Minister at that first Committee meeting and he said that he was working with the Department of Education. We welcome that and want to see those early interventions taking place.

As I said, we know that investment in early years works. We know that prevention is better than cure. We know that if our people are empowered to exercise regularly, eat a good diet, monitor their own physical and mental health and get help quickly and locally when problems arise, many long term and serious conditions can be avoided. We also know that investment in preventative drugs, such as anti-TNF drugs for debilitating conditions such as arthritis, or clot-busting stroke drugs, can provide a win-win, vastly improving the quality of life of the people receiving them as well as reducing the cost of treating those conditions later on in hospital.

To conclude, the health and social care budget for 2011-12 needs to be spent on front line services that work and, ultimately, provide the best health outcomes for all our people.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): At its meeting on 8 June, the Committee for Education noted the correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel regarding the requirement for an Excess Vote on the accounts of the Department of Education teachers' superannuation scheme. The Committee also considered the Public

Accounts Committee (PAC) report on the matter and the Comptroller and Auditor General's position that, if such a situation reoccurred, he would bring the matter to the Public Accounts Committee for further consideration.

Although the Committee received no prior notification from the Department regarding the Excess Vote — an issue I will return to in a moment — it did receive correspondence from the Department of Education providing the Committee with an explanation of the need for an Excess Vote and the action that it took as a result. The Committee concurred with the view of the Public Accounts Committee, which recommended that the Northern Ireland Assembly provide the necessary amounts by means of Excess Vote.

In the autumn, the Committee will be seeking an update from the Comptroller and Auditor General via the Public Accounts Committee that the issues that gave rise to the need for an Excess Vote have been satisfactorily resolved. In the interim, we will be exploring the matter with officials during next week's session on the Department's budget.

I move to a few comments as a private Member on the Budget before us. I want to raise some concerns that I believe need to be placed on record; they have been placed there before, but, in light of the debate that we are having and the current economic climate that we find ourselves in, it is as well to remind ourselves of the challenge that schools face. In particular, I am thinking of boards of governors. I declare an interest as a member of the boards of governors of Ballymoney High School and Ballymoney Model Controlled Integrated Primary School. Boards of governors sitting down to look at the forecast for how they will manage their future finances are finding it extremely challenging and difficult. One need only look at the savings delivery plan that the Department published some time ago. It clearly outlines the aggregate schools budget, which is the budget that pays for front line services: teachers, classroom assistants, caretakers, heat and light.

In 2011, some £26 million will be taken out; in 2012, some £13.85 million; in 2013, £114 million; and, in 2014, £179 million. That gives you some sense of the magnitude of the problem that schools face with the Budget. I have already called on the Minister to reprioritise so that the House and particularly

those who have to deliver the service in education will have some comfort that they will not be left to squander on this issue and that schools will not be financially starved out of existence because they have not had the wherewithal to deliver services.

I also wish to raise a serious matter regarding the capital spend, which Dominic Bradley mentioned earlier. Many schools have been living with a false sense of hope because of the publication some years ago of the investment delivery plan. That plan looked into the promised land and named the schools that met the criteria and were to get newbuilds. However, many of those schools will not get their new facilities. Therefore, I have called on the Minister to give us clarity, which the previous Minister failed abysmally to do, on the process that determines how a school is put on the list and how it sees the delivery of a new school in bricks and mortar. In fact, it was put to me recently that it was not even a case of knowing where a school was on the ladder; it was a case of knowing whether there was a ladder in the first place.

I remind Members that, before the end of the previous mandate, the Minister announced that work would start on 13 schools; we were told that those schools were part of a very detailed process. Remember, there was a review of schools that were compliant, partially compliant and non-compliant. However, would you believe, Mr Deputy Speaker, that seven of those schools were partially non-compliant? Yet they found their way on to a schedule of works and an agreed building programme. I have asked the new Education Minister to look at each of those decisions and to give us an update on where we are on that issue.

I am glad that the Finance Minister is with us, and I hope that he can give further help on end-year flexibility. Members will know that there was a problem and a crisis. We could almost have been in the same place as the banks when it came to the schools concerned that their surpluses were under threat. Thanks to the intervention of the Finance Minister, an agreement and an arrangement was put in place. In the June monitoring round, the Department of Education made a bid regarding that issue, and I would appreciate it if the Finance Minister could give some reassurance today to the House that the process that was announced before the end of the previous

mandate will be put in place so that the schools that need to have information and structure to their finances will get an assurance that helps them to plan for the weeks and months ahead.

3.45 pm

I conclude by raising the concern that, in the Budget before us and in the figures that Members have seen over the past months, there are elements which cause grave concern about home-to-school transport, from which it is proposed to take somewhere in the region of £20 million over the next four years. That will have a particularly adverse effect on rural communities — communities that feel isolated and desperately need access to rural transport to get to their schools.

The weeks and months ahead will undoubtedly be very challenging. We have had the fiasco with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), an update on which I have asked for from the Minister and his officials. We have all seen what has been spent by that organisation. I do not think that many teachers in Northern Ireland today have ever had the luxury of travelling in a jet to a conference. That is a serious issue that must be addressed by CCEA and the Department. We are often told that there is not much money around. There must have been a fair amount around when an organisation was able to justify that type of spend. I ask the Finance Minister to ensure that such non-departmental public bodies are looked at with a view to bringing them under tighter financial control.

I also reaffirm the priority of having a budget centred on the needs of the school and its pupils, not around the needs of a plethora of organisations that are there, in some regards and cases, to be self-serving rather than to serve the best needs of our education service.

Mrs Cochrane: Back in March, the Alliance Party supported the Budget for 2011-15. It was the right thing to do to bring financial stability to Northern Ireland in the medium term. We in the Alliance Party take our place at the heart of the coalition Government very seriously, and we are committed to making it as collective a body as possible. The striking of a Budget and sticking to it goes right to the heart of what makes any Government coherent. The Supply resolution is the first aspect of the process of turning that Budget into a formal piece of legislation for the 2011-12 financial year.

That having been said, it must still be acknowledged that there are many challenges on the road ahead. A major one is that inflation is now well in excess of the level on which the Budget was premised. In some respects, the challenge passes to the individual Departments to manage their budgets. However, that would be rather short-sighted and would indicate a missed opportunity.

In his Budget statement in March, the Finance Minister talked about the importance of “collaboration” between Departments; the need to focus on “early intervention and prevention”; and, perhaps most welcome of all, the need to address the financial costs of a divided society. To that could also be added the opportunity to pursue shared services on a cross-border or all-island basis.

I will start with the cost of division. Indeed, it was most telling that the Prime Minister, David Cameron, referred to that in his speech to the Assembly last week. When finances are so tight and we are trying to grow our economy, the resources wasted on managing division are a massive millstone round our neck. As for the importance of departmental collaboration, which other Members have mentioned, we need to realise that many of the most pressing challenges faced by Northern Ireland, as well as the opportunities that await us, do not fall into neat departmental silos. Therefore, we need much better co-operation between our Departments to make sure that we can grow our economy most effectively and to maximise efficiencies and the value of public services.

So far, the rhetoric and promise from Ministers in the Executive have been promising, but the Assembly has a right to expect tangible results in the very near future. Indeed, the Alliance Party believes that the Assembly should pass a governance Bill that would mandate better co-operation and collaboration between Departments to better combat the silo mentality. A duty should be placed on all Departments to co-operate and collaborate to meet some general objectives. Those could include promoting community safety and combating crime; promoting public health; working for sustainable development; and promoting a shared future.

With respect to early intervention and prevention, which other Members have also mentioned, a shift in the balance of resources to programmes

that seek to prevent problems from emerging, or seek to intervene at an early stage, can produce savings through avoiding the need to spend greater resources after problems fully develop. However, the funding of the former tends to be optional, while the funding of the latter tends to be statutory. There is a case for shifting the balance of funding, and that means following through with projected savings with back-end funding. That is not a leap of faith, as there is already considerable empirical evidence from other jurisdictions that that approach can be successful. A focus on preventive measures can ensure savings across a range of public spending areas, including health, justice and social care. For example, the cost of keeping a child in the care of the state is approximately £100,000 per annum. Family support programmes such as Home-Start and Sure Start, which have already been mentioned, cost less than £2,000 per intervention.

The Alliance Party is also very keen to promote more shared services on a North/South basis. That need not be about politics but good finance and economics. We welcome that the potential for that is being scoped through the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC). However, we need to see more tangible evidence of progress beyond the radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin. We have a responsibility to our constituents, who are worried about their jobs, the services on which they rely, their economic future, etc.

The Executive must be innovative as they prudently manage the resources available in order to meet the challenges ahead. The Alliance Party supports the motion.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I am sure that the Minister for Finance and Personnel can be forgiven for saying that he has heard nothing but hand wringing and exhortations to do better. All of us must realise that aspirational politics are confronted by the reality of a difficult financial position.

I speak on behalf of the Committee for Employment and Learning, which I chair. I understand the difficulties that the Minister is facing. Should additional funds become available in the year, I make the case that the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) has a key part to play in any moving forward. I lay claim to some of that.

The particular problem is that Northern Ireland, which has relatively few natural resources save for the talent of its people, needs to invest in its people. That is the only way in which we can move forward. Look at people who do not have any particular skills. How can we expect them to participate in growth if we do not invest in them? We have to give some help to individuals so that they can play their part in the economy. It is to the Department for Employment and Learning that the Employment Service reports. It is under severe pressure. The service is resourced to look after 35,000 registered jobseekers but currently deals with over 60,000. The Minister is aware that there is a bid to try to alleviate some of that pressure. We also have incoming welfare reforms, which will transfer additional pressure to the Employment Service. We have a problem: as things stand, the service that will be offered in Northern Ireland will fail and fall below the standard of that offered in the rest of the United Kingdom. It is important that we do not breach parity with the rest of the United Kingdom.

I also want the Minister to take on board the importance of the assured skills initiative and its contribution to Northern Ireland's ability to attract foreign and direct investment. I am sure that he will acknowledge, because we have talked about it for long enough, that the further education colleges are struggling, even as we speak, to meet the demand that has been placed on them.

The Minister is aware of the debate on tuition fees. It is worth mentioning it at this stage, though I accept that it does not directly relate to this particular year. It is something that the Assembly has to take seriously. It is not enough to say: "Do you know what? We will cap the tuition fees and try to fund everything else out of the reserves of universities and further education establishments." As the Minister for Employment and Learning made clear earlier, there are not sufficient reserves to do that.

However, I draw the Finance Minister's attention to a speech made by the First Minister on 31 March. He said:

"Devolution also allows us to take a different position on issues such as tuition fees ... That may require expenditure to be diverted from other areas but we believe that it is a price worth paying for future generations."

In a ministerial statement on 1 November 2010 reporting on a visit to the US economic conference, the First Minister told the Assembly:

"The one thing that came out of the various meetings that we had in Washington, especially from the US investors who are already here, was that the major selling point for them was the relationship between the universities and companies". — [Official Report, Bound Volume 57, p29, col 1].

I urge the Minister of Finance and Personnel to take on board the argument that if it is our intention to grow the economy, that is the way that we should do it. We have to find additional resources in that area.

Time does not permit me to go through all of the pressures on the Department for Employment and Learning. However, it is worth highlighting the very real difficulties that our flagship universities face. They leverage a lot of the funding that we provide them with. For example, Queen's University receives £110 million from DEL, £35 million from tuition fees and a staggering £300 million from other funding sources, such as research council funding. I use that only as an example; the other universities and colleges will be similar. The truth of the matter is that we are still not drawing down our full gamut of funding from the research councils. We should be getting more than that, but we cannot do that if we are paring back on our research capabilities. I know that it is a difficult case to make in the current financial situation, but we have to make it to explain to the electorate and you as Assembly colleagues that we must invest for the future.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair)

I listened to the Chair of the Education Committee, and I have considerable sympathy for the position that he outlined, because I was on that Committee for a number of years. However, the situation is that we are looking at a disinvestment in higher and further education of some £68 million by 2014-15. That is about 30% to 40% in real terms. It is absolutely draconian, and that is after we have to make the £28 million of efficiencies that we have already insisted on.

We have a problem in this area, and I am not shying away from it and saying that the Minister of Finance and Personnel has to take it on his own. I am sure that he will be the first to

come back and tell us that it is a question for the Executive and all of us here to agree on. However, it is my duty to bring it to people's attention that it is something that needs to be addressed.

Having spoken on behalf of the Committee on issues that are pertinent to it at the moment, I will speak for a moment as an individual MLA on the issue of annually managed expenditure (AME). The Minister was kind enough to answer an interjection from me earlier when he was making his opening statement. People need to understand the significance of a situation where AME becomes part of our budgetary control. AME is demand driven. It happens to particularly affect Departments such as DEL, but it will also affect other places. I am interested to see how we control the issue. If unemployment rises, if the student loan changes, or if the number of people involved changes, that will all feed directly through to the DEL budget, which we will not be able to control. The results will be catastrophic. When we look at AME and end-year flexibility (EYF), we may have to have a creative look at how we manage that particular budget.

I am speaking as an individual on the issue, even though it pertains to employment and learning. There is a question about whether we should be raising or removing altogether the cap on the number of students who come to these lands.

We ought to be able to get further investment because of the quality of our education provision. I understand that there is significant financial working-out to be done, but we should be able to make a business out of it. I am concerned that if we do not do that, and if we freeze our fees at the level reported in the press, we will have a huge influx of people from across the water into our universities and further education colleges, and that could drive out the people whom we really want to help, who are those from our neck of the woods.

4.00 pm

A particular problem for those who come from economically disadvantaged areas, even those who have a good education, is that they fear taking on debt, because they are not assured that the jobs that they will get afterwards will enable them to pay it off. That is a serious issue that we have to deal with. It is a political reality and something that we must confront. We must reassure our young people that we will find a

way of giving them the education that they need and deserve and that we will build an economy that will let them exploit those skills. I am keen to work with the Minister and other colleagues to find a coherent and cohesive way of doing so. That does not mean that there will not be times when we have a contrary view, but we will try to do so with the best interests of all people in Northern Ireland at heart.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I am pleased to speak as Chairman of the Committee for Justice, and I support the Supply resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12.

On 2 June, the Justice Committee received a detailed briefing from officials on the budgetary position and the pressures faced. We will receive in the near future the finalised savings delivery plans, which will outline how savings totalling £162 million will be achieved over the next four years. I will highlight to Members some of the key budget challenges facing the Department of Justice in 2011-12 and beyond.

The Department of Justice budget is ring-fenced for the Budget 2010 period. The effect of that is a reduction of 6.2% — £82 million cash — in its resource departmental expenditure limit baseline. That is a result of the Barnett consequentials arising from changes in funding to the Home Office and Ministry of Justice. Although all areas of the Department and its agencies are expected to deliver efficiencies, the specific level of savings required has been set to ensure that front line policing, other front line services and funding for the voluntary and community sectors are protected as far as possible. It is critical that the Department take the lead in cutting waste. It should robustly challenge its agencies and non-departmental public bodies to cut waste similarly in their budget plans.

Other issues of particular pressure include legal aid, the costs for which are currently running much higher than the available budget. That must be reduced over the next few years. Part of the financial package on devolution included £39 million of HM Treasury reserve funding that was provided for legal aid and other court pressures. Of that, £17 million was accessed in 2009-2010 and £19.2 million in the last financial year. That leaves only £2.8 million available to offset this year's legal aid pressures, and any additional pressures will

have to be met from within the Department's existing budget.

The projection is that there will be an overspend of £22 million in the legal aid budget in the current financial year. It is imperative that that budget be brought into line with what is happening in England and Wales. However, the budget available for legal aid here is more generous than it is there. A revised remuneration scheme for defence costs in High Court cases was recently introduced. That has resulted in a number of solicitors coming off record as well as accusations that the Department is seeking to get some kind of "yellow pack justice".

The reality is that the amount of money spent on funding legal aid must be reduced.

If I may speak as an individual MLA on this issue, I read the following headline in today's 'Belfast Telegraph':

"Bullying claims as legal row gets nasty".

I also read allegations that solicitors who have agreed to operate under the new legal aid scheme have been described by others in that profession as "scabs." The Law Society needs to investigate the conduct of some of its members, the circling of the wagons and the pressure being brought to bear on those who have agreed to take on that work. They are being bullied so that they do not take on the work and so that those who have milked the system will be able to continue to do so. However, the budgetary reality dictates that the system must change. Furthermore, the reference to "yellow pack justice" implies that those solicitors who are qualified and meet the required standards to practice are not up to the job. The Law Society must investigate whether anyone registered with it —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: No, I will not give way. I realise that the Member has particular expertise in the area, that he practised law and understands how the fee system operates. As I have quite a bit to cover, however, I do not have time to give way on this occasion, but I will do so in future.

The Department brought in powers to challenge appeals lodged against the decisions of the taxing master on how much money is allocated for legal aid, and it asked for documentary evidence to be provided for claims. Since those powers were brought in it, the Department has

saved millions of pounds, because those who appealed against the decisions were unable to provide that evidence. The greater the light that can be shone on the shadowy world of how legal aid fees are implemented, the more we will realise how critical it is that the system is changed and the greater the transparency that can be brought to bear on it.

Additional funding of £45 million was provided for the PSNI budget by the Executive. That money, together with the £199.5 million guaranteed by the coalition Government, will be used for police security funding pressures and to tackle the threat from terrorism. That is very welcome. The funding package is for specific purposes, and the PSNI will be required to deliver savings by ensuring that support services and ordinary policing are delivered more efficiently. The budget for the PSNI accounts for more than 60% of the total departmental budget. Given the impact that pressures on the PSNI budget could have on other parts of the Department's budget, the Committee for Justice intends to keep a close eye on it. The Committee will invite the Chief Constable and his senior officials to the Committee to discuss their spending and savings plans in detail.

The Prison Service is one area expected to deliver substantial savings in future years. Given the radical change programme proposed, that will be a difficult challenge. According to the director of the Prison Service, the strategic efficiency and effectiveness programme is due to be published in the near future. The Committee will want to scrutinise the details of that to establish whether the intended savings are deliverable within the timescales envisaged.

Again, I want to speak as an individual MLA on this issue. When I opened the Jobfinder section of the 'Belfast Telegraph' on Friday, I was somewhat surprised that, at a time when the Prison Service is being called on to deliver radical savings, it is seeking to recruit an organisational change manager. The post attracts a salary of up to £70,000 a year for two years, with the possibility of a further one-year extension. The Prison Service is also seeking to recruit an offender policy and regimes directorate project manager, a finance and corporate services directorate project manager and an HR and organisational development directorate project manager, all of which will attract salaries of up to £50,000 for 12 to

15 month contracts. I ask myself why that is necessary, given that, on page 43 of her interim report, Dame Anne Owers says:

"There are currently many directors, some of whom have no clear role and less heavily weighted jobs than should be expected of such senior staff."

She continues:

"It is not clear, for example, in a devolved service running only three prisons, that there is a need for both a Director General and a Director of Operations."

Clearly, there is work to be done by those who are currently in the Prison Service. Yet, that advertisement has gone out seeking to recruit people from outside the service with those salaries. There is an onus on the Department to look at what the Prison Service has done and establish whether those people whom the interim report has suggested do not have enough work to do — the service is overly managed and top-heavy from a management point of view — should do that work.

I agree that there is a need for a particular change management team to take forward that work, but is it really necessary to go out and seek to recruit people, given the sums of money involved, at a time when the Prison Service is facing major difficulties living with the resources that have been allocated to it?

Finally, there is provision in the capital budget to fund the joint training college at Desertcreat, which is welcome. There will be an additional £27 million from the Executive, which the Department intends to use to develop the prison estate. I support the motion.

Mr A Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I remind the House that one quarter of the £8 billion to be approved today is for the Department for Social Development (DSD). Furthermore, although the Committee has not had the opportunity to speak directly with the Minister — that will occur later this week — it has received a number of briefings from senior departmental officials. In particular, we received a briefing on the DSD budget on 2 June. I will highlight to Members some of the key budget challenges before DSD in 2011, 2012 and beyond.

First, I acknowledge and highlight that there is a real cash reduction for DSD current and capital

funding in 2011-12, compared with 2010-11 levels. That probably equates to a reduction in real terms of somewhere in the region of 12%. Of course, the Department sees that as a significant financial challenge and has highlighted to the Committee a number of what it considers as key financial pressures in five key areas.

Obviously, in housing, there is the challenge of maintaining adequate levels of capital investment for the provision of social housing schemes. Work is ongoing to modernise and make homes appropriate and decent for social housing tenants and for the provision of renovation grants. Similarly, the maintenance of front line urban regeneration and community development services will also be a challenge.

There are a number of challenges for the Social Security Agency. The primary one will be to maintain business as usual. In other words, to make sure that it processes all its work streams. Of course, because of the extensive programme for welfare reform and modernisation, there will be additional work of a transitional nature. That type of work will involve incapacity benefit reassessments, reform of disability living allowance, a social fund and the introduction of the universal credit. As I said, a significant area of work will be maintaining the current workload of the Department whilst bringing in the new processes as part of the transition. There is a new scheme to be introduced for child maintenance, which, again, will ensure additional costs.

Finally, DSD recognises that there will be further pressures from the transfer of appeals functions to the Department of Justice. The Department recognises the work and money involved in that transfer and the importance of ensuring that appropriate reforms happen through the policy and legislative changes that are required.

Again, on behalf of the Committee, I want to make the point that, over the past couple of weeks, the Committee has been taking substantive briefings from the Department. We have not yet had the opportunity to be very proactive and engage directly with the Minister and the Department on how they see the work going forward and how to meet the challenges, notwithstanding the considerable budget restraints. We look forward to working with the Minister and the Department in a robust way to deliver on the mandate for the Department

and the work of the Minister himself, and we will do so in a way that, we believe, will help all of us to deliver particular front line services while making sure that we also deliver the most efficient and effective use of the resources available to DSD. We will continue to report to the House accordingly.

4.15 pm

Mrs D Kelly: It is regrettable that we are again discussing the Budget yet still have no Programme for Government to set the Budget against when it comes to looking at how the Administration will continue.

We heard earlier from the Minister for Employment and Learning about decisions on tuition fees by September, which will be much too late. The Committee for Employment and Learning in the previous mandate heard that a decision needed to be made by mid-July at the very latest for universities in the North to be able to plan their courses and publish their prospectuses and to cost them in time for students filling out their UCAS forms this autumn. It is regrettable that the two universities in the North are the only universities, plus the Open University, on these islands that do not know what their future holds.

The leader of the DUP said during the recent election campaign that the money required to offset tuition fees ought to be found in the Executive. I am sure that the Finance Minister will be able to tell us from where that additional funding is coming. It is no use trying to pull the wool over our eyes again by saying that some £51 million was handed out in the past few months, because that £51 million was already earmarked. There was very little latitude, and a large part of that money was for inescapable pressures.

There will also be a huge challenge in agriculture over the next four years, as the Minister well knows, with the CAP reform and the consequences that that may have for farmers in the North. We already know that the rural development programme is struggling to deliver because of the difficulties faced by project promoters in finding match funding. Therefore, I hope that we hear from the Minister how we will offset those challenges in the round and whether we will have some collaborative decision-making.

It is no secret that the Finance Minister will have a very difficult job, as will all Ministers, in managing his budget over the next four years.

However, the public are not fully informed about the difficulties that will occur. We had the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) publishing at the very last minute the child poverty strategy, which it was legally mandated to do by the Westminster Government by the end of March this year. Unfortunately, that has not yet been debated in the House. However, Save the Children said that it was the worst strategy produced by the four nations on these islands.

There are huge challenges with the welfare reform cuts that are coming down the pipeline and with how the Executive, other than with the social protection fund, which my party colleague Alex Attwood produced a report on for the Executive in this budgetary round, will offset some of those challenges. However, it is still a huge task, and many people will struggle.

Anyone who does the weekly shop, as I do, can already see food bills rising every week. Fuel bills are also rising. We are already having inclement weather this summer, and some people who had hoped to save on fuel costs are having to heat their homes. There are huge challenges in this four-year term, so there is a need for certainty in the decisions that have to be made, and made well and made soon. Decisions also need to be taken on the Programme for Government.

There are also challenges in relation to how, with a very limited budget, we can get the construction industry back to work. Some 22,000 people have already lost their jobs in that sector, never mind the service industry that works to and supplies the construction industry. We have seen how the night-time economy across our high streets and side streets is struggling, particularly in rural areas, where many rural pubs and others are struggling. Those are all huge employers. If big companies were closing down at the rate at which some of those small businesses are closing and struggling, there would be a huge outcry and a lot of attention paid.

In my constituency, in the town of Lurgan, in three streets — North Street, Edward Street and William Street — upwards of 500 people are employed in the small shops, which obviously have some concerns around rates increases. Minister, I know that in the last mandate you went some way towards allaying the concerns of some businesses, but I will give you an example. I appreciate that there has to be a

cut-off point in eligibility at times, but a small hairdressing salon is just a few feet smaller than the area that qualifies for the offset of some rates, and it too is struggling. We should not underestimate the need to protect what jobs we have and try to grow the economy.

The agrifood industry is one industry that has the potential, alongside the green and renewable energy industries, to grow and help get us out of recession, but there is too little within the Budget to meet its needs, particularly the recyclable and new technologies, which are somewhat reliant on an “if”, a “what” and a “maybe”, rather than some certainty around their funding. I hope that the Budget, difficult as it is, will start to be much more tailor-made, right across the Departments, to meet the real needs and that those tough decisions that are to be made in the public sector can and will be made with a degree of sensitivity and real efficiency measures.

We often hear the cliché about learning to work smarter and not harder. That is something that we certainly have to do in this House and right across all Departments, including staff who are directly employed and this legislative Assembly as a decision-maker.

Mr Buchanan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I

welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate in my role as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for Employment and Learning. I have no doubt I will overlap on some of the issues raised by the Chair as he outlined the various pressures facing the Department at this time.

For many years the higher education institutions in Northern Ireland have made a significant contribution to the entire economy. With the Programme for Government putting the economy centre stage, it is essential that our world-class higher education system — recognised across the globe, yet currently under threat due to the tight financial constraints in this tough economic climate — is protected.

With Northern Ireland having no natural resources of its own, only the skills of our people will deliver economic growth and personal prosperity. Therefore, the Department for Employment and Learning has a key role to play in the economic strategy and the rebalancing of our economy, not only in attracting jobs but in the retraining and reskilling of those outside the labour market to help them realise their full potential, and in

ensuring that an adequate and relevant skills base exists in the economy to meet the employers' needs and demands, especially in the private sector.

However, to achieve that, DEL must be properly resourced, yet, as we examine the allocation to the Department on a like-for-like basis, while demands are continuing to increase, it has less resources available than previously, with savings of £150 million required by 2014-15 in order to balance the books. There is concern among the higher education institutions about the impact that the £28 million cut over the next two years will have on jobs, student services and course provision.

Although they are sharing the pain by taking measures to implement those cuts in the first two years, the real fear is that, when the £28 million cut is applied, there will remain a shortfall in the Budget of some £40 million a year by 2014-15. If that is not addressed by the Executive and made up, it will have devastating consequences for the entire higher education sector in Northern Ireland. It could result in thousands of job losses across the higher education sector and uncompetitive higher education institutions with restricted courses. Worst of all, it could result in a brain drain and reduce support for economic development in Northern Ireland, thus stripping Northern Ireland of the world-class higher education for which it is renowned and impacting seriously on economic growth and our students' educational opportunity.

The Chair mentioned it earlier, but it bears repetition that, at the US economic conference in October 2010, American investors already investing in Northern Ireland made it clear that the major selling point for them was the relationship between the universities and companies and the back-up support that they received from Invest Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is incumbent on the House that that relationship is maintained.

The direct and indirect contributions that our higher education institutions make to the Northern Ireland economy are significant. There is a direct contribution of £1.5 billion to the economy and 12,000 jobs and an indirect contribution of highly skilled graduates, drivers of innovation and attracting inward investment. Although our higher education institutions have been successful in leveraging public grants based on core government funding, reducing that core

funding will significantly reduce the capability of the universities in their leveraging power.

We all know that the Executive and the Assembly have some tough decisions to make. The rebalancing of our economy is our stated priority. To achieve that, we must invest in the future economic well-being of our region. It is our universities that provide the talented graduates, researchers and drivers of innovation to make that happen. Given the challenging economic environment in which we find ourselves, there has never been a more important time to invest in our higher education system.

I note that the Chairman suggested looking at the possibility of removing the cap on students from other places coming into Northern Ireland to study. I raised that in the Committee last week, and we should look at it as a possible way forward. I ask the Minister to look at it.

I know that the Finance Minister will no doubt take all these issues on board. I support the motion.

Mr Kinahan (The Chairperson of the Audit Committee): I welcome this chance to speak, especially in my new role as the Chairperson of the Assembly's Audit Committee. The Audit Committee has yet to meet, so I will not presume to offer any opinions on certain matters.
[Interruption.] Now, now.

However, it is important that the role of the Audit Committee is acknowledged during the debate on Main Estimates. Further to section 66 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, it is for the Audit Committee, in place of the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), to agree the annual Estimate of the use of resources by the Northern Ireland Audit Office and lay that Estimate before the Assembly. That is because the core purpose of the work of the Northern Ireland Audit Office is to ensure that the Assembly is provided with an effective and truly independent audit assurance in relation to the use of public funds. Removing the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) from DFP and the Executive's remit underlines and strengthens the Northern Ireland Audit Office's independence in holding Departments, Executive agencies and other public bodies to account for their use of public money.

4.30 pm

On 1 March 2011, the Audit Committee from the previous mandate met and agreed the 2011-12

Estimates for the NIAO. The Committee agreed a total resource provision of just over £8.5 million. That represented an 11% reduction in real terms from the previous year's Estimates. In doing so, the Committee had satisfied itself that the proposed savings could be achieved while still allowing the NIAO to maintain the same quality and extent of service to the Assembly that had been offered in recent years. Those Estimates were laid before the Assembly and sent to DFP. I can confirm that the figures set out for the NIAO in the Main Estimates today are consistent with those already laid before the Assembly by the Audit Committee. I look forward to the NIAO realising those savings while continuing its valuable work. In my role with the Audit Committee, I also look forward to learning a little bit more about the excess that we seem to be voting for today.

From a personal point of view, I want to raise one or two matters of concern with the Estimates as they are at the moment that have already been raised by my colleagues and other Members today. Among those concerns are the £45 million in the wrong column, and, as many have said today, the fact that there is no Programme for Government. How can we budget when we do not have a Programme for Government? I am glad that what is there was at least discussed for a bit before everyone took up their ministerial appointments.

Today, I have heard Members blaming Tory cuts or Labour cuts, as they often do. We can blame anyone we like, but we have to open our eyes. We must take the cuts on board and work together to plan how to lessen the pain. We have to accept it; we know what is coming. I call for proper visibility of all the detail of all the budgets, and, as Mrs Kelly said, to have them tailor-made.

I am the Ulster Unionist environment spokesman, so I will touch on that subject. I am concerned that we still do not know exactly where we are going with the Budget on that issue. We will have the review of public administration (RPA) coming in the next two years, but we do not seem to have it resourced. Many new pieces of legislation will land in front of the councils, including the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and, of course, that small Bill with 242 clauses that passed through the previous Assembly and became the Planning Act (Northern Ireland)

2011. With that, we got 18 or more sets of guidance, all of which have to go to the councils. We need to know where the resources are coming from.

From my brief time on the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I learned that we do not really know what is coming from Europe. We do not have good enough representation there, and, although we have some excellent people, we need more. We need to know what is coming from Europe. We also need to know how we will pay for it.

One or two Members touched on the carrier bags levy. There is a £4 million hole, and we are waiting to see exactly how we will pay for the items that we were relying on the carrier bag levy to fund over the next two years.

I am calling for more thorough visibility. We know that we are in hard times and that things are difficult. Let us look at the example of the green new deal. We all want to see that happening, but we know that the money for the part of the green new deal that is concerned with improving heating in houses and everything that goes with that will be put in up front. However, we do not know for sure whether we will get that money back. We hope that we will, but there are very many things on which we need more clarification. That is what concerns us today. I am calling for total openness and for us to sit down together and hammer out the finer issues. Let us hope that there is nothing else hidden, whether from St Andrews or Hillsborough or, perhaps, from behind closed doors.

In my brief time in business, I was always concerned about salami slicing, which, when it happened, cut chunks off every Department's funding. We at least have a chance to sit down face to face and go through all the issues. I hope that the review group will do that and that everyone will get the chance to work on these matters properly together.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My party opposed the Budget when it was presented to the previous Assembly in March. Today, we voice the same concerns about the allocation of funds for the spending proposals in that Budget. Those concerns are about the lack of detail on how Departments plan to use the resources available to them.

We opposed the Budget because of a lack of clarity on the impact of cuts. The public are beginning to see the impact of those cuts. The Education Minister has been forced to admit that over 300 teachers will be made redundant this summer, which is an increase of over 50% on the number made redundant in 2010. In addition, over 160 classroom assistants are to go. Others in the public sector fear for their job, as they may be next. We heard reports on the radio this morning about the Health Minister talking about the impact on acute medical services — possibly even closures — in some Belfast hospitals. No wonder there was a lack of detail before the election.

As the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) independent economic advisory group (EAG) said:

"This Budget process provides the opportunity, albeit in difficult circumstances, for the Northern Ireland Executive to set the tone for the progression of the local economy over the next four year period and beyond."

The Executive's four-year Budget is not based on an agreed Programme for Government for the next four years. There is no rationale behind the distribution of funds across Departments, and there is a lack of strategy in that distribution. There is no robust strategy for job creation. In the North, unemployment is at a 13-year high and is growing. The very modest 1% short-term economic growth forecast for the North is lower than that forecast for England, Scotland and Wales, and medium- and long-term predictions have our economy falling behind growth levels in the rest of this island. We need to see more investment projects starting. The green new deal must be pursued to create low-carbon buildings and to stimulate the local economy, because that is where some of the stimulus will come from. Those of us who get out and around our constituency to liaise with, consult and work on behalf of small businesses know that real economic growth is firmly grounded in those small, local, indigenous, medium-sized businesses. Indigenous, locally based enterprises need our encouragement, support and, with the limited budgets that we have, investment.

The construction industry, which is particularly well represented in my constituency of Mid Ulster, has been badly hit by what happened to the world economy and, consequentially, our local economy. In recent years, thousands of

jobs have been lost in the sector, and thousands more are at risk, with the consequential human effect of people being on the dole and their families, in the circumstances in which they find themselves, getting it really tough, in many cases, through no fault of their own.

The Assembly has already spent time debating the worth of a major capital investment in infrastructure: the A5 dualling project, which has secured some £400 million of investment from the Irish Government, despite the dire financial situation in which they find themselves. That project will lead to a significant increase in jobs in the area and sustain existing jobs in the construction and supplies sector. The A5 project will redress the regional imbalance in the roads and transport infrastructure in the North, leaving the legacy of a greatly improved roads infrastructure that will benefit the wider economy across the island. The Irish Government recognise the value of investing in the project, yet some Members question it. Their priorities are wrong. As well as delivering a long-term legacy, the investment in construction will deliver a very real economic return.

The chief economist for PricewaterhouseCoopers in Belfast, Esmond Birnie, who will be familiar to several Members, has warned of the almost complete absence of economic and social targets and outcomes underpinning the Budget and departmental plans for the period up to 2014-15. We are told that the economy is the priority. It is, but, if the public and private sectors are to be rebalanced — a matter about which there seems to be much debate but little action — there needs to be considerable growth in the private sector.

The green new deal, to which Mr Kinahan just referred, has been highlighted as an ambitious programme that will leverage significant private sector investment. However, DETI's independent economic advisory group's review found that the Budget allocated insufficient funds to implement the green new deal effectively. It also stated that the Budget will prove a significant impediment to the successful implementation of the new economic strategy for Northern Ireland, the pillars of which have been agreed by the Executive subcommittee on the economy. The EAG also warned that:

"The Executive cannot realistically hope to stem the continued rise in unemployment".

In addition, it pointed out that no details are provided to show the current level of total borrowing and how much of the £200 million that was borrowed under the reinvestment and reform initiative has been utilised to promote and develop the local economy. Instead of the funds borrowed from that facility being directed towards providing an economic benefit to enable repayment in the longer term, which the EAG considers essential, those funds are being used to reimburse out-of-pocket investors in the Presbyterian Mutual Society (PMS).

The Executive's Budget is not a plan for the difficult economic circumstances that we are in. It is not an attempt to steer a course to a better economic future. It was a last-minute outline sketch that was designed to con the public ahead of the May elections. They were sold a pig in a poke. Ernst and Young's 'Economic Eye' recently warned that its worrying economic forecast stands,

"unless there is a significant change in Northern Ireland's corporation tax rate and a more proactive approach to rebalance the economy which sees actual policy change, as distinct to strategy documents and statements of intent with no actual material change in policy".

Despite frequent media reports on the issue, there is no provision in the four-year Budget for the impact of a reduction in corporation tax, nor for the estimated £200 million to £300 million a year that it could cost. There has been no actual material change in policy.

The DUP and Sinn Féin have sufficient numbers in the Chamber to carry the vote today. That is taken as read. They do not need unanimity, but they want silence from those who disagree with the Budget. They do so because they know that, when the public feels the impact of the cuts, those parties will be looked to as a political mudguard. The Alliance Party can play that role if it wishes, but the SDLP stands here today on behalf of communities and stands up for the rights of those who will face the brutal savagery of those cuts.

Mr A Maginness (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The Executive rightly consider the economy to be the top priority in the Programme for Government. At least, that was the case in the last Programme for Government. We await the new one, but I assume that it will contain the same objective. The overall aim of the

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is to promote the development of a globally competitive economy. In pursuing that aim, the objective is to encourage the development of a high-value-added, innovative, enterprising and competitive economy, leading to greater wealth creation and job opportunities for all. Those are worthy objectives, which all of us in the House can rally around and support.

In growing the Northern Ireland economy, the focus will be on the delivery of the Executive's overall strategic aim of an economy that increases wealth and employment opportunities for all. A new Northern Ireland economic strategy will be central to that and will put at its heart the twin priorities of rebuilding and rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy in the aftermath of a sustained global economic downturn, from which the world is yet to recover and from which we have not started to recover. It is in that context that one has to view the Budget allocations in relation to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. As one can see in the figures, there are great challenges for the Department in dealing with the Budget allocation. I will not go through the individual figures, but the current expenditure in 2014-15 will reduce in real terms by 6.1% when compared with the 2010-11 position. However, capital investment will be reduced by 63.9%. The figures are there for all to see.

4.45 pm

Our main weapon in trying to regenerate and to rebuild our economy, to attract business and to develop industry is Invest Northern Ireland. Historically, Invest Northern Ireland consumes 63% of the DETI budget, and it will face a number of challenges. There is not only the huge reduction in capital but the financial commitments for unclaimed grant expenditure that will require to be funded prior to the budget being made available for new activity. In other words, because of Invest Northern Ireland's commitments, there will be little slack for it to make future investments. That is a serious problem for Invest Northern Ireland, which is at the cutting edge of reviving our economy.

At the end of 2009-2010, commitments amounted to £272 million, which reflected an increase of £78 million on the 2008-09 level. The proposed budget reduction and the need to fund a significantly higher brought-forward commitment than has generally been the norm

over recent years will create a challenge for the Department, which will lead to an increased need to prioritise its resources to maximise economic impact. An inevitable consequence is that, in some cases, good projects will not be supported unless additional funding is made available to the Department. That is the nub of the problem, which will be difficult for the Department to resolve on its own.

There seems to be a disconnect between DETI's operational budget and the Executive and Department's strategic vision for the economy. Invest Northern Ireland currently has, quite properly, a number of project offers out, which, as I stated, are very substantial. Invest Northern Ireland's budget will decrease by 28% over the next four years. There are two issues with the budget. First, there are long-term strategic issues about whether the budget will be sufficient to deliver economic strategy/development over the next number of years, which is absolutely crucial for us. Secondly, there are short-term operational pressures, particularly in the first two years. Will we be able to manage that? Will the Department be able to manage that? That is a serious problem for the Department. Nineteen million pounds has been ring-fenced for short-term job growth, but those are low-value jobs. That is good, and I am not criticising it, but it is a stopgap measure. However, there is real concern that we are moving back from a strategy of creating high-value jobs to increase productivity here as against productivity in the UK and that that strategy is being put at risk with the short-term goal of creating employment. Therefore, there is an obvious tension that must be addressed not only by the Finance Minister and the Enterprise Minister but by the whole Executive and, indeed, the whole Assembly. Invest Northern Ireland cannot address that by itself.

Of course, there are positives in the Budget. It is good that money is available for venture capital, and that needs to be developed further. It is good that money is available for short-term goals for employment and that money is available for development stages. However, I hope that the Finance Minister takes on board the real need for end-year flexibility. That has to be applied to the Department and to Invest Northern Ireland, and I would welcome the Minister's comment on that during his winding-up speech. The question for all of us is: is there enough money in the Budget to get venture capitalism involved? I think that there are sufficient

funds to do that. If end-year flexibility were available, short-term gaps could be addressed.

Finally, I turn to the future and the lowering of corporation tax. We have to start to prepare the ground for that now. We do not have sufficient time and space to delay on that project. I hope that the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Minister will embrace that challenge.

Mr Allister: At the start of the debate, something that I said in an anodyne intervention seemed to cause the Minister to lose the run of himself, and I cannot promise that that will not happen again. I want to return to the fact that, among many things, the Supply resolution includes funding for special advisers. There has been a sharp public focus on the appointment of Mary McArdle, and, for very good reason, the public reaction has been hostile. The Minister sought to berate me on the basis that, therefore, I wanted to see everything voted down. The Minister denied me the opportunity to respond, and, if he had permitted me to speak, I would have said that, given that he has told us that he is undertaking what he tells us is a review of special advisers, I wanted him to take away the motion and return with it next week when he has proposals on his review. Then, instead of it being a mere window-dressing review that, I suspect, has no intent, power or capacity to change anything, we would put to the test whether he was going to make any changes. Then, he could have dealt with the issues that have given rise to such discord in the community.

On the issue of special advisers, will the Minister's review now embrace the new circumstance that each Minister has, effectively, a parliamentary private secretary? They have the benefit of the knowledge and expertise of someone sitting beside them. There have been stages during today's debate when, without Mr Hamilton, the Minister would have been as lonely as I am in the House. There have not been too many Members around him on his Benches. However, he now has the help of the ever clever Simon Hamilton. Of course, Mr Hamilton was not quite as clever as his constituency colleague Jonathan Bell, who had the foresight to employ the First Minister's family and, therefore, gets to sit beside the First Minister rather than the Finance Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask the Member and all Members to return to the debate on the Supply resolution.

Mr Allister: I want to draw the Minister's attention to a number of issues, particularly in relation to justice. During the supercharged salesmanship of the devolution of policing and justice, we had a great deal of talk and focus and spin about a magical £800 million. However, I have heard little talk of it since. I have scoured these accounts as best I can and am not much the wiser. Can the Minister set out for us where in the Budget we can identify the entirety of the £800 million, so that we can see that it actually exists? Can he set it out in tabular form, so that we can see exactly where it came from, where it is and where it is going? To my knowledge, those questions have never been answered, despite all the spin and propaganda. Let us see it. How much of that £800 million is in the 2011-12 spending plans? How much of it is new money, or is it all smoke and mirrors? Are there any unvarnished, plain figures that the Minister can give?

What about the four bases that were transferred and about which an announcement was made in, I think, April of this year? Where are they reflected in the Budget? At what value and on whose valuation were they transferred? Where in the resource is the money to maintain those bases? How much is it? How much will it cost? Where are the ramifications of the bases in the Budget? What is their value? Who valued them? How does that work through in the budgetary arrangements? How much will it cost to maintain them?

Is the Minister satisfied that there has been full and faithful delivery of the Prime Minister's letter of October 2009? Has what was promised been delivered, or have the people of Northern Ireland had their eye wiped about the £800 million? That, to me, is an important issue financially in itself, but it also cuts to the veracity of government and to the authenticity of what is said by those in government. Therefore it is very important that we get, whether today or in response to today, definitive, unvarnished, plain figures and answers to those questions.

In my last couple of minutes, I want to say a word about corporation tax. I welcome the comments yesterday by Lady Sylvia Hermon. They were very much on the money.

It is utter folly to chase a moonbeam without knowing what the benefit will be but knowing with certainty that it will cost perhaps up to £385 million per annum out of the block grant. I

ask the Minister what the consequences will be for jobs and services of losing £385 million out of the block grant. Only when that question is answered should anyone raise a hand in favour of a proposition that will deliver that degree of hurt.

5.00 pm

I am not quite sure where the Minister stands on the issue. One of the beauties of the Executive in the eyes of some people is that Ministers can stand anywhere on any issue and still be part the Executive. Where the Minister of Finance and Personnel stands as opposed to the First Minister, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment or any other Minister is all just a big, grey blur. We are, however, coming to the point at which the Minister will have to declare himself. It seems that he has perhaps been retreating from the clarity of thought and expression that he had in the early days. Perhaps he will recover his position before it is all over.

Finally, in the last minute that is available to me, I want to say that the Minister talks a great deal about austerity, the need to be prudent, and efficiencies. It causes me to ask him a couple of quick questions on that need. If it exists, why is there a 125% increase from the 2010-11 provision in the 2011-12 allocation for cultural policy? Why is that thought to be necessary? In OFMDFM, why is there a 25% increase in the resource allocation for the North/South Ministerial Council? Is it such a sacred cow that it is exempt from all cuts?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Allister: Why is there a 25% increase in the resource budget of the Attorney General? Those are just some issues.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time.

Mr Allister: There are many more on which it would be good to have answers.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I thank all Members who have taken part in the debate for the points that they raised. The debate has perhaps been a bit different in tone, apart from the contributions of one or two Members, which were probably fairly predictable from some of the Assembly's debates on the Budget towards the end of the previous mandate. I am more than happy to address many of points that were raised.

First, I want to acknowledge the confirmation from the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, Conor Murphy, that there has been appropriate consultation with the Committee on the public expenditure proposals reflected in the Main Estimates, the Statement of Excess and the related Supply resolutions and Budget (No. 2) Bill. As a result of the Committee's agreement, the Budget (No. 2) Bill, which I plan to introduce shortly, will proceed under accelerated passage. That will exclude the need for a Committee Stage. I appreciate the assistance of the Committee in that matter. The Bill's accelerated passage is vital to ensuring that Royal Assent is received before the end of July.

I want to comment on the Supply resolution. Some Members have already indicated that they intend to vote against it. Of course, they can do so safely in the knowledge that money will be available for the supply of goods and services and public services in Northern Ireland because the main parties will support the resolution. Only the SDLP, perhaps, has adopted the position of wanting to remain outside the door still. You would think that they would have learned something during the election, but they clearly did not. I want to come to some of the negative comments that were made during the debate by some SDLP Members.

First, I come to the comments by the Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee. He raised a number of issues. In fact, he raised them in common with a number of other Members. The first thing that he asked about was the Budget review group, which will stay in place over the time of the Budget. We made that clear. We will continue to look for new revenue streams and new savings. When those are identified, that money will become available for Departments to spend. The first meeting of the group will take place on 15 June, and we will take stock there of the commitments that were made in the previous mandate and look at additional revenue streams. We will also complete the review of the arm's-length bodies and other specific projects, which should entail certain savings. There will also be a report on the progress of the central assets management group. We have £900 million of additional revenue over the coming years, and much of that will be delivered by the sale of assets.

The Committee Chairman, Mr Bradley and Mr McLaughlin raised the issue of end-year

flexibility. That is an important issue, and, as I said in response to an intervention during my introductory speech, we believe that the budget exchange mechanism proposed by the Treasury is deficient. It will not give the discretion that devolution and devolved Administrations require, and it will not allow for good accountable spending. I have proposed an alternative scheme. I know that Mr Maginness asked what proposals were going to the Treasury, as did Mr McLaughlin. One of the proposals that we have put to the Treasury is that it should at least allow us to have a carry-over capped at a certain level. We have suggested a cap of £50 million for current spending and £10 million for capital spending. Hopefully, the Treasury will see the value of that in so far as it will not mean that there is an open-ended ability to carry money forward, which is one of the things we were concerned about, while allowing some flexibility and discretion. I have written to the Chief Secretary setting out my concerns and our proposals. Hopefully, they will receive a positive hearing from him.

Mr Cree raised a number of issues in common with Mr Bradley, Mr Elliott and Mr McDevitt. The Programme for Government and the fact that there was none was raised. We got a Budget without a Programme for Government, and we now have the Estimates without a Programme for Government. We have worked on the basis that the Programme for Government, the discussions on it and the proposals from it will come from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I understand that discussions on that are going on. However, as I said during the Budget debate, I suspect that, given the issues that we are facing and what Members have said in the Chamber during this debate, the priorities for the new Programme for Government will not be all that different from those in the old Programme for Government. We want to grow and develop the economy. We made it clear in the Budget that we wanted to see the delivery of front-line services, especially in the Health Department. Money has been made available for that.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way in a moment. We want to tackle disadvantage. Again, that has been reflected in the spending proposals. During the debates, Members have given an indication of what they see as important. That is a reflection of what was in the past Programme for Government,

and many of the Budget allocations were predicated on that.

Mr McDevitt: I thank the Minister for giving way. I apologise, because I will need to slip out before the end of his contribution. I want to take him back to the Budget debate. I certainly recollect the Minister having considerable sympathy with the points made by the independent review of economic policy about the lack of direct connectivity between the Budget and the Programme for Government. Does that remain the Minister's view? Would he like to see the Programme for Government talks and process speeded up so that there is much closer integration between it and the Budget period that we are now heading into?

Mr Wilson: That was not just my view but the view of the Executive. A number of Executive Ministers, including the First Minister, indicated that they wanted to bring forward a Programme for Government for debate in the Assembly early in the new mandate. It is my understanding that that is still the case and that it will be done fairly quickly.

Mr Cree also raised an issue about the whole budgetary process. I agree with him that it is cumbersome, confusing and not all that enlightening sometimes. Indeed, look at the questions that the Member for North Antrim raised: parts of them just reflected his general negativity about life, but maybe some of them were genuine, searching questions that he really wanted answers to. However, I agree — indeed, I have made this clear to the Committee — that, in this process of Budgets, Estimates and resource accounts, the information itself is not always informative and transparent and the budget lines are not always clear. That is why we have undertaken the review.

I had hoped that the review would be well in place so that we could introduce the new system in the next financial year. However, we will commence a consultation process with the Committee and the Audit Office and will fully engage with them over the next few weeks and months. I think that it is important that we do not have endless repetitive debates as we go through this. Perhaps Members do not see exactly where the money has been allocated, and I have absolutely no difficulty with total transparency on these issues.

I know that he is not here, but Mr McGlone talked about the lack of detail. I have to say

that the huge book of Estimates has stacks of detail. However, it is not always clear how to find what you are looking for, and I think that the figures must be presented in a much more transparent way. Hopefully, that is what we are working towards.

Mr Cree also raised the issue of planned capital receipts and asked about the progress that we were making on those. The planned capital receipts, of course, cover a four-year period. We deliberately put many of those receipts towards the end of the Budget period, because the market would not allow us to realise the best value for them at this time. We have not already realised the capital receipts that were in the Budget, but there will be progress over time. One of the things that the Budget review group will look at is the progress being made by Departments. It would be foolish of me — I know that Mr Bradley raised this issue as well — to suggest that all those receipts are coming in the next few months. I do not think that anyone was expecting that anyway. However, it is important that we manage that and address any impediments. I am sure that many Members here have constituents who wish to purchase assets from government and are frustrated at how slow the process can be sometimes. We have to make sure that that is speeded up.

A number of Members raised the issue of the Excess Votes, and an explanation has been given. There is a misconception — Mr Bradley raised this — that the £40 million from Excess Votes somehow impinged on and took resources away from an already depleted Budget for this year. That is not the case. The money that will be used for the Excess Votes is surplus from last year, when there was underspend. That money would have gone to the Treasury, so it has been used for the Excess Votes. From discussions with Departments, I know that they do not easily wander into that, because it leads to the Audit Committee and the Public Accounts Committee looking at what happened. It can also sometimes lead to accounts being qualified, so permanent secretaries and Ministers do not easily wander into that. I think that the reasons for the Excess Votes have been given in the explanation.

5.15 pm

Mr B McCrea: I will not detain the Minister too long. However, I will make the point that we had Excess Votes in the previous year from, for

example, the Department for Employment and Learning of £15.8 million because, if I recall correctly, that had been misallocated from one day to the next. I want to make the general point that it is hard to have prudent oversight and scrutiny if the numbers move around so much. I hope that we are going to find a better way of doing it.

Mr Wilson: I have made it clear and it has been made clear in the explanations that were given about the Excess Votes, that Departments have taken this seriously and have looked at where mistakes were made. Processes have been put in place to make sure that that does not happen because, as the Member is right to say, it makes things hard to follow.

Mr Bradley also raised the issue of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA). On Friday, I met the Finance Minister in Dublin and discussed NAMA issues with him. I was pleased that I got the same response from him as I did from the previous Minister. Those discussions will be ongoing, and issues will be raised not just with him but directly with those involved in NAMA. If Members become aware of difficulties in their constituency or for people living in their constituency, I am happy to hear from them so that we can learn from that and take those messages to the NAMA board, either through the people we have on the advisory committee or directly through our political contacts.

Ms Lo raised the issue of single-use carrier bags. She will be aware that that is a responsibility of the Department of the Environment. It is unfortunate that HMRC has decided that it will not collect the tax for us. A number of Members raised that point. However, we have taken the £4 million out this year, so there is no consequence for the Department of the Environment from that. We will look at how the money can be raised and collected in the meantime. Ms Lo also raised the issue of the EU consultation and whether there should be incentives not to use plastic bags or taxes imposed on that. That consultation is ongoing.

Ms Lo raised the issue of road safety. The road safety budget has been reduced. Maybe Mr McGlone, who is not in his place, has replaced Mr O'Loan as the economic cloud in the Assembly. He talked about the lack of detail and what the implications of that would be for the Department of the Environment. The truth of the matter is that the previous Minister of

the Environment brought a detailed savings delivery plan to his Committee and was one of the few Ministers to do so. The Committee for the Environment, therefore, has had a chance to look at that.

I was a bit disappointed by Mr Spratt's comments about the money that has been available for roads and transport in Northern Ireland. Over the previous period, there has been £70 million for new trains and £50 million for rail infrastructure. Next year, a record £94 million will be spent on road maintenance. The roads budget will absorb almost half of the capital budget over the next four years. I felt that Mr Spratt — he is not here — was being a bit churlish about the amount of money that has been put into the roads infrastructure, which, we believe, is important for economic growth.

Caitriona Ruane raised the issue of savings through arm's-length bodies. It is great pity that, during her time as Minister, we did not take the opportunity to make some of the administrative savings that were available. There were many reasons for that. I think that, had there been perhaps a bit more flexibility on her part, we could have made at least the administrative savings, even if we could not have got the additional powers that the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) wanted. However, by insisting that all those things be packaged together, we perhaps did lose some time. I hope that the new Minister will progress the matter and do so quickly, because there are savings to be had. I would rather see those savings go on front line services for youngsters and schools than administrative structures or the likes of flying the CCEA to Galway. Some Ministers have been badgering me, saying that, if the CCEA can have private jets, why are they still stuck with Skodas? It just shows what knock-on effects there can be.

Mr Elliott raised a number of issues about the Maze/Long Kesh site, and he talked about the possibility of a terrorist shrine there. He is not here now, but I have to say that I was disappointed by his response. One of the reasons why the building that he is so concerned about remains on the Maze site is that a Member of his party was chairman of the group that had the buildings listed in the first instance. Of course, that has made it difficult to have them removed. However, there is a development, and OFMDFM is taking the lead on making an application for

£18 million of EU funding to build a peace and conflict resolution centre.

Oddly enough, when we were discussing corporation tax in London last week, a representative from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) or one of the investment analysts said that we ought to look at areas where Northern Ireland has a uniqueness that can attract academic and other interests. He also said that conflict resolution can play a role in attracting people and giving Northern Ireland a niche, and other investment opportunities can develop from that. Sometimes when we think about what is likely to happen at the Maze and OFMDFM's proposal, we look at it with Northern Ireland eyes, whereas other people look at it in terms of potential outside opportunities.

Mr Givan: Will the Minister agree that the Long Kesh site provides significant opportunity for development? I was there at the weekend with colleagues from Lagan Valley, and the Ulster Aviation Society had on demonstration the rich military history that is associated with Long Kesh. Members will do it a disservice if they allow republicans to hijack the site because, initially, it was known as Royal Air Force Long Kesh. Indeed, Queen Elizabeth's first flight landed at Long Kesh. President Eisenhower also visited Long Kesh. Therefore, we should be very proud of its history. Members who continue to allow republicans to try to hijack the site do a disservice to the unionist community and to the British military history that is long associated with it.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for that intervention. OFMDFM is taking forward not just the possibility of what the aviation society can do on the site but what the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society can do on it.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: In a moment; I want to make some progress on this issue. Mr Elliott also raised the issue of the social investment fund. The proposals are to spend £80 million over the next four years. The proposals will go out for public consultation before the summer, and, in keeping with what the Assembly has said about the recession and the fact that some areas have been hit by the recession more than others, the emphasis will be on dealing with social disadvantage and tackling poverty.

Mr Elliott also raised the issue of EU funding. We benefit from approximately £1 billion of EU funding at present. The two junior Ministers are taking forward the Barroso task force proposals to see where we could get more funding from, and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is looking at the money that we could get from joint ventures in research and development. That would be a very important part of DETI's strategy.

Mr Elliott also raised the issue of a victims' group audit. I am surprised that Members of his party have talked about ensuring that public money is not abused, yet he seems to object to the fact that investigations and audits are done to make sure that the money that has been allocated to groups was allocated properly. I would have thought that he would welcome that.

Mr McLaughlin raised the issue of the Barnett formula and moving towards a needs-based formula. Although I have some sympathy with that, the population-based Barnett formula at least gives us some certainty on what money will be available through the block grant. Any move to a needs-based formula makes the process much more subjective. Even the Calman Commission in Scotland flagged up that fact. Nevertheless, if a means of assessing or building needs into the formula could be found, it would be of some benefit to Northern Ireland. However, I am reluctant to open that box until we are sure of the approach that we want to make, because we could be left disadvantaged under any subjective arrangement.

Mr McLaughlin also raised the issues of corporation tax and the rebalancing of the economy. The consultation will finish at the end of June. Many issues are yet to be resolved, including those of cost, benefits, how it will be introduced and so on. A long, hard piece of work has to be done. During the consultation, the issue arose time and time again of what other measures needed to be put in place along with corporation tax to make Northern Ireland attractive to industrial investment.

The rationalisation of the school estate was among issues raised by Mr McDevitt, and he is right. We have 1,200 schools in Northern Ireland and 50,000 additional places. Clearly, the money that we spend on empty schools would be better invested in teachers and special needs education. However, it is easy to talk about that in the abstract here in the

Assembly. I guarantee that the first proposal to close a school in any constituency will result in Members leading delegations to the Minister and standing outside on protests. It is easy to talk about in the abstract but much more difficult when it comes to implementation. However, that it is something that we need to look at.

I will move on quickly to Mervyn Storey's contribution. He raised a number of issues, the first of which was the end-year flexibility guarantee for schools. He said that a bid had been submitted in the June monitoring round. I am sure that he would not expect me to anticipate what the Executive will decide on that. The bid will go to the Executive with a recommendation from the Department of Finance and Personnel. However, let me make it clear that we want to introduce certainty, so that schools will know that, if they save money that they then want to take out the next year, that money will be there for them. They can save with certainty, and they can draw down with certainty. Whatever decision we make on any application from the Department for end-year flexibility funding, the guarantee given last year when I met the Education Minister will stand. If we want to use our money prudently and believe that we need an end-year flexibility scheme for the Assembly, the same provision must be made available to schools. That will be the underlying principle that determines how the decision on applications for end-year flexibility or the savings fund for schools will be decided.

Mervyn Storey also raised the issue of home-to-school transport and the £20 million reduction in its funding. Other Members raised the issues of PEDU and home-to-school transport and PEDU's role in education. PEDU looked at a number of issues in education. After studying about seven issues and making comparisons across boards, it zoned in on two: home-to-school transport and catering. Even allowing for geographical spread, the differences between one board and another are enormous. There are savings to be made there. If there are such savings to be made, it is the right thing to do, and PEDU will work with the Department of Education to look at what savings can be realised in home-to-school transport.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you for giving way. I have sympathy with some of the points raised by Mr Storey, but you specifically mentioned openness and transparency in the whole financial process.

When I was preparing with my Committee, one of the things that came to light about making bids to DFP for in-year monitoring is that the amount of detail that is provided to DFP in order to get its support may not be sufficient. I do not mean to criticise; it is just that the officials tend to concertina the information to get it down to a manageable amount. I would be interested to know whether sufficient information comes in to support bids.

5.30 pm

I am also interested to know why, when the bid is rejected, for whatever reason, it is not clear why it has been rejected. There may be competing bids elsewhere or some other issues. It might be worth considering how we can feed back to Committees the reasons why what seem to be very important issues cannot be dealt with, whether it is that there are competing issues or whatever. Perhaps you would look at that in the coming years.

Mr Wilson: It is up to the Department to supply all the detail as to why a bid is essential. I imagine that, if Departments really want to push a bid, they will give all that detail. Very often decisions are made simply on the basis that no money is declared surplus to requirements. If money is not declared surplus, the bid cannot be met, regardless of how good it is.

Of course, on some occasions, there are political priorities. In the past, the Bombardier CSeries programme came before the Executive as part of in-year monitoring. That was given a very high priority. Although there were many other priority bids at the same time, it was felt that that bid provided high-tech jobs and met all the criteria in the Programme for Government and therefore the decision was pushed through. *[Interruption.]* I want to try to finish this.

Judith Cochrane raised the issue of cross-border co-operation and how there might be savings there. I met my counterpart there last Friday. We discussed greater co-operation and how it could generate savings. That is the kind of North/South co-operation that has no political risk or connotation. It is simply two states looking at how they can best use their resources in tight times. We will continue to do that.

Mr McCrea started off well by talking about aspiration and reality. He then seemed to go into fantasy. In five minutes, he talked about more money for investing in people, welfare

reforms and assured skills, and money for tuition fees, flagship universities and research councils. I am sure that they are all very worthy causes, but the Member gave no indication as to where that money might come from. The bill for that list is enormous. We understand the importance of training to the economy, and that is already reflected in the Budget, with a 3.3% cash increase for DEL, which is one of three Departments that got a cash increase over the four years. If we are to have bids like that, we need to know what the Member would like to see sacrificed in order to make that funding available. The tuition fees issue is out for consultation, and we will see what the result of that is.

Mr B McCrea: Perhaps I got it wrong, but I thought that I had tried to be constructive in bringing forward issues raised by the Committee, which is an all-party Committee. Members of the Minister's party have an opportunity in that Committee to bring forward those things. What I was trying to say is that those are the pressures reported to me. I bring them to your attention. Hansard will reflect that I started off by saying that, if there were moneys available in the coming year, it might be something that you might consider. That was the basis of my comment. I stated clearly that I understood the financial constraints that you operate under. It is difficult when people come along and say, "We need to tackle this together as an Assembly and an Executive." *[Interruption.]* Excuse me, Minister Poots. I am talking through the Chair to the Finance Minister. When people ask you to try to be constructive and bring these points up, it is difficult to hear those points being put down. Frankly, I am surprised that the Minister of Finance is taking that attitude, because we could adopt a more robust attitude when we go on to do this, and perhaps that is the right and proper way to do it. I want to know how we can deal together constructively with the financial pressures that I hear are being faced by a number of Departments. Surely, that requires collective responsibility.

Mr Wilson: All I can say is that we got a list, but we did not get any indication that if money became available in future, where it should come from or how we get the money to spend for the list.

Mrs Kelly took her cue from that; she felt that she had to outdo Mr McCrea in her demands.

She talked about not pulling the wool over our eyes and said that we needed to ensure that student fees did not increase. She talked about small businesses and mentioned a hairdresser's in her constituency that was only a few feet over the limit and was having to pay big business rates. Of course, in the Budget at the end of the previous mandate, when I proposed that we put money to increase the availability of small business rate relief for the hairdressers that Mrs Kelly goes to and was concerned about, the funny thing was that she voted against it. She was not all that concerned then. All those demands are a variation on a theme: I want this; I want that; I want the other. At least Mr McCrea will vote for the motion. Mrs Kelly is still not prepared to vote for it, yet she still insists that she wants the money.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: No, I want to finish. Mrs Kelly had plenty of time. She also talked about student fees. Her own manifesto says that the SDLP flatly rejects any proposal to keep a cap on student fees. However, there is no indication from the SDLP, either in its budget proposal or its manifesto, where that money will come from. She need not ask me where I am getting the money when she demands that student fees be kept level but is not prepared to say where the money should come from.

Mr Kinahan talked about the Audit Committee's independence and the fact that the savings were consistent with the estimates put forward. I am happy to hear that. Perhaps we give it far too much money in the first place.

Mr McGlone raised the issue of borrowing and talked about lack of detail. However, I think it was a lack of knowledge. He seemed to think that the money that was borrowed for the Presbyterian Mutual Society will come off investment money for construction and other projects in Northern Ireland. Had he paid attention during the lengthy debates and discussions and the many questions that have been answered in the House, he would have known that the PMS borrowing is on top of the £200 million a year that we can borrow under the reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI).

Mr Maginness talked about the need for high-value jobs, and I agree with him. However, the stopgap measures — the 5,000 short-term jobs — and the money that will produce what he calls lower-value jobs, are essential to

tackle unemployment now, and it is getting that balance. Nevertheless, Invest NI should be able to create 20,000 jobs, including that 5,000, over the four-year period of the Budget.

Finally, I come to the points raised by Mr Allister. I know that he has set his face to be contrary in the Assembly. His philosophy is that if the DUP is for it, he is against it; it really does not matter. First, we had his attack on the package for the police. As a result of the agreement made between the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, the police have a budget that the Justice Minister says he can live with and the police say they can live with. An additional £200 million that was to be looked at on a year-to-year basis has now been secured and guaranteed for the next four years to enable the police to deal with the terrorist threat. That is as a result of the Budget agreement that was made in Downing Street between the First Minister and the deputy First Minister and the Prime Minister. Regardless of how Mr Allister carps about it, those who are spending the money are happy with it. Had we adopted his policy of opting out, there would be nothing.

I will finish on another point that strikes me. The contrary Member of this Assembly has questioned my stance on corporation tax. He thinks it is deplorable and disgusting that we should contemplate a reduction in corporation tax because of the impact on services. However, I will tell Members what he said when he was a Member of the European Parliament. You can be, to use his phrase, anywhere on any issue in this Assembly. Well, Mr Allister is certainly proving that. In the European Parliament on 13 December 2005, he identified corporation tax rates as a key component in any country's fight for inward investment and stressed how important it was that it should remain under national control. It was reported that:

"In this context, the DUP MEP called for a reduction in Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland, as was recently recommended by an economic task force under Sir George Quigley."

You can be anywhere on one issue. You can be in one place in 2005 and another place in 2011. Maybe that sums up the contribution that we have had from Mr Allister. Let him find how to be contrary and he will go down that route, because if the DUP is for it, he is against it. I do not think that is good politics. I do not think it is a good way of making up your mind on any issue, and I trust that the House will not follow

the suggestion that he made to vote against these Supply resolutions.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close.

Mr Wilson: That would result in schools and hospitals closing and construction projects not working.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before proceeding to the Question, I remind Members that the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £8,141,695,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2012 and that resources, not exceeding £8,656,468,000, be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2012 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 3 (b) and 3 (a) of table 1.3 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Estimates 2011-12 that was laid before the Assembly on 6 June 2011.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £23,278,781.13, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for the year ending 31 March 2010 and that resources, not exceeding £17,836,994.70, be authorised for use by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Education teachers' superannuation, for the year ending 31 March 2010, as summarised for each Department in Part II of the 2009-2010 Statement of Excesses that was laid before the Assembly on 6 June 2011. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Budget (No. 2) Bill: First Stage

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I beg to introduce the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 1/11-15], which is a Bill to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of certain sums for the service of the year ending 31 March 2012; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes; to authorise the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) to borrow on the credit of the appropriated sums; to authorise the use for the public service of certain resources (including accruing resources) for the year ending 31 March 2012; to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of an excess cash sum for the service of the year ending 31 March 2010; to authorise the use for the public service of excess resources for the year ending 31 March 2010; and to repeal certain spent provisions.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I inform Members that the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel has confirmed that the Committee is satisfied that there has been appropriate consultation with it on the public expenditure proposals contained in the Bill, in accordance with Standing Order 42(2). The Bill can, therefore, proceed under the accelerated passage procedure. As announced at the start of today's sitting, the Bill's Second Stage will be brought before the House on Monday 20 June.

Committee Business

Business Committee: Membership

Resolved:

*That Mrs Karen McKeivitt replace Mr Conall
McDevitt as a member of the Business Committee.*

— [Mr Byrne.]

Adjourned at 5.50 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 14 June 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I ask you, in your role as the guardian of the interested Members of the House, to address your mind to an issue that arises under Standing Order 20B.

We have a process for the asking of questions for written answer and for the prioritising for some such questions. Standing Order 20B sets it out in mandatory terms that a Department shall answer within stipulated periods. I do not know whether it is just me, but I am certainly having difficulty extracting answers from one Department in particular: the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). I have 10 questions that are outside the guideline for answer. One is a priority question for written answer tabled on 16 May, and here we are a month later with no answer. That is 21 working days that have passed.

I have a full list if you wish me to supply it to you, but some action is required to expedite the matter and to cause Departments to live up to the obligations that are placed on them by Standing Order 20B.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his very important point of order. I have often said to all sides of the House that, if Members are having difficulty extracting an answer, especially an answer to a priority question, from any Minister, I have always allowed Members to raise that in the House in order to alert the House.

I will write to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I would be happy to have a list of the questions that the Member is deeply concerned about, and I will take it up with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. However, the very fact that the matter was raised here today has alerted the House.

I want to advise the House that there will be a photographer in and around the Gallery today taking photographs of the House. It is really for the Education Service's new website. It is nothing that Members on any side should be concerned about.

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Second Stage

Mr Speaker: I wish to advise Members, as I did yesterday, that the Minister of Finance and Personnel is not available and that he is attending the funeral of the former Republic of Ireland Finance Minister, Brian Lenihan. The House will know that the Bill's Second Stage is to be rescheduled, as was said yesterday. However, as the item still stands on the Order Paper, it will need to be dealt with formally this morning.

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 1/11-15] be agreed. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The motion is not moved.

Motion not moved.

Committee Business

Standing Orders

Mr Speaker: The next three motions relate to amendments to Standing Orders. I propose to group all three motions for the purposes of debate. The first motion to be moved will be motion (c), which proposes the main change to Standing Orders. Motions (a) and (b) are related to motion (c) but stand alone.

One amendment to motion (c) has been selected and is printed on the Marshalled List. A single debate will take place on all three motions and on the amendment. After the debate, the Question will be put on the amendment. If the amendment is agreed, motion (c) will fall, as it will have been overtaken by the amendment. If the amendment is not agreed, I will put the Question on motion (c). I shall then ask the Chairperson to move formally each of the two remaining motions in turn, and I will put the Question on each of them without further debate. Looking at Members from all sides, I believe that they seem to reasonably understand the way in which we will deal with the issues. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): I beg to move

(c) After Standing Order 5 insert

"5A. Principal Deputy Speaker

(1) Any Member of the Assembly may nominate a Deputy Speaker, who has been elected in accordance with Standing Order 5(1), to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.

(2) Once a nomination under paragraph (1) has been made, no further nomination under that paragraph shall be made, unless the person nominated does not agree to act as Principal Deputy Speaker or the nomination is not approved, in which case a further nomination may be made.

(3) A nomination to act as Principal Deputy Speaker shall not take effect unless the person nominated agrees to act as Principal Deputy Speaker and the nomination is approved by resolution of the Assembly.

(4) Where a nomination has taken effect in accordance with paragraph (3), the person so preferred may be called 'Mr Principal Deputy Speaker', 'Madam Principal Deputy Speaker', or 'Principal Deputy Speaker'.

(5) *If the Assembly resolves that the person acting as Principal Deputy Speaker should no longer so act, it may, in accordance with the provisions of this Standing Order, nominate another Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.*

(6) *Where the Principal Deputy Speaker ceases to hold office as a Deputy Speaker, any Member of the Assembly may, in accordance with the provisions of this Standing Order, nominate another Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.*

(7) *Where a Deputy Speaker is nominated to act as Principal Deputy Speaker under paragraph (1) or a motion is moved for a resolution under paragraph (5), a debate relevant to that nomination or resolution may take place in which no member shall speak more than once.*

(8) *A resolution under paragraph (3) or (5) shall not be passed without cross-community support."*

The following motions stood in the Order Paper:

(a) *In Standing Order 1(3) leave out*

"may be called 'Mr Deputy Speaker', 'Madam Deputy Speaker' or 'Deputy Speaker' and". — [Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

(b) *After Standing Order 5(3) insert*

"(4) A Deputy Speaker may be called 'Mr Deputy Speaker', 'Madam Deputy Speaker' or 'Deputy Speaker'." — [Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank you for your rundown on the procedures for what is going to happen. I speak as the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures, and we tabled the motions. The motions will amend Standing Orders to create the role of Principal Deputy Speaker, an instruction given to the Committee on Procedures by the Assembly.

Although the original motion on 16 May 2011 was given cross-community support, I am aware that there is still a great deal of mixed feeling about it. However, as I open the debate on the Committee's motion, I am also aware of the significant value that different viewpoints bring to such proceedings. When matters such as these are brought to the House, they provide an opportunity to measure just how far the Assembly has come. How do they do that? They provide an opportunity for the Assembly to demonstrate its continuing commitment to the democratic process. They provide an opportunity for robust challenge, which makes sure that

quality and accuracy are maintained, and they ensure that no measure of complacency creeps in, even when we are dealing with what appear to be the simplest of matters that affect us all.

We are all aware that not every decision taken in the Chamber, even when given cross-community support, can meet the expectation of every Member. That is evidenced by the amendment to Committee motion (c) tabled by, among others, two members of the Committee on Procedures itself. Although that could be viewed as a negative, I believe that such work gives us the opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to putting our point across and listening to the views of others but then moving forward with the agreement of the majority. That is a true measure of the commitment of all our Members to the democratic process. For that reason, I do not support the amendment but stand over the work agreed by the Committee on Procedures and summarised in the three motions. It is for that reason that I stand here to speak on the work of the Committee.

Throughout our deliberations on the issue, varying views were made clear. Although the Committee was not always in agreement, views were heard and respected, and the work required by the Assembly was recognised and achieved. The Committee rose above dissension to take a corporate view of the work required, and that has resulted in the document before Members.

We are all aware of the background to the motions. On 16 May, the Assembly passed a motion calling for the creation of the role of Principal Deputy Speaker and instructed the Committee on Procedures to draft the necessary Standing Order, which was to be tabled by 6 June. That may sound like a simple instruction; however, the Committee felt that, in order to arrive at a product that it could stand over, consideration needed to be given to a broad series of related issues. Issues included what the title of Principal Deputy Speaker might mean in practice and how practical issues, such as filling the role, needed to be achieved. The three motions on today's Order Paper represent the outworkings of those considerations.

The Committee agreed to compile a report on its deliberations, which has been provided to Members in advance of today's proceedings. The report was designed to inform Members of the full range of issues that were considered

by the Committee and to assure them of the Committee's diligence in probing the issues and the reasoning behind the wording of today's motions. As I said in my opening remarks, there were challenges to the Committee's decisions. For those who still felt strongly that the role was unnecessary — at times, that made for robust discussion around the table — the value of challenge cannot be underestimated and was vital in ensuring the quality of the product.

How did the Committee approach its task? In the first instance, it examined legal advice to assure it that the creation of the role could be achieved without contravening underpinning legislation. Following receipt of the legal advice, we heard many different points of view — sometimes more than once. Ultimately, however, the Committee agreed by a majority of those present that sufficient latitude existed to proceed and was content, therefore, to move into the next phase of its deliberations.

The Committee then explored the legislative boundaries within which discretion existed. For example, we found that the legislation is clear that the powers delegated by the Speaker are conferred on the Deputy Speakers. That meant that the role of Principal Deputy Speaker could be carried out only by a person who had already been elected Deputy Speaker. The Committee also found that there was no statutory scope to assign extra duties to the Principal Deputy Speaker and that the role of the Speaker as ex officio Chairperson of the Assembly Commission and any provision for chairing the Commission in the Speaker's absence was defined in the 1998 Act. The Act meant that considering the Principal Deputy Speaker or, indeed, any Deputy Speaker with regard to that role was outside the scope of the Committee's deliberations. The Committee also noted that reference to the administration of oaths and entitlement to vote applied to the Principal Deputy Speaker by virtue of their already being a Deputy Speaker and, therefore, did not need to be addressed.

Once boundaries had been identified, the Committee's deliberations moved on to matters on which various opinions could be considered, including how a Principal Deputy Speaker would be addressed. The outcome of that consideration is reflected in proposed new Standing Order 5A(4). The Committee also considered whether the creation of the role of Principal Deputy Speaker led to a requirement

to appoint additional Deputy Speakers. The Committee concluded that it did not.

A key consideration was how the Principal Deputy Speaker would be selected, and a number of options were examined. The outcome was the proposal to create new Standing Order 5A, which is before Members in motion (c). Finally, the Committee examined how the new Standing Orders would sit alongside existing ones and where explicit references to a Principal Deputy Speaker would be required.

The Committee report details those deliberations and subsequent decisions, so I will not labour them now. The outcome of the deliberations is clear from the wording of the motions. However, by way of brief explanation, I will say that motions (a) and (b) are paving amendments for the amendments proposed in motion (c). They do not alter the effect of Standing Orders at all but, rather, move a provision currently found in Standing Order 1 to Standing Order 5. The amendment proposed in motion (c) is the substantive provision; it will create new Standing Order 5A to provide for the role of Principal Deputy Speaker.

The Committee agreed to include a specific provision in proposed new Standing Order 5A for a debate to take place in respect of the appointment or removal of a Principal Deputy Speaker. It was modelled on the provision for the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker in Standing Order 4. To no one's surprise, the Committee unanimously agreed that the role of Principal Deputy Speaker should attract no specific or extra allowance on top of those already afforded to the Deputy Speakers. It also agreed by a majority of those present that rotation of the role among all Deputy Speakers during the mandate was not desirable. Consideration was also given to the frequency with which powers are delegated to the Principal Deputy Speaker and whether that needed to be specific in any way. However, the Committee agreed that that should stay as it is with any Deputy Speaker at present; that is, it remains a matter of discretion for the Speaker.

10.45 am

I will draw my remarks to a close, but I am sure that we will hear from Members who feel strongly that the changes effected by the new Standing Orders are unnecessary and others who are strongly in favour of them. However, I hope that, no matter how we feel

about the policy behind the motion, we can accept the direction given by the Assembly, move on to consider the practical application of the Standing Orders and look forward to and recognise the part that we have to play in ensuring that the Standing Orders by which the House is guided are accurate, corporate and enacted according to the motion passed by the Assembly on 16 May. I hope that we do that in the most efficient and effective way possible so that we can best serve the interests of the organisation as a whole.

Finally, on behalf of all Committee members, I take this opportunity to thank the Committee staff, who worked so hard over the past three weeks. We were given a short time frame for this. I also thank the people from Hansard, from the Research and Information Service and, especially, our legal advisers, who were faced with two great legal minds on the Committee and who gave us great legal advice. On behalf of the Committee, I thank all our staff.

Mr A Maginness: I beg to move the following amendment: In Standing Order 5A leave out paragraphs (1) to (8) and insert

"The position of Principal Deputy Speaker shall be filled by annual rotation between the Deputy Speakers who have been elected in accordance with Standing Order 5(1). The order of such rotation to be as agreed between the Deputy Speakers, or in the absence of agreement as directed by the Speaker. Throughout the term the Principal Deputy Speaker may be called 'Mr Principal Deputy Speaker', 'Madam Principal Deputy Speaker' or 'Principal Deputy Speaker'."

Mr Speaker, is the debate time-limited?

Mr Speaker: No, it is not time-limited.

Mr A Maginness: Before I deal in substance with the amendment, I want to make it very plain from the outset that, in the SDLP's view, there is no need for the change in title from Deputy Speaker to Principal Deputy Speaker. That view is supported by Mr McClarty, who was a distinguished Deputy Speaker in the previous mandate. On page 38 of the Committee's report, Members will see his written submission. He said:

"I wish to strongly object to the creation of the post of Principal Deputy Speaker. I believe that this is completely unnecessary given the experience of the position of deputy speakers in the Assembly over the years. I am speaking from

my own personal experience of serving as a deputy speaker for a four year term. The system which is presently employed works exceedingly well and does not require tinkering with."

That is the substance of what he said.

I do not understand why we are being troubled with changes to Standing Orders. At first, it was envisaged that the position of Principal Deputy Speaker would involve not only a change in title but a change in function. That was ruled out following legal advice to the Committee. It was clear from the legal advice that, under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, a change in function could not take place and, therefore, there would be a change in title alone. However, although, at this moment in time, there will be no change in function for the Principal Deputy Speaker, I anticipate that, over the next three years, there will, in fact, be an attempt to change the statute relating to Deputy Speakers in order to add functions to the position of Principal Deputy Speaker. In other words, there will be some sort of retrofitting to the new title.

The new title is proposed to assuage the political ego of Sinn Féin. It feels that it ought to elevate its Deputy Speaker to such a position of prominence. In essence, it creates —

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Let me just finish this point. It creates a hierarchy among the Deputy Speakers. That is contrary to the spirit of this institution, which was founded —

Mr T Clarke (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Surely, today's motion is about the procedures and not about whether we have a Principal Deputy Speaker. I thought that that debate had already taken place. Today's debate is about proposed changes to the process, something that was originally taken to Committee but was not agreed. Now we are getting into a debate that we had in the House about the very role of a Principal Deputy Speaker and the rights and wrongs in Mr Maginness's eyes. Surely that debate has taken place and, today, we should be discussing the process and how we change the Standing Orders to fit that.

Mr Speaker: I listened to the point of order that has been raised. Today's debate is on the procedures and changes to Standing Orders. In all those issues, I always allow Members

a wee bit of latitude in and around the issue. That is important in how they might develop their argument. I remind all sides of the House that today, as far as possible, we are debating changes to Standing Orders.

Mr A Maginness: Of course, Mr Speaker, I accept that. However, underlying the issue is a crucial point, which is that the House was founded on partnership and on the basis of equality and sharing power. If a hierarchy is created, as, in fact, it would be here, it would be contrary to the spirit and the principles on which the House was founded. The change comes from an arrangement between two political parties, not among all the political parties in the House. Therefore, it tampers with and undermines —

Mr Speaker: I urge the Member to come back to the issue that is before us.

Mr A Maginness: I am laying the ground for coming back to it. Bear with me, Mr Speaker, on this point. It is a bilateral arrangement between two political parties in the House to change Standing Orders and change the title of one of the Deputy Speakers to Principal Deputy Speaker. It has to be said that that is injurious to the integrity of the House. It is important for all of us to beware of tampering, once again, with the integrity of the House and the arrangements set up under the Good Friday Agreement.

As I said, the power to change the functions clearly does not exist presently in the House. That may well change in future, but I hope that it does not. If the House insists on changing the title and insists on creating the new title of Principal Deputy Speaker — I said from the outset that we do not accept that — the amendment that has been tabled by my party, supported by the Ulster Unionists and Mr Allister, proposes that the appointment of the Principal Deputy Speaker should take place annually and should be done on the basis of rotation. If we are to change, that seems to be a better way of doing so. It is on the basis of equality and partnership, and it deals with the basic justice of the situation to bring about an equitable distribution of the position of Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: I will give way to Mr Campbell and then to your good self.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. Earlier, he talked about the ego of Sinn Féin. Deputy Speakers from his party have attended royal events. Does he agree that, if Sinn Féin were prepared to use the position of Principal Deputy Speaker to meet royalty, that would be a small price to pay?

Mr A Maginness: I do not quite get your point. I hope that every Member in a position of responsibility would meet any distinguished guest who came to the House. My party and I have no problem with that. On occasion, Members from my party have met royalty. I reflect on Her Majesty's visit to the Irish Republic, which did a lot of good for all of the people who live on this island and for relations between Ireland and Britain.

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Your colleague was first.

Mr Givan: I appreciate the Member's giving way. I want to tease out the thought process behind the amendment. You touched on equality and power sharing. Are you saying that, under the proposal for annual rotation, you support Sinn Féin holding the post of Principal Deputy Speaker at some stage? That lies at the core of the amendment.

Mr A Maginness: I have no problem with any party holding the position of Principal Deputy Speaker, if we have to have that position, but I do not think that we need it. Nonetheless, if the House insists on creating that position, every party that has a Deputy Speaker should be entitled to the position, including Sinn Féin. We have never objected to Sinn Féin occupying that position, and why should we? Everyone in the House has a mandate from the people, and, whether the arithmetic of your representation is weak or strong, you have certain rights. Therefore, you should have the right to hold that office.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. You used the example of the Royal Family visiting the Irish Republic. It was noticeable that, yesterday, when the motion before the House was to send a message of congratulations to a member of the Royal Family, the SDLP had nothing to say on the matter. Sinn Féin had nothing to say on the matter, and, as a matter of fact, Mr McGuinness made a point of absenting himself during the debate, followed closely by Mr Pat Doherty, who obviously did not want anything to do with that message of congratulations. I

suspect that the actions of the SDLP yesterday, to some degree, embarrassed Mr Maginness, because it was written all over his face. I want the Member to respond to that point as explicitly as he can. I suspect that, had it been left to his discretion, he might have said something. Obviously, the orders come from above: keep your heads down, boys.

Mr Speaker: Before Mr Maginness continues, I remind the whole House that the motion is about changes to Standing Orders — nothing more, nothing less. I am more than slightly worried that the discussion is widening and almost becoming a different debate.

So, once again, let us try to keep to the motion that is on the Floor.

11.00 am

Mr A Maginness: I will, Mr Speaker, try to obey your instructions on the matter. However, I cannot read the mind of the deputy First Minister on that matter yesterday. However, there was no objection by the SDLP or, indeed, Sinn Féin to the congratulations to the Duke of Edinburgh.

I think that the amendment is fair, has been reasoned and is reasonable, and it reflects what I hope to be the commitment of this House to partnership and equity right across the whole institution. Therefore, I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr Speaker: I remind the whole House again that there is no time limit on the debate.

Mr Gardiner: I support the amendment that the Ulster Unionists have tabled. However, as we discuss this enabling legislation today, I want to make a few points about the proposal as it stands and the appointment. First, because you can do something does not mean that you should do it. I do not believe that a case has been made for this proposed appointment on the grounds of need. It needs to be spelled out where exactly we fell short in the last mandate to make this appointment necessary. How did that supposed shortfall show up? What shortcomings drove and led to the proposal?

We need to list the legislatures across the world that have a role similar to that of the proposed Principal Deputy Speaker. Is it appropriate to compare the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly, which has only 108 Members, with the House of Commons, which has 650 Members but has only three Deputy Speakers, which is the same

number as in this Assembly? I have to ask another important question: how many sittings does the House of Commons have —

Mr T Clarke: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There must be something in the water of those who have tabled the amendment, because we are back to debating whether the position of Principal Deputy Speaker should be created. While I am on my feet, I suggest that, if the Ulster Unionists had attended the meetings, they could maybe have put their case forward there. However, we are getting off the essence of the debate.

Mr Speaker: Order. I have said on two occasions in the House that there are no time limits. So, any Member who wants to speak in this debate today will certainly have time to speak. So, let us be careful. Once again, I remind the whole House: let us try to get back to the debate, which is about the changes to Standing Orders. I am prepared to allow Members some latitude to develop their argument, but I then like Members, as far as possible, to come back to the motion, which, once again, is about the changes to Standing Orders.

Mr Gardiner: I have to ask another important question: how many sittings does the House of Commons have and how long are they? How many hours a week do the Speaker and Deputy Speakers serve compared to those in the Northern Ireland Assembly? Why on earth do we need all these Deputy Speakers, with one being named as Principal Deputy Speaker, when Scotland has only two Deputy Speakers and the Dáil in Dublin has only one Deputy Speaker? Given that the post attracts additional pay, what sort of message does that send out to the electorate at the same time as public spending cuts —

Mr T Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Gardiner: No. We are supposed to support the interests — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Gardiner: Does that message not run counter to everything that we have been saying about saving money, cutting the number of Assembly Members, freezing Civil Service pay and cutting the number of Departments?

Mr Speaker: Order. I am trying to guide the Member as far as possible. I am listening to the

Member, and I believe that he is speaking to the amendment. If the Member were to link his remarks to the amendment as far as possible, it might help him to speak to it.

Mr Gardiner: I will be brief.

Ms S Ramsey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Gardiner: No. The Assembly does not need a Principal Deputy Speaker. Therefore, I will be brief; I support the amendment.

Mr Lyttle: Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the issue. I imagine that members of the public following the debate may wonder why the Assembly is not discussing more important matters. Having reflected on the proposals, I must say that I see no compelling identification of a problem or, indeed, a solution to the problem in the amendment or motions; nor is any value added to the vital office of Speaker of the House. That is why I see no good reason to support the amendment or motions. I call on Members to keep the office of Speaker beyond such political debate in order that it may continue to command the full confidence of the House, as is necessary for the delivery of its business.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The argument that the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists put up against the motions is really an attack on my party. The argument was put to them clearly. The legal argument was put to them clearly. This morning, Members have totally wandered off the point and away from the arguments that we are here to debate. I cannot understand why time is being wasted. We have gone through and discussed the arguments in meetings. We have heard all of the legal advice, and everything has been put in front of us. Yet we still argue points that have been agreed. Decisions were taken in Committee. I thought that the relevant parties had agreed those positions.

Mr McDevitt: I appreciate Mr McMullan's giving way. It is critical that the issue is debated. It will impact the culture of the House and, as Mr Lyttle said, the office of Speaker. Perhaps Mr McMullan could address what concerns me most, which is to redefine equality in the House. That is what we seek to do through the amendment. Equality has gone from being a situation in which we all come here and share the burden of responsibility equally to Sinn Féin and the DUP's being more equal than others.

That is a hierarchy of equality and, therefore, a new inequality in the House. I do not see how it is in the interests of the House or any party, particularly one that has campaigned so vehemently on the basic principle of equality, to introduce such a code to the House. That is the serious impact of those changes, and they send a negative signal to the outside world.

Mr McMullan: We have all fought against equality for years. I do not think that now is the time to lecture on equality, or inequality — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr McMullan: Why does the SDLP go against legal advice and argue that there is a hierarchy? All of the legal advice was explained to you in Committee. Indeed, Committee members from the legal profession could not disagree with it.

Mr A Maginness: I have been invited to make an intervention, and I will do so. The legal advice is clear that the function of Deputy Speaker cannot be changed because it is set out in the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The title can be changed, but there ends the legal advice, and the rest becomes a matter of political judgement. My party's political judgement is that it is wrong to create a hierarchy because it creates inequality. I thought that Sinn Féin was the party of equality and aspired to an Ireland of equals. You have got an Ireland of equals, except in the House, because you have got a Principal Deputy Speaker over and above the other two parties, namely the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP. That is stark inequality.

Mr Givan: Like other Members, I will be brief in dealing with this motion and the amendment, because there is very little to discuss. The Assembly has decided to create the position of Principal Deputy Speaker, and, today, we are talking about the process and how that appointment will operate. The role has been created; that decision has been taken. I realise that some Members do not like that decision, but the democratic institution has taken that decision, and those who respect democracy will respect the will of the House.

Mr Agnew: I appreciate that we have already debated the motion, but, as I said during the first debate, we have yet to be told why the change is necessary. Out of respect for democracy, the House and the voting public, will the Member please take the opportunity to

explain why the change is necessary? We have yet to hear that argument.

Mr Givan: The will of the House has deemed that it is necessary. A minority in the House do not want the position, but a majority of the House do. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Mr Givan: If it is good enough for Westminster, it is good enough for the Assembly. I have no difficulty with this distinction being made among the Deputy Speakers in other legislatures. It happens in Westminster. The Canadian Parliament is another example of a legislature where that is the case, so I am happy to follow the examples of other Commonwealth nations.

Mr A Maginness: The appointment of Deputy Speakers is governed by the Deputy Speaker Act 1855. It required specific legislation. We are not talking about legislation here; we are talking about a change in Standing Orders, which affects the political atmosphere of the House. It poisons it through the creation of a hierarchy within the House.

Mr Givan: The Member is unhappy that we are somehow undermining what was envisaged in the 1998 Belfast Agreement; the power-sharing arrangement in which everyone in the House was going to be equal. I am quite happy to undermine the spirit of that agreement. It does not present a particular difficulty for me, but I recognise that it does for the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists.

What does intrigue me is that Jim Allister has appended his name to the amendment. I will quote some comments of the SDLP's Alban Maginness. He said that this place was founded on equality and power sharing. He mentioned the undermining of the Good Friday Agreement and the spirit of that agreement. He also said that this debate was about the basis of equality and partnership. I put it to the Member that the amendment states that the position of Principal Deputy Speaker will be filled by annual rotation of Deputy Speakers. The Deputy Speakers include a Sinn Féin Member and, according to that amendment, Sinn Féin will hold the position of Principal Deputy Speaker. The proposer of the amendment agreed with that; he agreed that Sinn Féin would hold the position. That is why I am intrigued. We have interesting bedfellows here. The SDLP and the Ulster Unionists are arguing about one year or two years, or whatever

it may be, but, fundamentally, they are content for Sinn Féin to hold the position. Jim Allister has signed his name to that. Therefore, let us be clear for the public, if they do tune in to this: Jim Allister has no difficulty in Sinn Féin holding the position of Deputy Speaker. Whether it is for one year or two years is splitting hairs.

Mr Allister: The honourable Member has a short memory. It includes the abandonment by him and his party of every election pledge they ever made on these issues. Without stretching his memory too far, may I take him back to 16 May when he may recall that one person in the House sought to avoid the appointment of a Sinn Féin Deputy Speaker. That was me and me alone. He and his colleagues voted a Sinn Féin Deputy Speaker through. So, I take no lessons from the Member or his party on those issues.

11.15 am

Mr Givan: What we have is a flip-flop, another somersault, from the Member. Three weeks ago, he made a virtue of saying, "I opposed Sinn Féin; I fought the good fight". However, now he puts his name to an amendment that is saying, "I have no problem with Sinn Féin holding this position for one year". That makes an absolute nonsense and hypocrisy of the so-called principled position that the Member says he has. We are not going to take lectures from Jim Allister on that issue today, because he is accepting the principle of Sinn Féin holding the position of Principal Deputy Speaker by putting his name to the amendment. The public will realise that he is trying to con them with this so-called principled position. The electorate realised that when he put himself forward and was rejected at the polls again. He is only here, having been elected beneath the quota and on the back of DUP transfers. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I really must insist that the Member gets back to the motion and to the business on the Floor. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Givan: Mr Speaker, it is difficult for me to comment on the contribution made by the Ulster Unionist Member for Upper Bann. I am surprised that he said that there are only 108 MLAs in the Assembly and that the Assembly should not be compared to Westminster. I am content that this place should be compared to Westminster. As a unionist, I consider it to be the Mother of Parliaments, so I am quite happy for the Assembly to be compared with it.

The Member also said that there was concern about allowances. Under the proposal, no allowance would be added to the position of Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr T Clarke: I appreciate that the Member is not on the Committee, but does he accept that had the Member from the Ulster Unionist Party Mr Gardiner attended all four meetings — he did manage to get to one, but there were only four of them — he perhaps would have learned that the Committee recommended that there be no financial remuneration made to that post?

Mr Givan: I thank the Member, who attended all of those Committee meetings, for making that point.

Mr Gardiner: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. A claim has been made that I attended only one meeting. I attended, I think, more than one meeting. I was not there on another occasion because a deputation was seeing one of the Ministers, and his meeting ran on, so I sent one of my staff down to apologise.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has made his point. I assure him that, as Speaker, I do not get involved in the business of Committees.

Mr Givan: Thank you, Mr Speaker. He also made a point about whether we need so many Deputy Speakers. If the Ulster Unionist Party is volunteering to give up that post, that is a matter for it to decide. I am sure that the Member for East Antrim who is a Deputy Speaker will be intrigued to know that his party feels that he is not actually needed.

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr Givan for giving way. I am curious about two things that we have established during the debate this morning. The first is that the DUP believes that the creation of a hierarchy among Deputy Speakers is, in fact, properly unequal and, in their words, democratic. The second is that Sinn Féin believes that the creation of a hierarchy among the Deputy Speakers is, in fact, the embodiment of equality. Apart from what that augurs for the future of the Executive and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I would like to ask Mr Givan, specifically on the motion, about whether he is quite content that there is a hierarchy. The point has been made that there will be inequality, because that is the outworking of the democratic will of the House, so what is the problem with the position being rotated?

Mr Givan: I think that the problem is that the House wants the position of a Principal Deputy Speaker. The point I have made is that a minority of parties that do not like the will of the people on the outside, even though they voted them into this position, are unhappy. The public will see that we are really splitting hairs over this issue. All 108 Members in the House clearly have no difficulty with whomever takes up the position — Jim Allister has signed up to that principle today and has no difficulty with Sinn Féin holding on to the position. So, we really are splitting hairs.

I appeal to the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP not to portray the image that they are so unhappy with the outcome of the elections, which is what I think the public will see in the pedantic way in which the parties are approaching this issue.

Mr Kinahan: I am not a member of the Committee and am very pleased to be speaking on this today. This is not a trivial matter. This is something that I am quite passionate about. This is a matter of key importance. We may have lost the earlier debate; therefore, we are today proposing an amendment that would see the job of Principal Deputy Speaker rotated. That is the least worst of the options. Today we are seeing something that seems small but that actually is very important; the creation of another two-party deal or job-share. Looking at this carefully, along with many other matters, I see this as another nail in the coffin of Northern Ireland's democracy.

As I said, we have already voted on this. However, today, we have a sensible motion to rotate the new role of Principal Deputy Speaker. It is essential to point out the context that this comes into. We have already heard from one Member that he is happy to undermine the roles here. We are also aware that we are not meant to discuss things from the public's point of view, especially if we have lost an election. We are to be pushed into a corner and told to sit down. This is a nail in the coffin, and there have been many. For example, the St Andrews deal links one First Minister always to the biggest party. That is undemocratic. That links to today's change. We also have the fact that any Minister, such as the Education Minister, can ignore what is going on —

Mr G Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Do you accept that, again, we are going back into

history and are not dealing with the issue at stake? Now we are talking about the St Andrews Agreement; we will probably be talking about the Good Friday Agreement before that. Can we get back to the point?

Mr Speaker: The Member makes a very good point of order. We have talked about almost everything else this morning except what we should be talking about. Members from all sides of the House will know that I do like to give Members some latitude in developing their arguments, but please try to link those arguments to the motion that is on the Floor. I take it that the Member is speaking to the amendment. It is important that all Members, whether speaking to the motion or the amendment, try to link the amendment or the motion to what they are saying.

Mr Kinahan: Mr Speaker, thank you. There is a need today for latitude because this new role and its rotation links into everything that we do and how this House works. If you would all let me carry on, you would see how what I am saying links to our amendment.

I go back to my point that this is a nail in the coffin of Northern Ireland's democracy. The creation of one person in a better position than the other three stops the fairness that should be in this House. We have had plenty of examples of that before, such as the use of the petition of concern over the review of public administration (RPA) and double-jobbing or dual mandates. However, we are meant to be modelling this House on Westminster. Most of the world looks on Westminster as one of the best Parliaments. Therefore, I want to see Stormont as one of the best Parliaments and best democracies in the world.

The Speaker is meant to be non-partisan. In Westminster, he leaves his party. He is meant to be independent at all times. In Westminster, he is there for life, until he stands down or, as we saw once, has to stand down due to a misdemeanour. We have a good example of that here. To split the post in two and have a vice-principal Speaker nails both jobs to a party. That removes the independence. That is why we want to see the role rotated.

We have already heard that this is introducing a hierarchy. We already know that, in Westminster, there is one Speaker — no principal Speaker — for 650 Members. We lost that debate. We have four Deputy Speakers, and they should be

rotated. That is the least worst option, but we have to put up with it.

I want to know why. Is this another deal that is being put on us today, in which we have to change Standing Orders? It is another DUP/Sinn Féin appointment. What has happened to independence? What has happened to being non-partisan? It is right that we look at this from the point of view of it being a nail in the coffin of democracy.

Last week, Cameron came here and told us that we should have an opposition; that is, we should be more democratic. Yet, today, there is opposition to the idea of trying to have four Speakers rotating, and, again, the two parties are pushing forward to stop us from having a form of democracy. I think you have the gist of it. It is a grave error. The amendment makes it slightly better, so I will stick with it.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Up until now, we have been dealing with a mishmash of a debate. I have noticed that a lot of Members from other parties have stood up and that most of their speeches have not been to do with the amendment. A lot of them have been led astray, but I will try not to be led astray. I am speaking in favour of the motion and against the amendment proposed by Jim Allister, Alban Maginness and Tom Elliott.

As was said before, the Assembly tasked the Committee with bringing forward the necessary amendments for a Principal Deputy Speaker, which was agreed on 16 May, and there was cross-community support for it. Indeed, the Committee had a similar debate to the one that we are having today. It was very hard, in Committee, to pin down the issue that the Committee was supposed to deal with, yet we got all sorts of legal advice, including from the two great lawyers — as Sue Ramsey described them — Jim Allister and Alban Maginness. I might take her to task on that. However, in the end, they fought their case, they argued their point, they lost it to the Committee, and the Committee is now bringing the issue forward. We also discussed legislative boundaries, and Alban Maginness is right: to go any further than we are going today may mean that we have to have legislation. If we have to do that, let us deal with it when the time comes.

I want to deal with a couple of other things. Sam Gardiner said that there was some sort of extra remuneration or allowance: there is none.

That was the only thing on which the Committee was unanimous. There were a number of other issues around frequency and how a Principal Deputy Speaker would be used. Of course, that was put down to the discretion of the Speaker.

The SDLP, in particular, made a huge play on the issue of equality and tried to redefine equality, hierarchy and democracy. The difficulty is that we have different sizes of parties, we have different votes, we have an Executive that have different numbers of Ministers representing the parties, and we have votes in the Assembly that are determined on the strength of the parties, even in cross-community votes. Therefore, in essence, the SDLP is whingeing about the fact that it did not do well in the past three elections. The party is mixing up equality with democracy. I think that Danny Kinahan said that it was a nail in the coffin —

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr G Kelly: Give me a moment. I was going to ask you whether you are a lawyer, because I have a notion that if I give way to lawyers, they will speak for 20 minutes.

Mr McDevitt: No, I am not a lawyer.

Mr G Kelly: You speak like one. The SDLP's argument is against democracy. A vote was taken to bring the issue forward. The Committee did exactly what it was told to do and put it to a vote. That was democracy. The issue was then brought forward, and those who did not win the vote in the Assembly or in Committee are now arguing that we are doing down democracy, but that is absolutely untrue.

Mr McDevitt: I assure the House that I have no formal legal training whatsoever, and he can take up any slur that I might speak like a lawyer with his friends who are lawyers. However, on the substantial point, there is a basic issue of equality here. Mr Kelly's party and my party argue that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister are co-equal.

Therefore, they should be called and designated "joint First Ministers". We argue that because we do not believe that you should use a title to differentiate between people. The motions are an attempt to use a title to differentiate between people. In other words, we have an attempt to do with the Deputy Speakers exactly what Sinn Féin is against doing with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:

create a hierarchy of titles among a bunch of people who have the same job to do. On that basic point, this is inequality; it is the absolute outworkings of inequality. I just hope that Mr Kelly and Sinn Féin might reflect on that fact and, before it is too late, take their position away and come back to it another day.

11.30 am

Mr G Kelly: His is a simplistic but very false argument in trying to redefine "hierarchy". It could be argued, with respect to you, Mr Speaker, that we have a hierarchal system because you are in charge of the Deputy Speakers. That argument misuses all of those factors. We have the argument that this system is never used anywhere else, yet there are people who will defend the systems in Westminster and Canada, where they have something similar if not an exact replica of this.

On the subject of the Speaker, Principal Deputy Speaker or Deputy Speaker, let me say to Danny Kinahan that all Members who take up those posts come from political parties. We know that. Whether they are Deputy Speaker, Principal Deputy Speaker or Speaker, their duty is to be non-partisan, and that is accepted no matter what their position.

The SDLP always talks a lot about intent. The First Minister and deputy First Minister issue is a point that Conall McDevitt got wrong as well. In fact, if I remember correctly, it was the SDLP that argued and fought for the terms "First Minister" and "deputy First Minister". The SDLP made that mistake, so let it not try to rewrite history. On intent, which was mentioned on a number of occasions, Sinn Féin, by leave of the Assembly, will of course go for the position of Speaker. That was announced by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in the previous debate on this issue. This is about partnership. It is about good government and moving forward, so I support the motion.

Mr Agnew: This is a clear case of how the Assembly is failing to move forward towards a genuinely shared future, as opposed to a future that is shared out. The original setting up of the positions of Deputy Speakers was an example of sharing out. This, again, is a step towards sharing out. If we genuinely want to keep Northern Ireland moving forward, as many claimed during the election, the Assembly needs to lead the way in moving forward and not seek

to further duplicate positions in the way that we duplicate services in our society.

The only arguments given by those who put forward the proposed change are, first, “We are going to do it because we can”, and, secondly, “Well, others have done it, so why should we not?” I do not see those as strong arguments and I do not accept them. What has not been demonstrated is that there is a need for this change. These institutions were created with the endorsement of the people of Northern Ireland in what was the people’s agreement. I refer to comments made by a Member who said that he was happy to undermine the Good Friday Agreement. Well, I am not, because it was endorsed by the people of Northern Ireland, and any changes that we make to it should not be taken lightly. No party put in their manifesto that they wanted to make this change. It has not been endorsed by the people of Northern Ireland, and I believe that no party is mandated to make such a change.

I have said before in the House that I perceive the role of Principal Deputy Speaker to be a mere token, and I maintain that position. I said that I would be open to being convinced otherwise, but I have not been convinced. It is for that reason that I reject the motion and the amendment. I cannot give my support or endorsement to the position of Principal Deputy Speaker because I think its creation is disrespectful to the House, these institutions and the people of Northern Ireland, who endorsed these institutions and have not asked for this change.

Mr Allister: We have now debated this issue twice and had four sessions on it in the Procedures Committee, and we arrive at the end of this process with not one individual in the House or the Committee able to articulate a reason why we need a Principal Deputy Speaker. The challenge was laid down at every meeting of the Committee. Someone who is anxious today to raise points of order to shut down debate had the opportunity — namely, Mr Clarke — but was never once able to articulate to the Committee why we need a Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr T Clarke: For slow learners, let me say that the amendment is clear. The Committee was charged to look at the process of changing Standing Orders. The Committee was not charged to give reasons behind the change of function. It was charged to change Standing

Orders to reflect the decision taken by the Assembly. If Mr Allister does not understand that, we can perhaps get it in larger print for him.

Mr Allister: If the Member’s approach to politics is that you do something because someone else tells you to do it, you have no idea why, and you cannot think for yourself what the “why” might be, you just do it, then he is the classic example of Lobby fodder. He comes to this House without an idea in his head about why he is going to vote for a Principal Deputy Speaker and is incapable of articulating a reason as to why we need one. The Member condemns himself out of his own mouth in the manner in which he deals with this issue.

No need for the post has been established; we have no function for it; and we have no argument made for it. It is little wonder that there is such embarrassment in the House during this debate on the two main Benches. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: No Member who occupies those Benches has the capacity to tell us why we need a Principal Deputy Speaker. There is nothing there to give. That is why those Members want this debate over and swept under the carpet. This is not an appointment by reason or dint of need, or by dint of anything proved to be absent or deficient hitherto. It is an appointment by dint of a sordid deal between the two main parties, whereby, in order to keep the seat of the present Speaker warm for another three years for Sinn Féin, a deal is done that a Sinn Féin Principal Deputy Speaker will be appointed.

Let me come to the distracting hypocrisy of the suggestion that someone is supporting something against his principles. I know that it might be difficult for some to comprehend nuance. Let me give an example. The party that sits to my left purportedly takes a stand on abortion — a proper stand of opposition to it. When abortion was debated in the House of Commons, what did that party do? It tried to make the best of a bad job by voting to reduce the limit from 24 weeks to 20 or 18 weeks.

Mr Speaker: Order. As I have said to all Members, they should, as far as possible, stick to the subject of the debate, the motion that is before the House. I am prepared to give Members some latitude in and around that. *[Interruption.]*

Members should not try to shout across the Chamber. They should not do that. They should desist from doing that.

Mr Allister: I thought, and I hoped that you would see, that I make a legitimate debating comparison. When debating something that, on principle, you do not want at all, just as the DUP in the House of Commons tried to diminish the impact of abortion by voting to make the best of a bad job, in this House, I am faced with the steamroller, the juggernaut of the irrational, the inability to articulate the “why”, from the two parties by virtue of the political cabal and deal they have reached, and it behoves those in the House who want to think about issues to try to make the best of a bad job.

However, in this case, the DUP position seems to be that it wants a Sinn Féin Principal Deputy Speaker for three years, and it rejects the possibility of diminishing that to one year because it is so tied in, inextricably and inexplicably, to the party that sits to my right.

Mr Givan: Perhaps the Member could clarify: if he takes such a 100% principled position on the issue with regard to Sinn Féin, surely it should not even be one year for the Member, it should be never? He has signed up to say that Sinn Féin should have it for one year.

Mr Allister: If the Member is willing to join me, as he was not three or four weeks ago, in making sure that it is never, he will not be without company in that, I assure him. However, the honourable Member’s embarrassment comes from the fact that it appears that his members on Committee could not make up their minds on rotation because they had not received their riding instructions, and they abstained in the vote in the Committee. Presumably they have received their riding instructions by now and have been pulled into line to vote with Sinn Féin against rotation, to give the post to Sinn Féin for three years and vote down any proposition that would diminish the level of Sinn Féin occupancy of the post. That is the real position that the honourable Member wishes to cover. That is why he seeks to be so voluble in trying to distract attention from his position.

What of Sinn Féin? I thought that Sinn Féin was a party that pontificated about a classless society. Well, maybe old habits die hard. Maybe it likes titles like “quartermaster” and “commander”, which are not that different from

“principal”. Recently, we have seen that Sinn Féin does like titles. We now have the Baron of somewhere or other — Northstead — or the Steward of Northstead. Now, to add to that quota, we are to have the prized possession of a position without function, rhyme or reason, that of Principal Deputy Speaker. Those who are in cahoots with Sinn Féin will vote it through because that is the deal that they made. That is the reality of this debate.

I always thought that the members of the Alliance Party were the veritable paragons of equality; they were the cheerleaders of power sharing, rotation and sharing.

Mr B McCrea: Only when it suits.

Mr Allister: Yes, and what suits today is to prop up the cabal that puts it in the position that it occupies in the House. It is a surprising shame on the Alliance Party that today it eschews its own principles and leaves it to lesser mortals like me to dare to raise the standard for equality in the House. The Alliance Party: how the mighty have fallen when it has come to this. I implore them that the sense of equality that I exude might imbue them — they sit close enough — and that they might vote in accordance with those principles.

Someone said that there was an argument against democracy in the amendment. It really beggars belief that you should elevate someone to a position because you have done a deal about it that means nothing in terms of function, that has no definable role, yet that one day might be paid. Someone pointed out that it could not be paid; that is not true. That is under the aegis of the independent review body.

The independent review body could well decide, shamefully and wrongfully thanks to the votes of those who create the post, that it may be a paid position even though it may not have a function. Perhaps that is part of the demand; part of the deal. We have not seen the whole deal, the whole shoddy arrangement that brought this about. Perhaps part of the deal is that it is passed to the independent assessors through sleight of hand, so that some Members can say that they washed their hands of it, but they know the full extent of the deal they have done. They want to conceal anything that would reveal that to the House, and they want to be careful that nothing derails it.

11.45 am

The challenge to those who have been unable to articulate a reason, need, or purpose in making this appointment is why, if there is neither function, purpose nor need for it, they want to gift it to their partner, Sinn Féin. Have they so lost the run of themselves that all they are prepared to do in this House is whatever it takes to keep Sinn Féin happy? If they vote against this amendment that will be a demonstration of that, because they will be saying that they want to have a Sinn Féin Deputy Speaker for three years. Is anyone in the House capable of rising above the designation of mere Lobby fodder? We will see in a moment or two.

Mr T Clarke: The Procedures Committee was asked by the Assembly on 16 May to table the necessary amendments to Standing Orders to provide for the appointment of a Principal Deputy Speaker. You would not realise that that was what we were charged to do from listening to today's debate, but that is what we were asked to do, and I thank the Committee staff for their work, for the report that was produced and for the co-operation that they afforded to Members.

We are all aware that the proposed amendments to Standing Orders before us are not unusual; in fact, they bring the Assembly into line with several other jurisdictions. The first of those is, as some Members said while others will not recognise it, the House of Commons in Westminster. It has three Deputy Speaker posts: the principal Deputy Speaker is designated the Chairman of Ways and Means, and the other two Deputy Speakers are simply known as First and Second Deputy Chairmen.

Mr A Maginness: The three offices in the House of Commons that you referred to are defined in the Deputy Speaker Act 1855 and have individual functions. You are trying to create a title without function. Will you please explain why you are doing that, or do the terms of the deal between you and Sinn Féin have to remain absolutely and utterly secret?

Mr T Clarke: We were charged to look at the position of Principal Deputy Speaker, and that is what we have done. That legislation may be done differently in Westminster, but we have provided for the position of Principal Deputy Speaker.

The second institution is the Canadian House of Commons, where the Speaker is also supported by three Deputy Speakers with different status.

Mr McDevitt: I have listened carefully to the Member. He said: "we have provided for the position of Principal Deputy Speaker." Will he tell the House the difference between the position of Principal Deputy Speaker and that of any other Speaker, except for the title? What, apart from the title, is the specific difference?

Mr T Clarke: Again, there is no difference other than the title. *[Interruption.]* Do you want a definition or not?

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr T Clarke: I am sorry, Mr Speaker. They asked a question, and I was trying to afford them the answer as I see it. The post of Principal Deputy Speaker was created so that when the Speaker is not able to fulfil his role, he can call on a particular individual, as opposed to calling on one of three Deputy Speakers. It makes perfect sense to those who can understand; those who do not want to understand never will.

The Chairperson explained the rationale behind the three motions when introducing the amendments. The Chair highlighted the fact that the amendment proposed to the third motion is a substantive provision. That is the provision that will create Standing Order 5A to provide the role of Principal Deputy Speaker. The first two motions are merely paving amendments for the third motion and do not alter the effect on Standing Orders at all. Rather, they move a provision currently found in Standing Order 1 to Standing Order 5.

I will provide a recap of some of the points that were made. The Committee discussions were very interesting, albeit the meetings were fairly short. When I first went to the Committee meetings, it was like sitting in a court room watching two barristers cross-examining another barrister. Although declarations of interest were made at the meetings, I sometimes wondered whether those two members actually thought that they were still being paid to be barristers from how they were conducting themselves. By the end of the meetings, I was not sure whether to look to the bottom of the table to the person who had been charged by the Assembly to give legal advice or to look opposite me to those who thought that they were there to give legal advice.

Mr Allister: I would have done better.

Mr T Clarke: I hear him saying from a sedentary position that he might have done better. Maybe he would have done better in the courts than he did in the election, when he got in on the ninth count and depended on DUP votes. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr T Clarke: Then we come to Mr Gardiner. I was going to say that he made his point well, but I am afraid he did not make any point; all he did was to rehearse an old argument that has been lost. On, I believe, the only day that he was at the Committee, he referred to the House of Commons and its size and then to the size of this place, which he did again today. Casting my mind back to 1998, I believe that his party was at the helm and created the positions that exist here and the functions of this House. So, if there are too many Assembly Members — my party has consistently been on the record as saying that there should be a reduction in the number of MLAs and Departments — it was the Ulster Unionists that created the problem.

Mr Speaker: Let us try to stick to the motion before us.

Mr T Clarke: I am slightly disappointed that I did not get the same latitude as others, but I am happy to move on.

Chris Lyttle supported the motion, and Paul Givan also made a valuable contribution.

To bring Danny Kinahan up to speed: this House has three Deputy Speakers, not four. So, if we are going to take lessons from Danny Kinahan, maybe he should learn how many positions we are talking about. The amendment he supports refers to rotating positions; he is going to rotate four Deputy Speakers, but, as far as I am aware, there are only three positions.

Gerry Kelly also referred to lawyers. I wonder whether he has come to the same conclusion as me: certain members of the Committee were moonlighting and thought that they were not in the Assembly.

Steven Agnew — we will just skip over that one.

Jim Allister referred to me as “Lobby fodder”. I have gone to the electorate twice and have been elected twice. The first time that I went to the electorate, I did reasonably well. The second

time I went to the electorate, I did so on the same principle, and guess what? I got elected on the first count and over quota. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order. Allow the Member to be heard. Order.

Mr T Clarke: Everybody — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr T Clarke: Reference has been made today to the public and to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and all these other events. I am proud to be in the DUP, and I am proud of some of the changes that have been made in this establishment. However, reference has been made to what the public want. I think of the contribution that Mr Allister just made and the change that he has made in three weeks. I have to give him credit: he did get a resounding vote when he put himself forward for election after he left the DUP. However, when people got fed up listening to the tired old rhetoric of this man, they gave him the vote that he deserved. He came in on his knees, elected by a vote that was lent to him by the DUP — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr T Clarke: That is how this man got elected — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Do Standing Orders not recognise us as equals, or are we getting another lecture in fundamental inequality from the DUP?

Mr Speaker: Order, order. I appreciate the fact that the Member is making a winding-up speech on the motions and is trying to answer Members’ questions. I understand that. However, as far as possible, please try to stick to the motions. It is understandable that the Member has to widen the debate out slightly to respond to what Members said earlier.

Mr T Clarke: Thank you for that, Mr Speaker. Like other Members, I was just trying to lay out my case in answering some of today’s critics.

The point that I was trying to make about Mr Allister’s contribution is that the people have spoken, have given this party a voice and believe in the direction that it has taken. Maybe the Ulster Unionists should also listen to this point. The people have recognised the fact that the Ulster Unionists are in absolute meltdown

mode, which is why they are scratching their heads today and wondering why, joining Jim Allister and others —

Mr Speaker: Order, order. I must insist that the Member sticks to the business on the Floor of the House. You need to do that.

Mr T Clarke: Today's issue is not whether the role of Principal Deputy Speaker be created. That debate has happened and the decision has already been taken by cross-community support in the Chamber. The purpose of today's debate is to be certain that the proposed changes to Standing Orders meet the needs of the Assembly because they will apply to us all.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr T Clarke: No, I will not give way.

The amendments achieve that and in some way merely formalise a process that already happens in practice. On occasion, I believe that they will also simplify issues surrounding the order in which delegation of duties by the Speaker occurs, but that is, of course, a matter for the Speaker's discretion.

Members have had the opportunity to examine the report produced by the Committee to inform the debate. That details the Committee's deliberations, the options considered and what the Committee finally agreed, often by majority. However, the work has been done, and I will briefly summarise.

The Committee has suggested separating the two purposes currently performed by Standing Order 1(3) so it will serve only an interpretative function. The Committee has also suggested a protocol for addressing the Principal Deputy Speaker and has required a new Standing Order 5A to be drafted. That is designed to cover the selection and replacement of the Principal Deputy Speaker as well as the mode of address function. The Committee proposed no change in allowance. I take Mr Allister's point about the panel that has been set up to deal with that issue. Importantly, that proposal was supported by all sides at the meeting, and if we have the opportunity, we will not support any remuneration for the position.

The idea of formalising which Deputy Speaker would deputise for the Speaker under different circumstances was considered at length. The Committee ultimately agreed that that would remain at the discretion of the Speaker. I

will clarify. I find it amazing that there was disagreement today about the issue of function. It was the same Members who did not want the creation of a Principal Deputy Speaker who wanted us to tie down a function for the position. If we followed that path and created a function for the position, it would be easier for someone to be remunerated. So the Committee decided not to create a function that would differentiate between the Principal Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Speakers and instead leave that to the discretion of the Speaker.

As we wind up the debate, I remind Members that the changes that I summarised that are detailed in the motions are the issue in hand. The question is not whether the role be created but to be certain that the proposed changes to Standing Orders meet the letter and spirit of the motion agreed in the Chamber on 16 May. I support the motion.

12.00 noon

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 22; Noes 60.

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr P Ramsey.

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Allister and Mr Eastwood.

NOES

Nationalist:

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea,

Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Other:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms S Ramsey and Mr G Robinson.

Total votes	82	Total Ayes	22	[26.8%]
Nationalist Votes	32	Nationalist Ayes	10	[31.3%]
Unionist Votes	43	Unionist Ayes	12	[27.9%]
Other Votes	7	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

Question accordingly negated (cross-community vote).

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 53; Noes 29.

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms S Ramsey and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr P Ramsey.

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Swann.

Other:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Mr Swann.

Total votes	82	Total Ayes	53	[64.6%]
Nationalist Votes	32	Nationalist Ayes	22	[68.8%]
Unionist Votes	43	Unionist Ayes	31	[72.1%]
Other Votes	7	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

Main Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(c) After Standing Order 5 insert

"5A. Principal Deputy Speaker

(1) Any Member of the Assembly may nominate a Deputy Speaker, who has been elected in accordance with Standing Order 5(1), to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.

(2) Once a nomination under paragraph (1) has been made, no further nomination under that paragraph shall be made, unless the person nominated does not agree to act as Principal Deputy Speaker or the nomination is not approved, in which case a further nomination may be made.

(3) A nomination to act as Principal Deputy Speaker shall not take effect unless the person nominated agrees to act as Principal Deputy Speaker and the nomination is approved by resolution of the Assembly.

(4) Where a nomination has taken effect in accordance with paragraph (3), the person so preferred may be called 'Mr Principal Deputy Speaker', 'Madam Principal Deputy Speaker', or 'Principal Deputy Speaker'.

(5) If the Assembly resolves that the person acting as Principal Deputy Speaker should no longer so act, it may, in accordance with the provisions of this Standing Order, nominate another Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.

(6) Where the Principal Deputy Speaker ceases to hold office as a Deputy Speaker, any Member of the Assembly may, in accordance with the provisions of this Standing Order, nominate another Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.

(7) Where a Deputy Speaker is nominated to act as Principal Deputy Speaker under paragraph

(1) or a motion is moved for a resolution under paragraph (5), a debate relevant to that nomination or resolution may take place in which no member shall speak more than once.

(8) A resolution under paragraph (3) or (5) shall not be passed without cross-community support.”

Mr Speaker: We now move to the two remaining motions. There will be no further debate. If motion (a) is not agreed, the changes proposed in motion (b) will not be needed, and the Question will not be put on it. I remind Members that both motions require cross-community consent.

Motion proposed:

(a) *In Standing Order 1(3) leave out*

“may be called ‘Mr Deputy Speaker’, ‘Madam Deputy Speaker’ or ‘Deputy Speaker’ and”. — [Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 52; Noes 27.

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Flanagan and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr P Ramsey.

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Swann.

Other:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Lyttle.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Mrs McKeivitt.

Total votes	79	Total Ayes	52	[65.8%]
Nationalist Votes	32	Nationalist Ayes	22	[68.8%]
Unionist Votes	42	Unionist Ayes	30	[71.4%]
Other Votes	5	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(a) *In Standing Order 1(3) leave out*

“may be called ‘Mr Deputy Speaker’, ‘Madam Deputy Speaker’ or ‘Deputy Speaker’ and”.

Motion proposed:

(b) *After Standing Order 5(3) insert*

“(4) A Deputy Speaker may be called ‘Mr Deputy Speaker’, ‘Madam Deputy Speaker’ or ‘Deputy Speaker’.” — [Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 52; Noes 25.

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Flanagan and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr P Ramsey.

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Swann.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Lyttle.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Mrs McKeivitt.

Total votes	77	Total Ayes	52	[67.5%]
Nationalist Votes	32	Nationalist Ayes	22	[68.8%]
Unionist Votes	42	Unionist Ayes	30	[71.4%]
Other Votes	3	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(b) After Standing Order 5(3) insert

“(4) A Deputy Speaker may be called ‘Mr Deputy Speaker’, ‘Madam Deputy Speaker’ or ‘Deputy Speaker’.”

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the next item of business will be Question Time.

The sitting was suspended at 12.45 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Environment

Planning Applications

1. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of the Environment how the redeployment of staff from Planning Service has impacted on the processing of planning applications. (AQO 91/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):

I thank the Member for her question and welcome her back to the Assembly. The simple answer is that the redeployment of staff in the Planning Service has begun to have an impact on the processing of planning applications. Although I am advised that the Planning Service has done good work over recent years to speed up the handling of applications of all natures, evidence is beginning to emerge that the redeployment of staff and other factors have combined to create circumstances in which the better performance in the Department in managing all sizes of planning applications has now gone into reverse. Further detailed information on that will be made available over the summer, and I will provide copies of that information to the membership of the Environment Committee.

The management of planning applications has now become more visible, and a number of applications have been brought to my attention and received responses from me. Given that, I reassure all Members that those matters are being and will continue to be looked at and managed in a way that mitigates the impact of that redeployment.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for his answer and congratulate him on his new appointment. Does he believe that sufficient expertise and experience has been retained to ensure a consistent approach to new policies such as Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 21?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for that supplementary question. I am interrogating the management of PPS 21 in particular, because the anecdotal evidence is that there has been

some inconsistency in planning decisions between planning offices. If the Member or any other Member has any further information in that regard, I would very much welcome hearing from them.

I will go further, however, and say that, in recent times — even this morning — I have been applying my mind to determining whether there are potential variations in PPS 21 that do not breach in any significant way the intention or ambition of the planning policy but do, nonetheless, create some greater flexibility for non-farming rural dwellers. There is an opportunity to identify further moderate interventions that could see not just consistency in the application of the policy but some betterment in the conduct of the policy to enable those with a legitimate interest in living in a rural area to have the opportunity so to do.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé dúinn.

Will the Minister tell me what the current budgetary position is for income from planning fees?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for that question. Compared with the height of fee income from planning applications and property certificates in and around three or four years ago, the loss of receipts coming into the Department means that that budget is down 40%. That is clearly working itself through into the overall budgetary position in both the Planning Service and the Department. However, I reassure the Member that, whatever the budgetary situation, I believe, as I always said in my previous role, that a Minister's responsibility is to be in government and in power. If there are some further ways in which the power of the office can be used to assist the processing of planning applications, I will try to deploy that power. For example, I have instructed officials that, whatever the Programme for Government might or might not say when eventually we have one, we will create new performance indicators now around the management of all sorts of planning application.

On the basis of Civil Service advice, a target was set for timeliness regarding various planning applications, but I am not content, necessarily, that those time limits and time lines are right. If we can interrogate them in a way that forces the pace of planning applications so that they are assessed more quickly than they are at the moment — it is better than it used to be, subject to what I have just said — we should

go there. If there are critical cases in the North of Ireland where the consensus in a planning district is that there needs to be some upgrade in respect of staff, especially where there is a strong view across parties that particular members of staff were very helpful in their previous role, I will ask my permanent secretary to consider whether there are opportunities for redeployment back into those areas in an effort to help.

Mr Dunne: I congratulate the Minister on his appointment. Are there any plans to relocate the Downpatrick planning office, as a large section of its work is now managed by the Belfast area planning office?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member and congratulate him on his election to the Assembly. The answer to that question is “Not to my knowledge”. In fact, the contrary is the case. One of my ambitions as Minister is to identify opportunities, as I did in a moderate way when I was Minister for Social Development, to redeploy staff out of the major urban location of Belfast. I believe that there is an opportunity, subject to all necessary consultations with the staff affected, to see whether we can redeploy staff to other parts of Northern Ireland in the way that we pursued the decentralisation agenda.

I have also tasked my officials with identifying all assets of the Department of the Environment (DOE) estate to identify whether there are opportunities when it comes to other initiatives that the Department undertakes to deploy staff or to locate activities outside the greater Belfast area in a way that will see opportunities for decentralisation to grow. If there are opportunities in the north-west, west or south-east, I would like to see if we can do it in those areas. If there is anything further in respect of the Downpatrick situation that I think I should bring to the attention of the Member, I will do so in writing.

Ms Lo: I understand that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency entered a contract with a number of archaeologists who enabled the Department to scrutinise applications in relation to archaeological matters. The agency ended the contract on 31 May, but it will not start again until the end of the year. Will the Minister advise us who will deal with the applications in relation to archaeological matters?

Mr Attwood: I can confirm to the Member that there have been issues not just regarding

archaeological assessments but in wider assessments of built heritage where the budgetary situation has given rise to some issues and difficulties in a way that concerns me. The opportunity to scope out what the built heritage is, where the assets are and what we need to do to protect them may be put off for a significant time — too long, in my view.

In respect of the question that she raised, I will come back to her in more substance in writing.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before moving on to our next question, I inform Members that questions 5 and 9 have been withdrawn and will require written answers.

Waste Management: Incineration

2. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the use of incineration as a form of waste management.
(AQO 92/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for her question and congratulate her on her election to the Assembly. Given that there are a number of live procurements in respect of waste management through the three clusters of councils, the Member will appreciate that I need to be careful about what I say in answer to her question.

In respect of taking waste management forward — incineration in particular — I will look at any recommendations that come forward to the Department. I will assess any proposal against the current planning and wider policies. I will determine whether it is sustainable and does not jeopardise any further opportunities for recycling. I will assess any proposals for waste incineration by judging them against what is known as the waste hierarchy.

That said, I want opportunities for waste management and recycling to be exploited more during my tenure. Although Belfast has a domestic waste recycling rate of 30%, comparable cities in Britain, such as Cardiff, have a recycling rate of 40%. Particularly if we go down the road of reorganising local government, I want to see how we can push the new councils, in the run-up to that reorganisation, to up their game on recycling, reusing and maximising opportunities that could mitigate the need for incineration. I should point out that incineration is not merely a matter of burning waste, and opportunities to get energy from waste make the incinerator option more attractive.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he clarify the future plans for incineration in Northern Ireland? In particular, how does he intend to address concerns raised by Almac Pharmaceuticals about Re-Gen Waste's proposed construction of a material recovery facility beside its site in Portadown?

Mr Attwood: As the Member may be aware, the three waste management groups that reflect the interests of local councils in the North have ongoing procurements for potential incineration plants. I am not a Minister minded in all circumstances to turn down any application for an incinerator. I will set any proposal that comes forward, if any does, against the standards and principles that I have just outlined: is it consistent with policy, is it a disincentive to recycling, and is it a sustainable and efficient model going forward? In coming to a recommendation on each proposal for an incinerator, I will consider those factors.

I will write to the Member in more detail on the Almac matter. However, if we are able to keep on the right side of European law, there are increasing opportunities for all-Ireland incineration and recycling. There is a major incinerator in County Meath, and there will be one in Dublin. I understand that both may have excess capacity. If we are able to move forward in a way that creates not only opportunities in the North but, potentially, opportunities on the island that are consistent with European transport and other environmental directives, I am keen to scope that out to determine whether good evidence exists for going in that direction.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister to his first Question Time in his new office.

Recently, Minister, you kindly responded in writing to a question that I asked you shortly after you came into office about Rose Energy's application to build an incinerator at Glenavy, on the shores of Lough Neagh. You said that you would consider expert advice following an assessment of submissions made by the applicant and by the considerable lobby opposed to the incinerator. Given that the proposed incineration plant has proved hugely controversial, as part of your careful consideration of the application, would you consider it helpful to commission an objective study of alternative means of treating poultry waste?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question and kind words. I welcome the fact that he acknowledges, as I do, that poultry litter disposal is something that we just have to deal with. Let me reiterate to the Member what I said in response to a question tabled in the Assembly: when I have receipt of the expert advice from the consultees on the submissions by the applicant and third parties, I will make an assessment based on the recommendation of officials.

I note the particular proposal that the Member makes. It has not come across my desk heretofore. I will ask my officials to investigate that proposal to see whether it would enhance the information available to me as Minister in making an assessment of the matter. Beyond that, I will make no further commitment at this stage, given that it is crucial that I keep on the right side of due process and good evidence in the matter.

2.15 pm

Mr Allister: Minister, can you assure the House that you have no fixed ideological position on the matter? In particular, will you be mindful of the very special needs of the agriculture sector and, within that, the poultry sector? Will you take care not to fall into the trap of perpetual delay in reaching essential decisions? Will you remain mindful of the severe risk of EU infraction proceedings if we do not adequately deal with the poultry litter problem?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member and welcome him to the Assembly. I confirm that I have some ideological positions, and I am not afraid to have them. Perhaps, in the next few months, you and I could have some conversations, one way or the other, about ideological positions. Perhaps mine might even prevail over yours.

Mr Elliott: I would not bank on it.

Mr Attwood: Precisely. My experience as an SDLP politician has always been to travel more in hope than in expectation. I assure the House that, when it comes to talking to Mr Allister, that is definitely the basis on which I would have the conversation.

I do not fall into traps around delay. When I was Social Development Minister, I tried to demonstrate that there was a difference between going into government and going into power, a difference that, in my view, Ministers

did not fully appreciate. One of the differences is that, when you go into power, you do not allow yourself to become a captive of delay. I assure the Member that, if there is any reason to be concerned about delay, it should be brought to my attention. However, it will not be the measure against which I will proceed.

I note what the Member says about infraction proceedings. I assure the House that I have enquired generally within my Department whether any infraction proceedings are pending or might arise in respect of any activity or function of the Department, and I have been reassured in that regard. I refer to what I said to Mr McLaughlin about the management of the issue. I await best advice. When I get it, mindful of the proposal made by Mr McLaughlin, I will advise the House further.

Local Government Auditor

3. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to give increased scrutiny powers to the local government auditor to help improve the financial accountability of local authorities. (AQO 93/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for her question. Let me say to the House that, irrespective of what happens with the review of public administration (RPA), the shape and character of the RPA and the powers of the local government auditor in the event of the reorganisation of local councils, if Members have any issues with the conduct of any council that, they believe, needs to be investigated now — whether it is the council of which the Member was a member, the council of which I was a member or the councils of which many people in this Chamber are still members — they should bring it to the attention either of the auditor or of my office. I remind Members that, unlike the auditor in Britain, the local government auditor in Northern Ireland still has the opportunity to surcharge councillors. Whatever about future scrutiny powers, one of the current scrutiny powers is that the local government auditor has the opportunity and ability to surcharge. We should not be coy about that. If councils are on the wrong side of good practice and performance, let the matter be investigated. If there is something that needs further remedy, let it be addressed.

At the Committee Stage of the Local Government Finance Bill, the former Minister made a commitment to deal with the issue raised by Mrs Kelly. I await advice on enhancing the power of the local government auditor. If reorganisation happens, it is already the case that the local government auditor will have an assurance and assessment role in councils' compliance regarding service delivery and performance improvement. If good evidence and best advice shows that there is a need for further legislation to enhance all that, I will not shirk from going in that direction.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his reassurance. It will be no surprise to him that I have many concerns about the behaviour of Craigavon Borough Council, of which I was a member for nearly 17 years. The Minister will be well aware that councils across the North have substantial land banks as well as having a certain role to play in area planning and town centre boundaries.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mrs D Kelly: I urge the Minister to ensure that the local government auditor has real-time investigative powers. I also ask him for a commitment that his Department will carry out an analysis of the role and function of the local government auditor vis-à-vis the Comptroller and Auditor General at the Assembly.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member. I have some sense of her concerns about the council that she named, as well as similar concerns held by other Members about one or two other councils. All accountability mechanisms that exist in the North need teeth, whether local government auditor, Police Ombudsman or any others. If there is good reason to give more powers to the local government auditor going forward, I would be minded to do so.

I note the points that the Member made in the latter part of her question, and I will look at those matters further. I also note what she said about land banks. Bearing in mind the asset base that councils do and will have, we need to make sure that the management of those assets, including land banks, fulfils all appropriate and high standards. However, there is a wider political point: if we go in the direction of RPA, I have a sense that a cluster of councils is preparing itself for that direction of travel. They will do so in confidence, using the powers

that they already have to ensure that there is good performance and best value for money and in a way that properly addresses any issues of concern. I have a sense that some councils and staff are more interested in competing for territory and status than they are in competing on behalf of the citizens and ratepayers whom they represent. I hope that, if we go in the direction of RPA, those councils will embrace the best standards and performance of their colleagues.

Mr Givan: I know the Minister would agree that 99.9% of functions exercised by councils are carried out to the highest possible standards. It is important that there is financial probity. Will he check with the local government auditor whether he is still prepared to use the surcharge function? I understand that, after losing a case, he indicated that he would not use the function again because he was overruled on it. Secondly, does the Minister agree —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that they should ask only one question.

Mr Givan: I believe that some councils are seeking to gift land, at no charge, to the GAA. Will the Minister make sure that there is financial probity in those transactions?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member. I confirm that I signed off on four disposals of land or property by councils to the GAA and other organisations in the past two weeks. Given the financial situation that many sporting and other organisations face, I asked officials to check, on the basis of good practice and evidence, whether there are opportunities to dispose of lands, buildings or parts of buildings in council areas, not necessarily at nil value or rent but at a more advantageous value or rent. It seems to me that, if councils or government have an asset base, there may be opportunities in these times of difficulty and less money to enable community, sporting and other organisations to fulfil their purpose and serve their members, whatever their background.

I do not like it when a Member, when making a comment about the disposal of land or buildings, particularises one organisation. That is partial, selective and partisan; it is not in keeping with the standards that this Chamber upholds or with the standards that my Department or councils, by and large, uphold. I regret that remark.

I note what the Member said in respect of the local government auditor and will probe the matter further. An independent accounting auditor may have powers, but the fact that he loses a case should not lead to the conclusion that he never used his powers at all.

Road Safety

4. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of the Environment what road safety measures he intends to introduce during this Assembly term.
(AQO 94/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for that question. I will shorten my answer to give the Member the opportunity to come back with a supplementary question.

I am minded to introduce new road safety measures during this Assembly term. Although we continue to scope those out in the Department, one example is the introduction of further measures to deter drink-driving. Perhaps we should not only reduce the minimum level of alcohol in a person's blood that can lead to prosecution for certain designated drivers, such as R-drivers, but introduce a requirement for a blood:alcohol reading of nil to avoid prosecution. Nil does not necessarily mean a zero reading, as there are reasons, such as the taking of medicines, that could lead to partial traces of alcohol in a person's blood. Reducing the blood:alcohol level required for prosecution is an area that we should explore.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I welcome the Minister in his new role. I also welcome the fact that he has outlined some of the issues that he intends to raise. Does he have a timeline for doing that? Does he have any intention of meeting his colleague in Dublin to share his proposals, particularly those that would be strengthened if they were rolled out on a cross-border basis?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his comments and his question. The answer to his second question is yes. At a North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) sectoral meeting on the environment on 1 July, I am scheduled to meet the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Phil Hogan. Independent of that, we have scheduled a

further meeting on 4 July, at which we will be able to scope what further can be done.

At the margins of the NSMC meeting, I spoke to Minister Hogan on Friday, and, in a very short time, we were able to scope out a number of interventions on an all-Ireland basis that would benefit our citizens, North and South. For example, it would be better to align blood:alcohol limits across these islands. However, I have indicated to officials that, given that we share a land border with the Republic of Ireland, we should not unnecessarily delay doing what we want for Britain; we should go ahead with doing that with the Republic of Ireland.

Given the good work of previous Ministers to ensure that there is mutual recognition of disqualification, we need to push on with the mutual recognition of penalty points on a North/South basis, if not on an all-island basis. The all-island freight forum is a crucial measure in road safety.

My intention is for Minister Hogan and myself to, within a month, map out and announce, subject to his agreement, a pathway for all-Ireland road safety.

2.30 pm

Finance and Personnel

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the Minister of Finance and Personnel has advised of his unavailability today due to his attendance at the funeral of Brian Lenihan. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment will be answering questions on his behalf.

Budget Review Group

1. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what issues he has raised at meetings of the Budget review group to date.
(AQO 105/11-15)

8. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the Budget review group is considering the opportunities that exist to apply for European Union funding to help raise revenue.
(AQO 112/11-15)

14. **Mrs McKevitt** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much has been realised to

date through the implementation of revenue-raising measures that have been recommended by the Budget review group. (AQO 118/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I want to group this question with questions 8 and 14.

The first meeting of the newly constituted Budget review group under this mandate will take place on 15 June. At that meeting, Ministers will need to take stock of the Budget review group commitments made by the previous mandate and the specific projects that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The Minister of Finance and Personnel will be anxious to see how those Departments with explicit Budget review group commitments incorporate within their Budget settlements the work that they have been asked to take forward. There is some £900 million of additional revenue-raising measures to be delivered over the coming four-year period, which include the plastic bag levy, capital receipts from the sale and disposal of assets and contributions from the Port of Belfast and housing associations.

At the meeting, the Minister will also raise the need to pursue those other revenue-raising proposals advanced but not sufficiently robust enough to reflect in the Budget settlement. An important element of that will undoubtedly be an exploration of all options to maximise the drawdown of European Union funding streams that are open to the Executive to exploit. There is much merit in some of those proposals, and the Budget review group needs to examine them thoroughly.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. Did the Minister of Finance and Personnel raise the issue of asset disposals with his Southern counterpart at last Friday's North/South Ministerial Council plenary meeting, particularly in relation to the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA)?

Mrs Foster: As the Member knows, the Finance Minister has had a good working relationship with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland on NAMA issues. In that respect, it is appropriate to pay tribute to Brian Lenihan's work with our Finance Minister on NAMA. He allowed Sammy to have access to some issues to which officials originally would not allow him access. It is right and timely that I should pay tribute to Brian Lenihan.

I am not aware whether the Finance Minister raised issues with his counterpart at the North/South Ministerial Council. The issue was certainly not on the agenda, so it probably was not raised at the meeting. However, the Finance Minister will want to see how assets will be realised in Northern Ireland because they are part of the £900 million Budget commitment. We will want to explore those matters at tomorrow afternoon's Budget review group meeting.

Mrs McKeivitt: What is the current outlook for raising revenue from the Port of Belfast?

Mrs Foster: The Member will be aware that the contribution that is being asked of the Port of Belfast is some £40 million. Negotiations are still ongoing between the Port of Belfast and the Department. The Finance Minister is leading on the issue, and he will continue to push the Port of Belfast for its share of the Budget settlement. We believe that the assets are there, and the Minister will continue the negotiations and will no doubt advise his colleagues who sit on the Budget review group of their progress.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister indicate when the Assembly can expect results from the review of arm's-length bodies?

Mrs Foster: That is an agenda item for tomorrow's meeting. From my experience, I know that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has tasked every Department to supply information on their arm's-length bodies. Questions were asked as to the effectiveness of those arm's-length bodies and whether there was a statutory need for all of them. All that information has been collated, as I understand it, and sent to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and that matter is on the agenda for tomorrow's meeting.

Mr S Anderson: The Minister referred in her initial response to housing associations. How do the Executive propose to access the housing associations' reserves?

Mrs Foster: That matter caused much discussion at the time. I well recall listening to the housing associations say that that was something that could not be done, that we did not have legal grounds to do it, and all manner of claims. However, as the Member will know, the Budget review group (BRG) in the previous mandate very much identified the possibility of deploying the

housing associations' financial reserves, which are quite considerable, and we believed there was a need to look at ways of using that more effectively.

I think that there was a misunderstanding at the time that we would come along and dip into the bank accounts of housing associations. That certainly was not the way in which we saw this going forward. It is not a question of directly accessing the reserves. Rather, the way in which it is happening is that the grant paid to housing associations has been set at £20 million per annum lower than it would otherwise have been set. That, we hope, will encourage housing associations to use their reserves to make up the shortfall in moneys coming from the Government. That is how the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is dealing with the issue of housing associations and their reserves.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer. She mentioned earlier that there were robust options that did not make it into the Budget. Will she give us examples of additional revenue-raising options that have been identified by the BRG?

Mrs Foster: Many other options, some robust and some not so robust, were considered by the Budget review group and Finance Minister. At the meeting tomorrow, as I understand it, the group will look at the latest position on, for example, the review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which is one of the options that it wishes to look at. It will also look at work in relation to the Odyssey Trust Company to take forward suggestions that were made there.

Of course, different political parties raised other issues, be they mobile phone mast charges or levying a charge on non-exempt ATMs. However, all those matters have to be subject to rigorous examination and, in some cases, possibly legal opinion to see whether the matter can be taken forward. So, they will be robustly challenged. They are not in the Budget at present because the Finance Minister did not feel at that time that they were robust enough. So, they will be looking at all those options again tomorrow afternoon.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before moving on to our next question, I advise Members that questions 3, 4 and 10 have been withdrawn and will require written answers.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

2. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made on the expansion of the small business rate relief scheme. (AQO 106/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Good progress has been made, and a paper setting out the preferred option of the Finance Minister is with the Executive for consideration. Around £6.3 million is the current annual saving to small businesses under the main scheme, helping around 16,000 businesses in Northern Ireland. The Finance Minister would hope to be able to double the amount of relief and increase by over 50% the numbers who receive help.

Given constrained public finances, the additional help needs to be broadly cost-neutral to the Executive, and it is proposed to fund the expansion of the small business rate relief scheme through a large-retail levy. Large retailers are generally better placed than small businesses to cope with the economic downturn. These measures need to be introduced as soon as possible, and, with Executive support, the Finance Minister will be seeking Assembly approval to have them in place by next April. They will apply for three years, through to the end of the Budget period. Consultation will begin soon on the way forward, and the Finance Minister hopes that final decisions can be reached in the autumn.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Minister for her answer. Wearing her normal hat, she will recognise that small businesses are the backbone of our local towns and that any assistance would be welcomed in the current climate. What is likely to be the average benefit if such a scheme were introduced?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for her question. I recognise the value of small businesses to the Northern Ireland economy. Indeed, it was while visiting one of those small towns — I do not know whether you would call Ballyclare a small town, Mr Deputy Speaker; perhaps you can clarify. In any event, we visited Ballyclare and when talking to some of the small businesses there I was surprised to hear that the current small business rate relief scheme did not help some businesses in that town.

It is good to see that the Finance Minister has decided to expand the small business rate relief scheme, because that will make a real difference to a lot of small businesses across

Northern Ireland. The 20% relief for those with a net asset value of £5,000 to £10,000 would give an average award of £730 at 2011-12 levels. The idea is that the hearts of villages, small towns and bigger towns will be kept alive during what has been a very difficult period for them. The small business rate relief scheme, from the Finance Minister's point of view — and, indeed, from the economy Minister's point of view — is a very good scheme, and it is one of which the Assembly should be very proud.

Mr Murphy: The Minister is correct; the smaller business rate relief scheme is something that we could give significant support to, and, hopefully, the effect will be to help sustain smaller businesses in town centres. She is also correct when she says that that is predicated on a greater return from the retail levy, which, again, is predicated on the rateable value of larger retail outlets. Given that that may not be such an accurate barometer of how some of the larger retail outlets are doing, does the Minister think that perhaps some element of profitability should be added to the scheme? Although I think that it is a valuable scheme and that it will have a good effect on smaller indigenous businesses that are struggling, nonetheless it could potentially be a blunt instrument that may act against some larger retailers that are perhaps not doing so well in the circumstances.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for that question, and welcome his support for the small business rate relief scheme. To put it into perspective, the large-retail levy is likely to affect fewer than 100 properties throughout Northern Ireland — 0.1% of all non-domestic properties. My understanding is that it involves just 27 companies that have a combined UK sales turnover in excess of £100 billion per year. The impact that it will have on those 27 companies is minimal compared to the amount of profit that they make year on year.

Having looked at the situation in the round and at how larger businesses have been much more resilient than some of our small businesses, which live from month to month in relation to their cash flow, I believe that it is a substantial help for those small businesses and will be at minimal cost to those larger businesses that will be asked to pay the levy.

Mr Durkan: I welcome the Minister back again today. As well as the retail levy mentioned by the Member who spoke previously, does the Minister foresee any opportunity for adding an

additional levy for large retailers that sell alcohol below cost price on many occasions?

2.45 pm

Mrs Foster: The Minister of Finance and Personnel will want to discuss that issue with the Minister for Social Development. I know exactly what the Member is talking about, because the issue of local retailers selling alcohol at below cost price has been raised with me at constituency level.

I will take the Member's comments back to the Finance Minister and ask him whether he has any plans to speak with the Minister for Social Development. Presumably, that is also part and parcel of the debate about minimum pricing in which the Minister for Social Development is involved. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has also indicated that he wants to take the matter forward. The issue crosses a number of Departments, but I am aware of it.

Corporation Tax

5. **Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions have taken place between his Department and Her Majesty's Treasury on corporation tax. (AQO 109/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The First Minister, the deputy First Minister, the Minister of Finance and Personnel and I met David Gauke and Owen Paterson in February and March 2011 to discuss the then draft 'Rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy' paper, which is currently out for public consultation, ending on 24 June. At those meetings, we made it clear that the United Kingdom Government needed to work with the Executive to look at the different options for varying corporation tax. We also identified a need to examine the costs, which remain very high and at the upper end of the previous estimates. We asked that the paper be more explicit about the benefits that we might expect. Further work is needed in those areas, and we will continue to engage with the Treasury in that regard following the close of the consultation.

More recently, we all attended a consultation event in London on 8 June, which was chaired by the Exchequer Secretary, at which we heard views from multinational businesses and other private sector stakeholders on the impact that a corporation tax reduction would have on the attractiveness and ease of doing business in Northern Ireland.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Minister for the response to that question. Given that many experts, elected and unelected, have expressed opinions about a reduction in the rate of corporation tax, what impact does she expect a lower rate will have on Northern Ireland's attractiveness as a location for inward investment?

Mrs Foster: I do not have any doubt, nor do most of the commentators in the business world, that reducing the rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland would have a significant benefit to the economy. The question then is whether that benefit is greater than the cost to the block grant. The independent evidence that I have in my Department — it is important to say that it is independent — leads me to believe that a lower rate of corporation tax would be of huge benefit to Northern Ireland in a number of ways. It would bring more foreign direct investment and many more jobs into the economy. My economic advisory group has indicated that it could create up to as many as 4,500 new jobs every year. It would increase our productivity levels, so the productivity gap between us and the rest of the United Kingdom would close. That is something that we set as a target as far back as 2007, at the start of devolution. That convergence of living standards would be something that all people in Northern Ireland, regardless of where they live or what they do for a living, would feel. For me, that is the key part of obtaining a reduction in the rate of corporation tax.

However, the consultation is continuing. As I understand it from my Department, the closing date for the consultation has been extended to 1 July 2011. That will give businesses and, indeed, everyone else the opportunity to engage in that consultation with the Treasury, after which there will still be much detailed work to do on how the corporation tax reduction will, hopefully, happen in Northern Ireland.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I detect a slight difference in emphasis in the enthusiasm for a reduction in corporation tax between the Enterprise Minister and the Finance Minister. Be that as it may —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mr D Bradley: In the Minister's view, what measures can be introduced to ensure that Northern Ireland is not subject to a rash of the practice known as brass plating, whereby

companies seek to gain advantage from the lower rate of corporation tax without the accompanying economic activity?

Mrs Foster: The Member is absolutely right: that is one of the key issues that we need to sort out after the consultation is over. As the Member will know, there are two stages to it: the principle of devolving corporation tax to Northern Ireland, and sorting out the details of how much will come off the block grant and how we will administer it in Northern Ireland. For instance, will Northern Ireland have a separate administration to deal with those issues? So, there are a lot of details to be sorted out between ourselves and the Treasury.

I have to say that I laughed a little when I read today's 'Belfast Telegraph', which said that the First Minister is the nice cop, the Finance Minister is the nasty cop, and I am the even nicer cop. [Laughter.] The 'Belfast Telegraph' is now high on my list —

Mr Hamilton: Have they met you?

Mrs Foster: Mr Hamilton wants to know whether they have met me.

Obviously, the Finance Minister is charged with the public finances of Northern Ireland, and, therefore, he will be concerned about the cost of devolving corporation tax. As the economy Minister, my job is to build the Northern Ireland economy and to try to close the productivity gap between ourselves and the rest of the United Kingdom. That is my primary aim and why, having looked at the independent evidence, I believe that reducing corporation tax will bring about benefits for Northern Ireland that we would otherwise not achieve.

Mr Agnew: Will the Minister confirm that, as well as the cost to the block grant, Northern Ireland will be asked to bear the burden of the extra administration cost of implementing a reduction in corporation tax? Furthermore, are there any estimates of how much that cost will be?

Mrs Foster: As I said in answer to the previous question, those are the issues that we need to sort out with the Treasury. Interestingly, last week's consultation was attended by some of the major multi-nationals, and their tax advisers said that they did not see any difficulty in administering a different tax rate in Northern Ireland from that in the rest of the United Kingdom. However, they were very clear

about wanting a single point of contact in the United Kingdom to deal with their company's tax issues, and they felt that a differential tax rate in Northern Ireland could be dealt with quite easily from London.

Corporation Tax: Block Grant

6. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline why the estimates provided by Her Majesty's Treasury, on the potential cost to the Northern Ireland block grant of a reduction in the level of corporation tax, differ significantly from his Department's estimates.

(AQO 110/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The first point to make is that both figures are estimates. Last year, corporation tax figures were included in a Department of Finance and Personnel report on Northern Ireland's fiscal deficit. The analysis detailed in that report applied a methodology developed by the Scottish Government for estimating their fiscal deficit. Although that approach was agreed with the Office for National Statistics, it involved making some high level assumptions in allocating tax revenues, as regional tax data is not routinely published by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and was not available at that time. The Treasury estimates included in the Government's consultation document were produced using a different methodology. Although there are also caveats attached to those figures, they are based on a detailed analysis of actual tax receipts by postcode that was previously unavailable. That said, further work is needed to find out precisely how much corporation tax is collected in Northern Ireland, and I will be pressing the Treasury to urgently take that exercise forward.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for her answer. Obviously, there is still some work to be done. Has the Department sought legal advice on the Azores ruling, and, if so, how does it affect the outline proposals?

Mrs Foster: The Azores ruling is fundamental in that, if Northern Ireland is to get a differential tax rate, an amount of money must come out of our block grant to reflect that. The Department of Finance and Personnel has been engaging directly — as, indeed, has the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) — with the European Union, along with Treasury officials. Indeed, the reaction from Europe was positive. At the meeting, it was said that, as

long as the Azores ruling was complied with, they did not think that there would be any difficulty in relation to the European Union. So we will work on that basis. If we do achieve a lower rate of corporation tax, as I said, it will be of great benefit to Northern Ireland.

I look to places such as Estonia, which has a corporation tax rate of 10%. Indeed, my Department carried out a significant piece of work on smaller regions throughout Europe with tax incentives, looking also at their economic policies. Estonia has a corporation tax rate of 10%, but, fundamentally, it also has other very good policies, including research and development, innovation and a whole culture of moving its economy forward, to bring about economic growth. Let me be very clear: although a low rate of corporation tax would be a great help to the Northern Ireland economy, we still need to increase our skills level and have that innovation and research and development culture very much at the heart of our economy.

Mr Ross: I agree with the Minister when she says that the ability to reduce the corporation tax rate in Northern Ireland could be a significant economic lever for the Executive and that, hopefully, it will transform the Northern Ireland economy and help to grow the private sector. However, she is also right when she says that it will not, on its own, be a silver bullet to transform our economy. Will she outline what other measures or policies the Executive can pursue to ensure that we grow our private sector and continue to attract foreign investment?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for that question. As I have said, we need to continue to grow our skills agenda. In that regard, I look forward to a meeting that will take place in the near future with the Minister for Employment and Learning to see what else we can do in and around the skills agenda. As economy Minister, I pushed for the Treasury paper, in addition to containing the corporation tax proposals, to look at matters such as research and development tax credits, which is a key element that could really help the many companies that raised the matter with me. Another issue that some people mention is whether companies in Northern Ireland could take a holiday from National Insurance contributions. There are other elements as well. However, the independent economic advisory group that gives me advice simply says that, while other things will help, the thing that will

give us the step change will be the lowering of corporation tax.

Mr McLaughlin: I commend the ability of the Minister to step in at such short notice and handle the questions in such a comprehensive fashion. I return to an issue that the Minister addressed earlier. Assuming that the power to vary taxes is devolved to the Assembly, would it become practically impossible for the Executive to do so unless and until we resolve the current difference in the estimates?

Mrs Foster: We cannot take a leap into the dark on this matter; we will have to get more clarity in and around the estimates that were given to us. The Member will know that the Department of Finance and Personnel carried out considerable work in relation to the ancillary benefits that will arise as a result of reducing corporation tax. If you get more people to come in to Northern Ireland, you are, of course, going to have more people spending money in Northern Ireland and paying National Insurance contributions and all of the other taxes. He is right: there is very much a need to get clarity on the estimates from Treasury. That is not for the want of asking on our part, but we will continue to ask. Once the consultation is over, that matter will take up speed again.

Village, Belfast: Negative Equity

7. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the discussions that have taken place between his Department and the Department for Social Development and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive regarding the negative equity issue that has arisen as a result of homes being vested in the Village area of south Belfast. (AQO 111/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Following the Assembly debate on negative equity in October 2010, the Finance Minister met Ministers Attwood and Murphy in November 2010. In April of this year, he again met Minister Attwood and was briefed on the outcome of Minister Attwood's discussions with the Attorney General. Senior officials from the Department for Social Development (DSD) and the Department of Finance and Personnel have met on several occasions to discuss those difficult issues.

Mr A Maskey: I thank the Minister for that reply. In a previous response, she said that some businesses may fall outside the benefit of the

business rate relief scheme but, nevertheless, would be able to absorb that because of the size and scale of their operations. Similarly, in the Village area — there are obviously others, but I speak for the purposes of this question — a number of people who have bought properties may be landlords, but others may be people who have families or may be first-time buyers.

Is the Minister in any position to explain whether the Departments have examined the scale of the negative implications that there may well be for first-time buyers and families, as opposed to larger landlords, who, I understand, bought some of the properties? There is a scale of how the negative impact may apply to individual families. Is any work being done on that?

3.00 pm

Mrs Foster: A considerable amount of work has been carried out on that. As I understand it, there are 538 properties in the Village urban renewal area, and, of those, it is estimated that in the region of 60 owners are in negative equity. Of those 60, it is understood that four cases relate to owner-occupiers and the rest are held by landlords.

I know that the issue is causing considerable angst in that area, and the Finance Minister has kept in close contact with the Department for Social Development on it. They have looked at a previous Lands Tribunal case in relation to the matter, but, in this new mandate, they will want to be up to date on whether any action can be taken. As I understand it, from that case, there is no legal basis for compensating negative equity. That discussion was ongoing between the Minister for Social Development, the Minister for Regional Development and the Minister of Finance and Personnel, and they will probably want to revisit that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up, and that concludes Question Time for today. I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments until the next item of business.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

A26: Glarryford to Ballycastle

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes. The Minister for Regional Development will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately eight minutes.

Mr Storey: I thank the Members who have remained for the Adjournment debate, particularly those from the North Antrim constituency. I also thank the Minister for Regional Development for his attendance.

The A26 is one of Northern Ireland's main routes. It runs from County Armagh and County Down right up through the heart of County Antrim and into Coleraine. The part that runs through my constituency carries a large volume of traffic daily, and it is a main arterial route for commercial and domestic vehicles. It serves a population base of well over 100,000 people.

During the summer months — that is, on the particular day that we get a summer — people head up to Northern Ireland's premier tourist attractions, one of which, the Giant's Causeway, is in my North Antrim constituency. They also visit many of the other attractions in the north coast area. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) estimates that around 1 million people visit the north coast each year, and many of them use the A26 to get to their destination. Road usage increases on specific days such as the Auld Lammas Fair, the Easter holidays, the Twelfth fortnight, the North West 200 and many other events.

If the original motorway plans of the 1960s had become a reality, the traffic would have been carried by the M2, but, as we know, the M2 was never completed, so the A26 carries the burden. The stretch of the A26 that runs between Ballymena and Ballymoney is dual carriageway from just after you come off the M2 until you reach the Glarryford junction, where it becomes a single-lane road, with just a few bits and pieces of dual carriageway. I use the road almost every day of the week, and anyone who

uses the road will know that it becomes very frustrating to be stuck behind a slow-moving vehicle after having made steady progress on the M2 and the dual carriageway. There is always the temptation to overtake, and it might not always be wise to do so.

It has, therefore, been argued for a long time, rightly, that the rest of the road from Glarryford up to Ballymoney needs to be upgraded to dual carriageway. However, in particular, the section that needs urgent action — this is the subject of the debate today — is the section that runs from the Glarryford junction to the Drones Road and the junction to the right that takes you off to the A44 to Ballycastle. It is 7 km in length or, for those of us who still are more attuned to miles, it is nearly four and a half miles.

That section of the A26 takes in the famous Frosses trees, and the road through the bogland is known for the supporting trees but also, tragically, for its fatal accidents. Indeed, it has been described as one of Northern Ireland's most dangerous roads. More than 20 people have lost their lives there over the past two decades. I have obtained figures from the police for accidents in the past 10 years at those stretches of the road up to March this year. They show that, in that time, there have been 47 serious collisions, resulting in nine people losing their lives and 33 being seriously injured. Those figures are for collisions on the main road only and do not include collisions on or near the junctions themselves.

It would remiss of the House not to, at this stage, remember those families who have lost loved ones and friends as a result of accidents on that road, and our thoughts and prayers are with those families. Road statistics are just that — statistics. However, behind every news report of a fatal accident, there is a very tangible human tragedy, and families affected can never really move on. So, my thoughts today are very much with those families for whom the A26 holds dark and painful memories. I fully accept that not all the accidents that occurred there were due to the road being a single rather than a dual carriageway, but I feel that we owe it to those who have lost their lives to do all that we can to reduce the risk and increase road safety.

I welcome the fact that Roads Service has this week started work on a right-turning lane at the A26 at the junction of Frosses Road and Crosstagherty Road. I raised that issue

with Roads Service some time ago, and I am delighted that it was able to find ways whereby that work was able to commence at the beginning of this week.

For far too long, there have been decisions, proposals and plans to upgrade the section of the road from Glarryford to the Drones Road. It has been on the cards for years, and all that there have been are talks, discussions, proposals and promises but, to date, no delivery. As far as I can see, the problems on that stretch of road were discussed as far back as 1990 — 21 years ago — when a concerted effort was made by Ballymena and Ballymoney councils to conduct research and put some pressure on the direct rule Ministers. Indeed, the arrival of new direct rule Ministers, both Conservative and Labour, usually signalled visits to the road, with the accompanying promises.

However, in August 2008, it seemed as though we were on track with the announcement by the then Minister for Regional Development of the preferred route for a new dual carriageway at an estimated cost of £52 million. As is often the case when a new road is proposed, there was considerable concern about the loss of valuable farming land and about houses, and so on. However, the 2008 scheme attempted to minimise all that, as most of the existing road was to be used. There is, of course, considerable concern at the moment, and, at this stage, I say to the Minister that, although work has been carried out, plans have been laid and negotiations have taken place with landowners, there are particular problems in that the design does not secure an appropriate and adequate underpass for some landowners. The road cuts through some good farmland, and, in fact, some farms are now divided. I have seen some of the proposals, and I do not think that they go far enough to address the specific issues that have been raised with me about the adequate provision of underpass. Therefore, it would be useful if the Minister were to bear in mind that issue when he considers the project.

At the time when the announcement was made, I and my DUP Assembly colleagues warmly welcomed the proposed upgrade of that vital economic and trading corridor. At the time, we said that, for more than 20 years, fatalities along the route had increased and the decision, while of little comfort to those who have been bereaved or injured, at last indicated that road safety is a priority. We hoped that deaths on

that road would be a thing of the past when the new carriageway was built. However, almost three years later, little work has been carried out apart from statutory processes. In fact, no work has started on the ground.

The previous Minister stated that his Department was continuing to develop the design. I understand that such things take time. However, the longer it goes on, the longer we face the sort of problems that I have outlined and the more costs we will, ultimately, incur. That has been confirmed by the current Minister in his response to a question for written answer that I tabled a few days ago, in which he stated:

“Unfortunately, the funding levels within the current budget do not allow for construction to start before 2014/15 at the earliest.”

I am afraid that I find little comfort in those words.

I am aware that the Minister is taking a look at the proposed investment in roads throughout Northern Ireland and how Budget 2010 might impact on all of that. Although there is little doubt that the A5 and A6 are also regarded as important enhancements to the road network, I know that there is considerable unease about the A5 in particular and that it is currently the subject of a public inquiry. It is a controversial plan. I note that the Minister is on record as having said that he will not be stampeded into a decision. Far be it for me to try to blow the whistle for that stampede to commence; however, if there is any chance of a plan for the A5, I urge the Minister to do what he can as part of the monitoring rounds to persuade his Executive colleagues of the merits of redirecting spare finances to the A26 project.

An upgrade will not solve all the problems. However, it will help tourism, businesses and the many commuters who use that route daily. Most importantly, it will reduce the risk of accidents. Sadly, it will not eradicate them. While there is human error, there will always be accidents. Surely, if an upgrade helps to make the road safer, it is well worth the investment. If it saves one life, it is well worth that investment.

I do not envy the Minister his task of responding to the debate. My colleagues, my party and I appreciate fully the difficult and almost impossible decisions that he faces. However, I ask him to take a long hard look at what has been said, the history of the project, and all the concerns that have been raised. I carried

out a search on the matter in the council. I was able to unearth a considerable paper trail on the project that goes back many years to various Ministers and the Department. It was interesting that almost all of the responses, which came from as far back as when Mr Moss MP was Minister, focused on the economics of the project. Surely, if the focus had been kept on the issue, the project would have been delivered many years ago at considerably less cost to the public purse than is now estimated.

I am delighted that the Minister is here. I appreciate the time that he has taken in conversations and written responses to deal with the issue. Again, I ask him seriously to consider that plight and resolve the ongoing problem of the A26. I trust that there will soon be speedy progress on the delivery of a much-needed upgrade on that stretch of road.

3.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Robin Swann, I remind the House of the convention that a maiden speech should be made uninterrupted.

Mr Swann: There are not many in the House to interrupt me. It is with great humility that I rise to make my maiden speech to the House. I am also greatly humbled by the number of Members who have seen fit to make it into the House to hear it, and I hope that the prospect of my speaking has not deterred them from participating in what is a significant debate on the A26 in north Antrim. I will return to that matter shortly.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the electorate of North Antrim who returned me to the House as an Ulster Unionist. I assure them that North Antrim has a strong, proud and determined Ulster Unionist heritage that I will endeavour to carry on. For a long time, the House reverberated from the noise made by the so-called big man from North Antrim. I inform you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that there is now a wee man from North Antrim in this place, and it will be my intention to make sure that I am heard. I intend to leave my mark. It may not be a photograph hanging on the stairs or a life-size bronze statue, although one of me would use a lot less bronze than one of Craigavon. Rather, I will endeavour to leave my mark through my work for the people not only of North Antrim but of Northern Ireland.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor, the Reverend Dr Robert Coulter MBE, who served the House faithfully in many roles and served the Ulster Unionist Party steadfastly over many years. I only hope and pray that I can build on the firm foundations that he delivered into my hands.

I consider it a great privilege to represent the great constituency of North Antrim from Kells to the Causeway, which, I hope, the A26 will cover one day. North Antrim born and bred, the son of a plumber and a hospital cleaner, and from a farming background, I know what hard work is. I am fully aware of the hardships facing families across the whole constituency, and I dedicate myself to working for them. Having been labelled often as a Ballymena man and tagged with the various stereotypes that come with that, I will work in this place to bring to task those individuals who seem now to know only the cost of everything but the value of nothing. At this stage, I can only stress the strength of the values of that strong north Antrim work ethic that my parents instilled in me and the importance of strong family values, which I thank my wife and young daughter for giving me. By embracing those values in the House, we can all work to make this a better place to live.

The North Antrim constituency to which Mr Storey referred is a marvellous place. It has the eighth wonder of the world, the Giant's Causeway, and we are much indebted to Finn McCool for his foresight in placing such a fabulous tourist attraction in the most beautiful constituency in Northern Ireland, if not the world. We are also blessed with the green slopes of Slemish, where St Patrick spent time in contemplation, and our famous green glens. We have so much to offer, and it is right that we should be proud of the area.

I will return to the topic of today's debate. So much more could be done by continuing the upgrade of the A26 from Glarryford to Ballycastle, a route that would help the people of the area. Upwards of 20,000 vehicles a day use the current road, which is in stark contrast to the usage of other upgrades brought before the House. Mr Storey has given a detailed description of almost every turn along that road.

On a constituency level, I express my disappointment that the upgrade of the A26 was not given the same special status in the previous mandate as that of the A5 and the

A8 and in the failure of the previous Sinn Féin Minister in not affording the people of North Antrim the same consideration. Mr Storey rightly referred to the families who lost loved ones because of the dangers on that road.

I seek an assurance from the Minister that the A26 upgrade will be brought forward if and when additional or other funds become available and that he will include that in the next evolution of the investment strategy for Northern Ireland. I take this opportunity to inform the people of north Antrim that I have raised the matter of continued work on the A26 with the Minister on a daily basis, which I am sure that he will attest to, and not just by presenting questions for written answer to the House. I have extended an invitation to the Minister to view the proposed route and the famous trees at the Frosses, to take the opportunity to talk with a few of the farmers whose land will be affected by the future work, and to discuss the options for adequate access to their land that lies on either side of the new route.

Using the protection of my maiden speech, I also invite the Minister, when he is in north Antrim, to see how a link road around the village of Cullybackey would help the residents as well as the future development of traffic-calming measures across the villages and hamlets in north Antrim, of which Kells, Connor and Dervock are a few on a long list that I will raise with him day and daily.

As I said earlier, I will use my time in the House to raise the concerns of and defend the small man. I am sure that my friend and colleague Mr Ross Hussey, if he were in this place, would agree that, in addressing the problems that we face in our daily business, a one-size solution will not fit all in this House. I pledge to the Speaker's Office that, when I rise to my feet, I will use the time that I have been allotted to say what I have to say and will not simply speak for the length of time that is available. Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence in my maiden speech.

Mr Allister: I begin by congratulating Mr Swann on his maiden speech. We look forward to his raising continually the issues that, of course, affect all of us who live in and represent North Antrim.

One of the cardinal issues that have afflicted the constituency is the state of the A26, which has been a constant bugbear for residents

and visitors. We have seen false dawns and expectations rise only to be dashed. At this moment, we still live with the reality of an utterly inadequate road. Yet, it is one of the main arteries in our Province, has one of the highest daily vehicle usage figures, and, as Mr Storey said, has a tragic death rate. A number of us in the House know and think today of people who have lost their lives on that road. So, it is not just some abstract thing that we are talking about. It is a pressing, urgent necessity that we address the inadequacy of road provision.

Indeed, it is probably a reflection of the significance of roads issues and the inadequacy of some roads that we have probably debated the issue of roads more than anything else in the House since the start of this mandate. That in itself points to underinvestment, which is a legacy of the last Executive, and that legacy now falls to the current Minister to address.

The issue is not just about convenience and about getting to the north coast faster. It is, in effect, about developing the economy of north Antrim, because there is an inextricable link between good road access and economic development. It is no coincidence that Ballymena, to which we have good road links, has seen industrial growth. Yet, if you drive the further miles to Ballymoney, you will see a dearth and a loss of industrial growth. That is not a coincidence. Ready access is a big contributory factor to the economic attractiveness and viability of any town.

However, when you impose on a town such as Ballymoney the restraints and inhibitions that arise from that dreadful stretch of road from Glarryford to the town, do not be surprised that it is hard to attract necessary investment.

Mr Storey: I see the point that the Member is making; it is a change from what he said during the election, when he accused the Investment Minister over the problems in Ballymoney. Having roads there is important, but how would Tyco, Sherwood's, Ballymoney Foods or the Fleming's factory have benefited from the road's being a dual carriageway? Is it not also the case that commercial decisions were made —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member speak through the Chair, please?

Mr Storey: Unfortunately, those decisions affect Ballymoney and should be included in his comments.

Mr Allister: Of course commercial decisions are relevant, but commercial decisions to expand are aided if there is a good roads network. Therefore, I am surprised that the Member intervenes to argue against himself and the cause of improving the A26.

Let me pick up on his point. He made reference to comments made during the election. Yes, there is a definite nexus between economic development and a good roads structure. The Minister himself represents an area that has shown the benefits of that. We have had a huge economic focus on the Belfast to Dublin corridor. The natural consequence of that, and this is where the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) Minister played her part, is that we have seen a disproportionate pouring of investment into industrial parks and other ventures in proximity to those roads. Before the election, the DUP Minister poured yet another £38 million into the industrial park in Newry, but not a penny for Ballymoney. That is the point that I was making.

I appeal to the Minister, being a beneficiary of a good roads structure in the southern part of the Province, to take pity on his poor northern cousins. He can move himself to spread to the northern part of the Province the largesse that has given the southern part of the Province a good roads infrastructure.

The scheme is, essentially, ready to go, but it has stalled. The stalling of the scheme is not just a frustration; it blights those whose lands are affected. Farmers were co-operative in the process and not obstructive as some have been elsewhere. We arrived at a scheme that is viable and tolerable for all concerned. However, an inevitable consequence is that their land is now blighted by that planned expansion.

In the name of the farmers, I say to the Minister that time is not on our side; we need to move on this issue. In the scale of things, £50 million is not a huge amount of money; in the scale of the extravagance of the A5, it is but nothing. It will not break the bank of the Department for Regional Development (DRD), but it will do a great deal for the future of that very important part of Northern Ireland that is north Antrim. I urge upon you the necessity of giving it all the priority that it most certainly deserves. As I said, at present we have the worst of all worlds: a promise unfulfilled, a blight on the landowners

and yet no product. We need product on this matter.

Mr Storey's intervention provokes me to welcome the fact that he has returned to supporting the A26 project. A few months ago, he and Mr Frew, who, I hope, now supports the project again, voted for a Budget in the knowledge that that Budget under that Minister would scrap the A26. By his vote in this House in support of that Budget — I am glad that the Minister cannot be accused of this — he was prepared to downgrade the project and see the scrapping of the A26. It is to be welcomed that Mr Storey and, I trust, Mr Frew, have returned to full support for the A26. Together we might see it delivered.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up; we must move on.

A number of Members have lately indicated that they wish to speak, so we will have to restrict the remaining three Members who wish to speak to six minutes.

3.30 pm

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will not keep you six minutes. The section of the A26 Frosses Road between Glarryford and the A44 Drones Road forms part of the northern key transport corridor. We have listened to arguments between some Members today about what happened before and after the election, but that does not solve the problem for the people who are looking for these road improvements to be made.

I want to quickly talk about the economic benefits of the road. The road goes from Belfast right into Derry, and from Derry it takes you right into Donegal, opening up an all-Ireland corridor for tourism, for commercial life and for all. It is one of the busiest roads for the haulage industry, which is vital to our economy. Indeed, transport business comes from the South of Ireland into the North, going to Belfast or Larne and, ultimately, to England, Scotland or Wales.

The road is absolutely vital for the tourism industry. It takes you right down into where the previous Member alluded to —

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for giving way. We must stress that the A26 should not be made into a link road that goes straight from

Ballymena to Ballycastle to the detriment of the small villages that lie along the proposed route. Some signage should be put in place to ensure that they get their proper dues, rather than having a straight rat run.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for his intervention. I will come to some of the smaller villages later, but I agree that all villages, big and small, are entitled to their share of the tourism trade, and we see that at the minute. However, the Frosses Road meets the Drones Road to take you into Ballycastle, and, only recently, a new operator has come in to run a ferry from Ballycastle to Campbeltown. That will also be a vital link for our tourism industry.

I hope that the Minister will look at putting some money into the Antrim coast road. We could do with it. We have the Lammas fair and the North West 200, and there is Portrush. Those are all vital tourist links, and we cannot let them go away. I totally agree with the Member when he talked about the number of fatalities and injuries on that road. I will go so far as to say that it is one of the worst roads on the network for fatalities. I agree with the Member that we are thinking of the families at this time when we are putting up the case for commercial business.

I will not dwell much longer on what I have to say. I support the debate and thank the Member for bringing it to the House. We have to agree collectively and not talk about what Members did or did not do, as some Members are trying to make out. The scheme and the route have been identified, so let us get on with it and see if we can put money into developing it. We have to open up that whole area for tourism.

The Member mentioned small villages. The new state-of-the-art visitors' centre at the Giant's Causeway will be ready next year, and it is hoped that it will encourage somewhere in the region of 700,000 people a year to visit. Those are phenomenal figures in anybody's book. We must have the infrastructure to take those people in and out, and people must feel confident that they will be able to drive in and out without sitting in tailbacks and traffic jams.

The Antrim coast road is a vital link to Larne. I was a North Antrim man for years until legislation changed me into an East Antrim man, but I still have my ties in North Antrim, and I empathise with everything that has been said. However, we should not lose sight of the port of Larne being a vital corridor for industry coming here. The

amount of traffic that goes through it — road haulage, tourism and everything else — filters out right down through the coast. Picture that network going through the whole place. So, Minister, I ask you to think about this seriously, and I support everything that has been brought to the debate. Before I finish, I congratulate the Member on making his maiden speech.

Mr D McIlveen: I congratulate Robin on his maiden speech, and I thank my friend and colleague Mervyn for securing the debate.

Obviously, this stretch of road has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. I agree with the previous Member to speak that talk is cheap and we need to see something done as quickly as possible. I listened, quite interested, to the debate on the A5, and a lot of the arguments surrounded the economic advantages and convenience of opening up that route. That is not really what this debate is about. Safety is the elephant in the room when it comes to the A26. It is a very dangerous piece of road. As Mervyn said, more than 20 people have died on the road, and there have been 47 serious collisions. For the sum of around £50 million, which does not sound too bad when you say it quickly, that could be easily eradicated. The problem will be much eased by widening that stretch of road.

I am conscious that I am doubling up a little, but I want to imprint this fact. I ask the Minister to work with farmers in the area when the road comes to be looked at. I will go further and ask the Minister to perhaps give some guarantees that funding will be available for suitably sized underpasses, so that farmers can adequately access their land.

As well as the safety issue, there is the economic one. If we are to encourage tourism into Northern Ireland, we need to make sure that our infrastructure is up to the job. This part of north Antrim, up to the north coast, is one of the jewels in the crown of Northern Ireland tourism. People regularly come from all over the world to the north, some specifically to go to the Giant's Causeway. Bear in mind that this road is some people's first impression of Northern Ireland. So, coming from Belfast, they have the M2 leading onto the dual carriageway of the A26. They are heading up to the Giant's Causeway when, all of a sudden, they get to the junction at Glarryford, and they move at a snail's pace. Even worse, they may come across

a road accident. I ask the Minister whether we want this to be the first impression of Northern Ireland for tourists. I support the debate wholeheartedly, and I encourage the Minister to make the A26 upgrade a reality as quickly as possible.

Mr Frew: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to take part in the debate. I believe that there was some confusion with regard to who was down to speak. I apologise for not hearing the whole debate. I was chairing the Agriculture Committee, and I am glad that the debate was still going on when I came out of that meeting. This is a very important issue not only for north Antrim but for Northern Ireland as a whole. I congratulate my DUP colleague Mervyn Storey on securing the Adjournment debate. I also congratulate Robin Swann on his maiden speech, for which he certainly picked a good subject. For many years, we in the DUP have campaigned for improvements on every stretch of this carriageway. It is not something that we shirk or shy away from. We raise the issue at every opportunity that we can.

I will be brief on this, because I want to spend my time having the ear of the Minister, but I will address Jim Allister's comments about Mervyn Storey and me not supporting this. At no time have we ever not supported the upgrade of that road. Equating that with supporting the Budget is just farcical. It is easy when you are a one-member party to stand up, gowl, snarl your teeth and everything else.

Mr Allister: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member voted for the Budget in circumstances in which the Minister for Regional Development had made it plain that, on his assignment of money, he would prioritise the A5 and shelve other schemes, including the A26 scheme. Therefore, the Member, with his eyes and ears wide open, voted for that proposition when he voted for the Budget. He might like to deny it now, but that is the unpalatable truth.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for his comments. Let me explain to him and perhaps educate him. Had we not voted for the Budget, Northern Ireland would be bankrupt today. Let us be clear: it is easy to nit-pick and make such suggestions, but the Member does not really know the full —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please return to the subject?

Mr Frew: I will, Mr Deputy Speaker. I do not want to waste any more time on negative comments. We now have the ear of the Minister, and I appreciate his taking the time to attend this Adjournment debate.

I want to talk about tourism. North Antrim is split in two, straight down the middle. The spine of north Antrim is the A26. It opens up the north coast and the Giant's Causeway. It has some great funding opportunities and some great tourism aspects. We have the North West 200. The A26 opens up the north side of County Londonderry, including Coleraine and Limavady, and people can travel along it the whole way to the city of Londonderry. It is a major road, an arterial route of our Province. It attracts lots of traffic and businesses. It can provide Northern Ireland with growth. If the road is improved, it will help haulage contractors and businesspeople commute from Londonderry to Belfast and vice versa. It will help towns in between those places and help everywhere in County Antrim. I ask the Minister to think carefully about the road and what it means to Northern Ireland.

I concur with what my colleagues said about the farming community and the provision of underpasses. It is crucial that the farming community is thought of. We have been campaigning for many years, not only for tourism, business and economic development but for safety. It is clear that there is a major safety issue on the A26. Many of the accidents that occur on it at present are rear-end shunts. That says a lot about the road and about the improvements that have been made in other years and on other stretches of the road. It is fine time that we in north Antrim had a good road network to link the towns of Ballymena and Ballymoney. It would improve investment and business in those towns and in every village in between. It would provide access to other villages by virtue of the bare fact that people would be able to travel to those communities much more quickly and safely. It would certainly open them up.

I think that I have overrun, so I thank you for your patience, Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask the Minister to think seriously about the road and the improvements that can be made to it. I plead with all North Antrim Members and anyone who has an interest, including Members who represent East Antrim, that we might come together and present a united front to ensure

that the A26 gets the improvements it so badly needs.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to the debate. I thank all the Members who spoke for their contributions. I have listened intently and with interest. I congratulate in particular my party colleague Mr Swann, who made his maiden speech. It was a very good contribution and one that deserved a wider audience. I congratulate him and welcome him to the Assembly.

I have asked my officials to take note of the Hansard report so that, if I do not pick up on any points or have not time to respond, I can write to Members directly after the debate.

At the outset, I restate that I welcome and support improvements to the A26 and other arterial routes across Northern Ireland. As Minister for Regional Development, I want to see improvements across the road network that will help enhance safety, reduce journey times, provide value for money and support the economy. I note the comments made by Members, which align with the support my Department has received for the scheme from local representatives over the years. I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate on the proposed improvement works on the A26 Frosses Road between Glarryford and the Ballycastle junction of the A44 Drones Road.

3.45 pm

The A26 Frosses Road forms part of the northern transport corridor as an element of the strategic road network between Belfast and the north coast. It provides an important commuter and tourism link. The route between Belfast and Glarryford is constructed to either motorway or dual carriageway standard. However, from Glarryford, the A26 Frosses Road reduces to a single carriageway. A 7-km or, if you are imperially trained like Mr Storey and me, a four and a half-mile stretch of the Frosses Road from Glarryford to the A44 Drones Road carries in excess of 20,000 vehicles a day and suffers from congestion at peak traffic times in particular. In addition, there is a lack of opportunity for safe overtaking. I also recognise and acknowledge the high number of accidents, some unfortunately fatal, and I offer my sympathy to the families who will never recover from the loss of a loved one in such tragic circumstances.

The scheme is included in the regional strategic transport network transport plan, which was published in March 2005. That identified this section of the A26 as needing improvement to achieve dual carriageway standard. That supports the aims of the regional transportation strategy, which is reflected in my Department's vision to provide dual carriageway standard roads on all key transport corridors. In response, Roads Service is continuing to develop proposals for a new dual carriageway on the A26 between Glarryford and the A44 Drones Road. The scheme includes the provision of 7 km of dual carriageway with a 70 mph design speed between Glarryford and Drones Road. A detailed assessment against the national criteria produced a preferred route that closely follows the line of the existing road. The scheme also provides junction improvements along the stretch, which include grade-separated interchanges at the B64 Glarryford junction, the C61 Lisnasoo Road and the B94 Drumadoon Road. A new roundabout will be provided at the A44 Drones Road at the end of the scheme.

I will tell Members about the progress to date. The design of the scheme has been under way since 2006, when consultants were appointed to develop and progress a preferred scheme through the statutory procedures. Throughout the scheme development, my Department has sought to ensure that those directly affected, the general public and elected representatives have been kept fully informed of progress.

A number of Members mentioned the impact on farmland. Again, I can confirm that the Department appointed an agricultural consultant to assess the scale of the impact on farms affected by the dualling scheme. Roads Service is and will remain committed to working with farmers to ensure that access to land is maintained and the impact is mitigated through accommodation works where possible.

The preferred route for the scheme was announced in August 2008. Since then, work has continued on scheme development, and my Department is working towards the publication of the draft Orders and an environmental statement for the project later this year. I hope that signals intent and willing on my behalf and that of my Department to progress this important scheme.

My Department's budget allocation —

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Kennedy: I really must make progress, but I listened to the Member's contribution.

A reduction of two fifths in the Executive's overall capital funding brings with it a significant challenge to us all. That is especially true for my Department's infrastructure investment. Of the £1.2 billion allocated to Roads Service for capital spend over the four-year Budget 2010 period, almost two thirds or nearly £800 million is allocated to two major roads schemes, namely the A5 and the A8. Of the remaining capital funding in the four-year period, limited funding is available for other schemes, particularly in the middle two years. That makes it extremely difficult to start any scheme until near the end of the Budget period. Following the draft Budget consultation, over £60 million of additional funding was received for major road projects in year 4 of the Budget period. That will be considered for a range of competing priorities.

Decisions to start schemes in 2014-15 will be dependent on the funding made available beyond the current Budget period. Schemes such as the A26 will take more than one year of construction, and funding cover in year 5 and possibly beyond that would be required before I could give approval for construction to commence. The funding in those years will not become clearer until further work has been completed to develop the third edition of the investment strategy for Northern Ireland, which was referred to by Members and is due to conclude this year.

As Members will be aware, I have received numerous requests to meet a wide range of bodies and elected members who are interested in progressing strategic road improvement schemes across Northern Ireland. I will continue to use those as opportunities to listen to opinions from across the Province before forming a view on the way forward. That will coincide with the work being undertaken to develop the investment strategy beyond this Budget period. I appreciate the safety, business and tourism arguments made by Members for why the proposals to improve the A26 should be advanced to construction. Mr Swann is right: on a continuing basis — almost daily and certainly any time he sees me — his first words are "A26". I have to live with that reality.

I am pleased to reaffirm the intention to publish draft Orders and an environmental statement for a proposed scheme later this year. That will

lead to a statutory consultation period and, on the basis of the number and type of comments received, I will make a decision on whether a public inquiry is required.

As Minister, I want to see improvements across the strategic road network that will enhance safety, as I said, reduce journey times and provide value for money. I intend to consider the proposed investment across my Department and the impact of Budget 2010 on the roads programme, and I want to explore opportunities for bringing forward schemes such as the A26 dualling scheme between Glarryford and the Ballycastle junction.

I will quickly respond to Members. Mr Storey set out the case very well. He gave us the history and reminded me of my words in another debate, when I would not be stampeded. Members will understand that I have to give careful consideration to the large number of representations on schemes, bypasses and improvements, unlike Mr Swann, who seems to want me to spend all of my budget allocation, if not on the A26 then on a bypass for Cullybackey and other places.

I take the point that people want to see road improvements across the entire Province. I thank Members for all of their input. I have listened carefully. If I have missed points, I will attempt to address them by writing to the Member concerned. It has been a valuable experience for me to learn so much about the A26.

Adjourned at 3.54 pm.

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

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Culture, Arts and Leisure

2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

Published at 5.00pm on Wednesday 15 June 2011

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I wish to inform Members of the benefits to the North of Ireland from the Olympic and Paralympic Games being hosted by London in 2012.

During 2012 the Games themselves will have a direct impact on the North of Ireland through:

Torch Relay, which will visit all parts of the North. LOCOG also announced on 18 May that they are exploring the feasibility of taking the Olympic Flame on a short visit to Dublin. I discussed this possibility with LOCOG on 13 June and I know that work on this is ongoing.

Live Sites – large screens showing Games' events in public areas, located in Belfast and Derry

Pre games Training Camps and events

Major events associated with the London 2012 Festival and Cultural Olympiad.

Three high level strategic benefits arise for the North:

Increasing grass roots participation in sport, particularly by young people – encouraging the population as a whole to become more physically active;

Exploiting the opportunities for economic growth;

Promoting community engagement and achieving participation across all communities through the Games.

A number of initiatives are underway to ensure that we maximise the opportunities presented by the Games and deliver benefits for people in our communities. A number of 2012 related programmes and initiatives have been developed to do this.

Pre-Games Training

Over 200 countries will participate in the Games. Whilst 80 teams or countries have some level of agreement in place the majority of athletes do not yet know if they have qualified for the Games, and therefore cannot yet commit to a Pre-Games Training camp. The qualification process for many disciplines will not be completed until late spring 2012 and a lot of work is going on behind the scenes to attract athletes here in anticipation of their qualification. Let me detail this work for Members:

26 facilities, catering for 22 distinct sporting disciplines have been accredited for Olympic sports along with three 'hub' venues suitable for hosting Paralympic disciplines in the North.

A working group, chaired by SportNI, with representatives from DCAL, NI Tourist Board, Invest NI, Disability Sports NI and local government, is committed to attracting both training camps and events to the North of Ireland. The group has identified that the best chance of attracting visiting teams to the North of Ireland for the Games, is to work with the governing bodies of sports who have accredited facilities. SportNI has liaised with all Olympic/ Paralympic Governing Bodies and has identified those that are likely to be able to attract a Pre Games Training Camp or Event.

A wide range of marketing materials have been prepared including promotional DVDs and brochures under the theme 'Raising your Game in the Land of Legends'. These have been distributed to every International

Olympic Committee throughout the world. In addition, both DCAL and SportNI have given presentations in other countries promoting the North as a venue, including Beijing, Berlin, Rotterdam, Seville, Jordan, Palestine and London.

SportNI have provided funding to Sports Governing bodies to promote Pre-Games Training Camps and Events at a wide range of international sporting competitions, conferences and exhibitions. SportNI recently made a presentation on Pre-Games Training Camps to seventeen South American Ambassadors at an event in the House of Lords which was attended by the First Minister. SportNI was recently represented at the Sport Accord Conference attended by over 100 countries and held meetings with various International Governing Bodies to promote Pre-Games Training Camps and events.

A number of sensitive and confidential negotiations are ongoing and I hope to have positive news to announce once countries become aware of who has qualified for the Games. However, given the recent media interest it is important to describe the progress made to date in some detail:

Paralympic Sports

The World Boccia Championships will take place in August 2011 in the University of Ulster. This is a qualifying event for the Paralympic Games with over 35 countries and 400 athletes participating.

The North of Ireland will also host an International Wheelchair Basketball Pre-Games Tournament January-February 2012.

Badminton

SportNI have been working with the Ulster Branch of the Badminton Union of Ireland. I was delighted to announce yesterday that the Yonex Irish International Badminton Championships would take place in Lisburn in December 2011. This is a ranking tournament for those seeking to compete in the 2012 Games. It is anticipated that 20–25 potential Olympians, likely to be participating in London, will be participating in this event.

Gymnastics

A coaching clinic took place in Salto Gymnastics Centre in Lisburn at the end of May 2011

involving members of the development squad from England, Scotland and Wales. Two officials from China are soon to visit Salto for a familiarisation visit with a view to locating their Pre Games Training Camp here. Representatives from local Gymnastics will be attending International Events in London in the coming months. Relationships with existing contacts are being developed.

Boxing

SportNI are working with prominent boxing officials to attract teams to locate their Pre-Games Training Camps in the North. The boxing officials have had significant discussions with a number of teams in recent weeks with one high profile team giving a strong indication that they will locate their Pre-Games Training Camp in Belfast.

Fencing

The World Junior Fencing Championships were held at Jordanstown in 2009. A representative of the local Fencing Federation has met with several leading International coaches and administrators. SportNI representatives are working hard to secure a further Pre-Games Event that has the potential to lead to a Pre-Games Training Camp.

Table Tennis

SportNI and representatives of the Ulster Branch of Table Tennis Association have been in discussions with a number of bodies to attract teams to the North of Ireland. It is anticipated that two or more teams likely to qualify for the 2012 Games will come here for an event next spring

Athletics

SportNI and local Athletics Association representatives have met with representatives of a number of countries and progress has been made in attracting a Pre Olympic event and/or teams to locate here.

Judo

Representatives from the local Judo Federation will be attending the British Open where a variety of International coaches will be present. Initial contacts have been made with a number of African countries. It is hoped that existing contacts will be developed and a Pre Games Event will be secured.

Hockey

SportNI have had discussions with Lisnagarvey Hockey Club regarding attracting a team to play an exhibition game in Lisburn. The qualifying competition for 2012 has not yet been completed.

Sailing

The Royal Yacht Association is hoping to attract potential Olympians for some Pre-Games Training event prior to the 2012 Games.

Hosting such events offer immediate opportunities and longer term benefits. In the short-term having international athletes train and compete here provides a unique opportunity for our home grown talent and rising stars in sport to meet, greet, observe and possibly compete with world-class athletes and international sporting heroes at home. It is difficult to measure the inspirational impact in economic terms that such a once in a lifetime opportunity provides. However, it will inspire our young people to participate and achieve and bring the spirit of the Games to our communities.

For the visiting athletes, teams and countries, and their support network including coaches, competing in our local venues will provide them with first hand knowledge and experience of what we have to offer as well as a guaranteed warm welcome and the opportunity to visit iconic sites and see our outstanding scenery. It is anticipated that those positive experiences will be influential in the decision making process when the time comes for the respective athlete, team or country to make their selection for pre-games training in the lead up to the Games.

A number of other significant initiatives are underway to maximise the benefits to the North of Ireland from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

5 Star Disability Sports Challenge

Developed by Disability Sport NI, funded by my Department and supported by Department of EducationNI, the '5 Star Challenge' is increasing awareness amongst children about people with a disability. It promotes understanding that disability is not an obstacle to achieving physical and sporting success. Almost 20,000 children across our schools have participated so far with up to 30,000 planned by 2012.

Activ8

Developed by SportNI 'Activ8' is a sports participation campaign that encourages primary school age children (and their families and friends) to get active and stay healthy. Over 25,000 children have participated already with the potential to engage 91,000 young people across the North to choose sport, to get them involved in some kind of physical activity and to stay healthy. With the high incidence of suicide in disadvantaged parts of the North and not least problems with obesity both '5 Star Challenge' and 'Activ8' are key and will support implementation of DCAL's overarching Policy and the Strategy for Sport 'Sport Matters'.

Volunteering

Volunteer Now leads on volunteering, and my department provides funding for a Volunteering coordinator to secure benefits from the 2012 Games.

The aim has been to build on the capacity and capability of volunteering in the North in order to make a major contribution to the successful delivery of the events taking place here in the lead up to the Games in 2012 and beyond, including the World Police and Fire Games in 2013, which will require over 5,000 volunteers, and with further opportunities for volunteers as part of the Derry City of Culture celebrations, and the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow 2014.

Over 900 applicants from the North were interviewed recently by the London Organising Committee at Queens University. DCAL, in partnership with Volunteer Now, has developed a Volunteer Bursary Scheme that will provide up to £30,000 of financial support to local people from disadvantaged back grounds to enable them to go to London if selected.

Education and Skills

The Olympic and Paralympic Games provide an opportunity for our schoolchildren to get involved with the Games through the 'GetSet' programme. Almost 250 schools in the North are involved and benefiting from Olympic related education materials, access to competitions, resources and exchange opportunities with schools and young people in other countries across the world. Ten schools are in regular exchange with schools in Jordan. My Department fully supports this programme and is working with partners such as DENI,

British Council and a 2012 Sponsor to support an opportunity for those young people to meet their counterparts in Jordan. Young people will have the opportunity to forge international links, promote diversity and exchange cultural values.

Cultural Olympiad

Derry will host an opening event for the 2012 Festival on the 21 June 2012, in aid of Peace One Day, which will attract international attention in the build-up to the Games.

In Belfast the 'Land of Giants' programme will deliver a major outdoor event in June 2012 on the Titanic Slipways, and is one of four major outdoor celebrations to be held here and across England, Scotland and Wales in the run up to the Games.

Live Sites

Live Sites are large screens in public spaces which will screen major events and other content. These are designed to animate local public spaces, helping contribute to a shared sense of place. There is one already in Belfast and another will be installed in Derry by the autumn. These screens provide a tangible benefit and genuine legacy from the Olympic Games.

Torch Relay

I am delighted that my Department has secured the Olympic Torch Relay for four days next June. The torch will be hosted at overnight celebration sites at Portrush, Derry, Newry and Belfast and work is at an advanced stage to develop the final route. Eight thousand Torchbearers will be required overall with approximately 600 of these needed here in the North of Ireland. The public have been invited to nominate local heroes to carry the torch through their communities. I would stress that torch bearers are normal every day people and I encourage all of my colleagues to promote this opportunity to participate in the nomination process which closes on 29 June 2011.

I am confident that the torch relay will showcase our local stars, iconic sites, stunning land and our inspirational communities, to an international audience. This will demonstrate that we are a welcoming place to visit, to live, to learn and to do business with.

Business

My Department has been working closely with Invest NI, who lead on the business area of our plan to deliver economic and business benefits from the Olympics. To date more than 40 local businesses have secured Olympic contracts valued at over £30m with examples including:

Lagan Construction, who have won a contract to build a bridge right at the heart of the Olympic Park and will see thousands of people use the bridge during Games Time;

The McAvoy Group who have won a major contract to build modular buildings at the Basketball Arena;

Ulster Weavers Home Fashions Ltd have won a major licensing contract to produce official London 2012 kitchen textiles;

Macrete are supplying pre-cast concrete; and

Baronscourt Technologies have won a software contract with the Olympic Delivery Authority.

With over half of Olympic related contracts still available from the London Organising Committee many opportunities still exist for contracts in the areas of food, security, sports, and the arts, amongst others. InvestNI continue to work with key partners including local government to raise awareness of those opportunities through hosting business conferences, seminars, workshops and delivering training that will help grow the confidence of local businesses and encourage them to secure Olympic-related work.

Tourism

NITB lead on Tourism in respect of 2012 Olympics and my Department is working in partnership with DETI and NITB to maximise the opportunities to increase visitor numbers, bed nights and change perceptions of the North internationally. 2012 is being highlighted as the North's year of opportunity by DETI, and a 2012 Programme will include promotion of 'Titanic Built in Belfast' along with numerous other events, activities and initiatives which are currently being developed.

In Conclusion

As you may be aware recent media reports have expressed doubts as to whether the North will benefit from the Games. This Assembly paper aims to inform members of the wide range of

activity underway to secure benefits from the Games, and progress that is being made.

There is no doubt that we have challenges in respect of the Olympics. Not least of these is the fact that over £41m was diverted from lottery to fund the construction of the Olympic Park; no actual Olympic or Paralympic sporting events are taking place here during Games time; and the perceived distance from London and the Games which may be a barrier to some. However, my Department has forged excellent partnerships with government departments, their arms length bodies, local government, community organisations and important private sector organisations. These have enabled good progress to be made. With just over one year to go, I would encourage you all to work with my Department and the other partners already engaged in this process so that we fully exploit this unique and once in a lifetime opportunity for us all.

Written Answers

This section contains the written answers to questions tabled by Members.

The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 27 May 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Papal Visit to Northern Ireland

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) for an update on their Department's position on a Papal visit to Northern Ireland, in light of the documentation that was released by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which states that the deputy First Minister had mentioned the prospect of such a visit; and (ii) whether their Department has made any representations to Her Majesty's Government in relation to this matter.

(AQW 92/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Our Department has no position on a Papal visit and has made no representations in relation to this matter.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Elite Facilities Programme Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the level of financial support she intends to make available to those organisations that provided business cases for the Elite Facilities Programme funding.

(AQW 171/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The assessment of the Outline Business Cases for the Elite Facilities Programme (now known as the Major Facilities and Infrastructure Programme) broadly coincided with the announcement by the Executive of the draft Budget 2011-2015 and the fact that no capital funding had been made available for any of the applications under this Programme.

I am, of course, conscious of the level of commitment and work put in by organisations and individuals in developing their projects and in bringing all of the bids to the Outline Business Case stage.

However, in line with general and accepted practice for applications for capital funding to my Department and indeed to many other organisations within Government, expenses incurred in making a bid to the Programme were taken "at risk". It was made clear to applicants at various stages throughout the process that this was the case. Under such circumstances there is no financial support available for those organisations that provided business cases for the Elite Facilities Programme.

Department of Education

School Places for Children in Groomsport

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail any plans to allocate Year 1 school places to the three children in Groomsport who no longer have a school nearby.

(AQW 9/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): In accordance with normal procedures for the placement of pupils in primary schools, where a parent has failed to obtain a place for their child in a school of their choice, the relevant Education and Library Board then approaches the parents with a list of undersubscribed schools to seek a further selection for their child.

In the case of unplaced pupils in Groomsport seeking admission to P1 this September, the South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised the parents that over 100 places are available for allocation at two controlled primary schools within reasonable travelling distance of Groomsport at less than 15 minutes by road. As the distance from Groomsport to these schools is more than 2 miles, the children should be eligible for transport assistance.

Newbuilds for Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the criteria used by his Department in relation new builds for schools.

(AQW 14/11-15)

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

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

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

School Budgets

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how his Department intends to protect schools from having to make teachers redundant as a consequence of current school budgets.

(AQW 15/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A key priority in agreeing final budget allocations was to drive up efficiency, reduce bureaucracy and eliminate duplication in order to protect frontline services in the classroom as far as possible.

Schools have received their delegated budgets for 2011-12 and under the Local Management of Schools arrangements it will be for each school to decide on their spending priorities, including their teaching and non-teaching complements.

I intend to work with my Executive Colleagues in the months and years ahead to help alleviate the pressures on school budgets.

Teachers in Roman Catholic Schools

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of teachers from (i) a Protestant background; and (ii) a Roman Catholic background currently teaching in Roman Catholic schools.

(AQW 56/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 provides for employers to make annual monitoring returns to the Equality Commission about the composition of the workforce and those applying

for employment. However, this provision does not apply to recruitment as a teacher in a school. Therefore, employers of teachers in Catholic schools do not hold information on their religious background.

Newly Qualified Teachers

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what action he intends to take to ensure that newly qualified teachers are given preference over retired teachers to fill vacancies.

(AQW 57/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is imperative that newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are given every opportunity to fill vacancies, including those of a temporary nature, and to provide substitution cover.

My Department has issued guidance to all employing authorities and schools advising that the NI Substitute Teachers' Register (NISTR) must be used when booking all substitute teachers. NISTR allows schools to identify younger teachers seeking employment as substitutes and employing authorities to mount a more robust challenge where schools employ prematurely retired teachers. From September 2010 my Department has monitored the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers on a monthly basis. Schools and employing authorities are routinely challenged when such employment occurs, and an explanation sought as to why such teachers are being re-employed in preference to NQTs or other non-retired teachers.

The rules of the Teachers' Pension Scheme also militate against the employment of retired teachers, in that such teachers may suffer a reduction in pension as a result of earnings from employment as a teacher. My Department has strict controls in place to monitor such cases.

My Department has committed to explore the scope for introducing a flat rate of pay, based on the salary levels applicable to NQTs, for prematurely retired teachers who return to teaching. My Department also proposes to make amendments to the Common Funding Scheme for the Local Management of Schools (LMS) which will encourage schools to give preference to newly or recently qualified teachers. These include charging the school's delegated budget for the full cost of employing a prematurely retired teacher as a substitute; and reducing the ceiling for centre reimbursement of teacher substitution costs from point 4 to point 3 on the teachers' main pay scale. My officials are currently considering the responses to formal consultation on these changes, and on an Equality Impact Assessment, which closed on 11 May.

Furthermore, employing authorities are now required to bear the costs of granting premature retirement to teachers. Since 2008 there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of premature retirements, with no teacher granted premature retirement since April 2010. Over time, this will have the effect of reducing the stock of prematurely retired teachers from which schools can draw, and they will, therefore, need to look more frequently to newly qualified and other non-retired teachers when filling vacancies.

New School Buildings in the Hollywood Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail any plans his Department has to address the need for new school buildings in the Hollywood area.

(AQW 58/11-15)

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

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

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

You will appreciate, therefore, that I cannot provide you with an update on the potential new build projects for the Hollywood area at this time.

Admissions to P1 in the Bangor Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of appeals lodged with the South Eastern Education and Library Board for failure to gain admission to P1 in the Bangor area, in September 2011, broken down by each primary school.

(AQW 79/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of appeals together with (i) the number of applications: and (ii) the level of over subscription for P1 primary school places for September 2011 in each primary school in the Bangor area are as detailed in the table below. Further appeals may still be lodged.

School	Total Applications	Approved Admissions	Level of over-subscription	Appeals Lodged to date
Crawfordsburn Primary School	50	32	18	2
Ballyholme Primary School	128	90	38	5
Clandeboyne Primary School	23	78	*U	0
Bloomfield Primary School	65	58	7	0
Grange Park Primary School	80	52	28	2
Kilcooley Primary School	16	81	*U	0
Rathmore Primary School	101	79	22	1
Towerview Primary School	79	46	33	1
Kilmaine Primary School	122	87	35	4
Ballymagee Primary School	82	58	24	0
St Comgall's Primary School	45	41	4	0
St Malachy's Primary School	51	60	*U	0
Bangor Central Primary School	100	87	13	1

*U = undersubscribed

Source: South Eastern Education and Library Board

The total level of over subscription in the Bangor area exceeds the number of vacant places in the three under subscribed schools because a child's application can be considered by more than one school thus one child can be counted several times. Additionally applications are received for children from outside the Bangor area. There are sufficient places in the Bangor area to provide for the number of applicants.

Over-Subscription for P1 Primary School Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of applications; and (ii) the level of over-subscription for P1 primary school places for September 2011 in each primary school in the Bangor area.

(AQW 81/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of appeals together with (i) the number of applications: and (ii) the level of over subscription for P1 primary school places for September 2011 in each primary school in the Bangor area are as detailed in the table below. Further appeals may still be lodged.

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Towerview Primary School	79	46	33	1
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Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Wind Farms

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of electricity produced by wind farms in each of the last five years.

(AQW 35/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The amount of electricity generated by onshore wind¹ since 2006/07 is detailed below, together with the total electricity generated from renewable sources over the same period:

	Electricity generated from onshore wind (GWh ²)	Total electricity generated from renewable sources (GWh)
2010/11	675.4	745.4
2009/10	709.8	754.9
2008/09	583.9	596.6
2007/08	431.7	441

	Electricity generated from onshore wind (GWh²)	Total electricity generated from renewable sources (GWh)
2006/07	335	345.2

Source: NIE

Notes:

- ¹ Onshore wind figure includes electricity generated by wind farms and individual wind turbines.
- ² GWh – Gigawatt hour. One gigawatt equals one thousand megawatts

Presbyterian Mutual Society

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the lessons learned and the changes implemented as a result of the Treasury Select Committee's investigation into the Presbyterian Mutual Society.

(AQW 51/11-15)

Mrs Foster: HM Treasury in collaboration with the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment initiated a review of the legislative framework for both credit unions and industrial and provident societies in Northern Ireland in 2009. In relation to learning lessons from the PMS experience, its Report concluded that the main lesson to be learned related to transparency, that an institution offering shares must tell its members the nature of their investment and that their capital will be at risk; it also concluded that there were no compelling reasons for Northern Ireland's integration into a United Kingdom wide framework for IPS's.

My Department will take forward legislative proposals which will update the current Northern Ireland framework in line with Great Britain, including in relation to improving corporate governance and disclosure, during the mandate of the current Assembly.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Bonus Payments

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to outline his Department's policy on bonus payments to public service employees; and (ii) whether this policy has been followed by all Departments, including the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Invest NI.

(AQW 2/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Executive's policy on bonus payments/performance pay for senior officials in the public sector in Northern Ireland is that they should not be awarded unless there is a clear contractual entitlement to such an award. All departments are required to follow this approach for all public sector staff groups that are subject to Government Pay Policy.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Health of Working-Class Communities

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any plans his Department has to improve the health of working-class communities.

(AQW 7/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Health and wellbeing are influenced by a range of complex and inter-related socio-economic and environmental influences on daily life, as well as factors such as age, sex, hereditary factors and lifestyle. Evidence shows that

the more disadvantaged people's social and economic circumstances, the worse their health status is likely to be.

Improving population health and wellbeing, and in particular reducing health inequalities – the gap in health status between more affluent and disadvantaged communities and population groups - requires long term sustained and collective effort across government and all sectors, and is a major challenge.

I will bring forward plans to ensure that improving health and reducing health inequalities will be a key priority for my department and its agencies.

Counselling Service for Stroke Victims

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are any plans to introduce a dedicated counselling service for stroke victims.

(AQW 20/11-15)

Mr Poots: I understand that to date a number of service developments have been taken forward by the Regional Stroke Implementation Group which was established to take forward and to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Stroke Strategy.

These developments, across all Health and Social Care Trusts, include the establishment of Early Supported Discharge (ESD) teams with a recognised specialist stroke coordinator available to help coordinate all aspects of the discharge process. Counselling is part of the follow up care in the community and is the responsibility of the ESD and community stroke teams. I am advised that the provision of improved psychological support remains one of their priorities subject to the availability of the required investment.

Music Therapy Services

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to review the decision to cut music therapy services to Clifton Special School, Bangor.

(AQW 26/11-15)

Mr Poots: Music therapy services were provided at Clifton Special School in Bangor through the Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust's (NIMTT) "Arioso" project. That project was supported initially by the Children's Fund, established by the NI Executive, from April 2003 to March 2008. From April 2008 my Department used its own funds to extend those ex-Children's Fund projects which pursued health and safety care activity until March 2011.

Projects were advised that they would be expected to move to a position of self-sustainability over this extended funding period, or secure an alternative funder, as it would be prudent for them to plan ahead on the assumption that funding would not be available beyond March 2011.

Unfortunately, due to other pressures and priorities on my budget I am no longer in a position to provide funding for this project directly.

However, responsibility for the commissioning of services, including music therapy, rests with the Health and Social Care Board in Northern Ireland and, therefore, any issues relating to funding should be directed to the Board.

Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to progress the provisions of the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(AQW 30/11-15)

Mr Poots: In the first instance I wish to make it clear that I am committed to improving services for those with autism and for their families and carers.

The Autism Act received Royal Assent on 9 May. Among other things, the Act requires my Department to prepare an autism strategy in consultation with other Departments and officials are now commencing discussions as to how this can best be progressed within the timescale set out in the Act.

S2 Certificate Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, under the S2 certificate arrangements, (i) how many people not resident in Northern Ireland received non-emergency treatment here in each of the last five years; (ii) how many of these non-residents were residents of the Republic of Ireland; (iii) what was the cost of the treatment provided to Republic of Ireland residents; and (iv) how much the Republic of Ireland reimbursed the Health Service for these treatments.

(AQW 46/11-15)

Mr Poots: The financial arrangements surrounding S2 certificates are handled centrally by the Department of Work and Pensions on behalf of the UK. All payments and refunds relating to the S2 certificate are made to a central UK budget. S2 figures are not available for each composite part of the UK.

Frontier Workers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many 'frontier workers' resident in the Republic of Ireland and working in Northern Ireland are (i) registered with a Northern Ireland GP; and (ii) eligible to receive treatment on the Health Service.

(AQW 47/11-15)

Mr Poots: As of 20th May 2011 there are 1503 frontier workers resident in the Republic of Ireland and working in Northern Ireland who have been issued with a medical card in Northern Ireland. Anyone who qualifies as a frontier worker under the provision of EU social security legislation is entitled to the full range of health services in Northern Ireland on the same basis as any Northern Ireland resident.

Physiotherapist to Patient Ratio

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the minimum safety standard in relation to physiotherapist to patient ratio in a rehabilitation ward; and (ii) the current level of qualified physiotherapy staff in each rehabilitation unit in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 55/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) Currently there are no minimum safety standards in relation to physiotherapist to patient ratio in a rehabilitation ward.

(ii) The qualified physiotherapy staff in each rehabilitation unit in the Northern HSC Trust is:

Whiteabbey	4.1 WTE (whole time equivalents)
Mid-Ulster	2.5 WTE
Causeway	2.2 WTE

Neurologists

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many neurologists are currently working within the Foyle constituency; (ii) whether these neurologists are based in Altnagelvin Hospital; and (iii) what is the average waiting time for an appointment with a neurologist in this area.

(AQW 64/11-15)

Mr Poots:

i Information on staff working within Northern Ireland Health & Social Care is not available by constituency.

- ii. There are 2 (2.0 Whole-Time Equivalent) Neurologists employed at Altnagelvin Hospital as at May 2011. (Source: Western HSC Trust)
- iii. The median waiting time-band for a first appointment in Neurology at Altnagelvin Hospital at the 31st December 2010, the most recent date for which information is available, was the 9-13 week time-band. (Source: Departmental Return CH3 Parts 1 and 2)

Free Health Service Care

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether only those people who are entitled to free Health Service care receive it.

(AQW 68/11-15)

Mr Poots: Entitlement to publicly funded health care services in Northern Ireland is generally based on being ordinarily resident here. There are exceptions to this including emergency treatment for non-UK residents in an A&E Department, residents of countries with which the UK has a reciprocal agreement, and frontier workers.

There are systems in place to ensure medical cards are only issued to those with an entitlement and residency checks are also carried out on patients presenting at hospitals for treatment. As with any system there is the potential for abuse however all possible steps are taken to avoid this and the Counter Fraud and Probity Services within the Business Services Organisation take action wherever possible on identified cases of fraud.

Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon in the Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many new referrals have had appointments with a Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon in the Western Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.

(AQW 75/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of new outpatient attendances with a Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon in the Western Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years is outlined in the table below:

Year	No. of new outpatient attendances
2008/09	1,274
2009/10	1,436
2010/11	1,398

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Music Therapy Services

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to review the decision to cut music therapy services for children with severe learning disabilities.

(AQW 76/11-15)

Mr Poots: Music therapy services for children with severe learning disabilities have been provided by the Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust's (NIMTT) "Arioso" project. That project was initially supported through the Children's Fund, established by the NI Executive, from April 2003 to March 2008. From April 2008 my Department used its own funds to extend those ex-Children's Fund projects which pursued health and safety care activity until March 2011.

Projects were advised that they would be expected to move to a position of self-sustainability over this extended funding period, or secure an alternative funder, as it would be prudent for them to plan ahead on the assumption that funding would not be available beyond March 2011.

Unfortunately, due to other pressures and priorities on my budget I am no longer in a position to provide funding for this project directly.

However, responsibility for the commissioning of services, including music therapy, rests with the Health and Social Care Board in Northern Ireland and, therefore, any issues relating to funding should be directed to the Board.

Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust's Arioso Project is a regional project and responsibility for its funding lies with the Health and Social Care Board in Northern Ireland and therefore any issues relating to funding should be directed to the Board.

All projects were advised that given the increasing pressures on public expenditure they would be expected to move to a position of self-sustainability, or secure an alternative funder.

Dental Surgeries

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to repeal the legislation that was introduced by the previous Minister which requires dental surgeries to register as independent hospitals with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority on a form which is not designed for use by small businesses; and if he will engage with the relevant dental authorities and organisations on this issue.

(AQW 125/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have no plans to repeal legislation, which from 1 April 2011 provides for the regulation of all dental establishments delivering private dental care, including orthodontics. This legislation will provide assurance to the public, through regular inspection and monitoring by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) that private dental treatment is delivered to a minimum standard.

The registration of private dental practices within the classification of "independent hospital" is a legislative mechanism to facilitate regulation of the sector, but does not mean that they are treated, in terms of regulation and inspection, as hospitals. They are regulated and inspected with respect to the minimum standards for dental services set by the Department.

The registration application procedure, including documentation, is a matter for the RQIA and I understand that application forms and guidance on completion have been issued to all relevant practices.

I am happy to engage with dental authorities and organisations on any issues of concern.

Department of Justice

Super-Injunctions

Mr Allister asked Minister of Justice how many super-injunctions have been (i) sought; and (ii) granted through applications to the High Court of Justice in each year since 2007, up to and including the date of answer.

(AQW 5/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The information as requested is not available. There is no legal definition of the term "super injunction" and it is therefore not possible to determine the number of injunctions that could be classified as 'super injunctions'.

Case Number 11/000893

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total costs and expenses, including accommodation and travel, for case number 11/000893 in relation to defendant Kehere Arija, broken down by the (i) Public Prosecution Service; (ii) defence; (iii) jury; (iv) PSNI; and (v) interpreters.

(AQW 17/11-15)

Mr Ford: Some of the costs associated with case number 11/000893 are not yet known and not all agencies hold cost information at case level.

The table below sets out the estimated costs associated with case number 11/000893 where available and includes all Magistrates' Court and Crown Court appearances.

ESTIMATED COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH CASE NUMBER 11/000893

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
PPS Prosecution ¹	£1,500
Defence (Legal Aid Costs)	£10,205
Jury	£577
PSNI Prosecution ²	£1,210
Interpreters ³	£3,961
Total	£17,453

- 1 The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) note it is not possible to produce accurate costings for particular decisions since the amount of time required to take individual decisions will vary on a range of factors including the complexity of the case and extent of case papers. Fees paid to prosecuting counsel and witness expenses are included in the estimated total PPS case costs.
- 2 The PSNI costs are based on court attendance by the investigating officer.
- 3 This represents court interpreter costs and includes accommodation and travel.

Prisoner: Devidas Paliutis

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice if he can confirm (i) that the erroneously released prisoner Devidas Palautis has been apprehended; (ii) when and where he was apprehended; and (iii) where he is being held at present.

(AQW 18/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) Devidas Paliutis was apprehended in the Republic of Ireland on 29 April.
- (ii) He was charged by the Garda Síochána, in relation to the murder of Dmytro Grysunov in Killeel on 23rd April.
- (iii) Mr Paliutis appeared before the Criminal Court of Justice in Dublin on 5 May 2011, and currently remains in custody in the Republic of Ireland.

Mobile Phones for Community Police Officers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) which District Policing Partnerships have provided mobile phones to Community Police Officers; (ii) the costs incurred in supplying these phones and the call charges to date; and (iii) for his assessment of the effectiveness of this initiative.

(AQW 21/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The Northern Ireland Policing Board has confirmed that the following District Policing Partnerships (DPPs) provided mobile phones to Community Police Officers.
- Armagh DPP provided Community Police Officers with six mobile phones in the financial year 2008/09.
 - Craigavon DPP provided four mobile phones to Community Police Officers in the financial year 2009/10.
- (ii) **Armagh DPP** purchased six phones at a total cost of £200.00 with no contribution to the running costs or call charges thereafter.
- Craigavon DPP** purchased four pay-as-you-go phones at a total cost of £98.92. There were no additional costs thereafter.
- (iii) DPPs and the police locally report that the community contact numbers have increased accessibility of Community Police Officers within the districts concerned. This is in line with the PSNI Policing With the Community Strategy 2020, which identifies the need to increase the amount of time spent by officers on patrol by increased use of mobile data devices increasing visibility and accessibility.

Attorney General for Northern Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland's intention to expand his remit by acquiring supervision powers for the Director of Public Prosecutions. **(AQW 22/11-15)**

Mr Ford: Arrangements for governance of the Public Prosecution Service are founded on the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 and came into effect on the devolution of justice matters. Some concerns have been expressed about those arrangements from a number of sources, and the First Minister, deputy First Minister, Attorney General and I have therefore agreed that the Department of Justice will lead a consultation on governance/accountability arrangements for the Public Prosecution Service. The consultation will consider options for the future and invite views.

Posts of Lord Chief Justice, the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and the Director of Public Prosecutions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the impact on his commitment to a shared future if the posts of Lord Chief Justice, the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and the Director of Public Prosecutions are held by people exclusively from one tradition. **(AQW 24/11-15)**

Mr Ford: Appointment on merit is fundamental for all positions within the justice system. The perceived background of any person within the justice system has no bearing on my commitment, and that of my Department, to building a shared future for all the people of Northern Ireland.

Appointment of a Director of Public Prosecutions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice if he has made any representations to the Attorney General for Northern Ireland about the delay in the appointment of a Director of Public Prosecutions. **(AQW 38/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The Attorney General for Northern Ireland is responsible for appointing the Director of Public Prosecutions. I have not made any representations to him concerning the appointment process.

Roman Catholic Church: Child Abuse Cases

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what representations he has made, or intends to make, to the Roman Catholic Church highlighting that when dealing with child abuse cases, responsibility lies with

the PSNI and does not belong 'in the first place to bishops' as stated in a recent letter issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and circulated to Roman Catholic clergy.

(AQW 53/11-15)

Mr Ford: None. Under the Criminal Law Act (NI) 1967 anyone with information about the commission of a crime such as child abuse has a duty to bring this to the attention of the Police Service Northern Ireland.

Department for Regional Development

Road Surfacing Programmes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any new road surfacing programmes identified for the (i) Donaghadee; and (ii) Bangor areas in this financial year.

(AQW 8/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are currently no road resurfacing schemes planned for Donaghadee in this financial year, but that a provisional programme of carriageway and footway resurfacing schemes, as outlined below, has been developed in anticipation of the finalisation of financial allocations.

Carriageway and Footway composite resurfacing schemes:

- Demesne Road, Holywood;
- Brook Street, Holywood;
- Gransha Road, Bangor – Ring Road to Cranley Road;
- Maryville Road, Bangor;
- Maryville Park, Bangor;
- Ballymacconnell Road South, Bangor; and
- Perry Road, Bangor – Ballycrochan Road to Briarwood Drive.

Footway resurfacing schemes:

- Kilmaine Road, Bangor;
- Innisfayle Drive, Bangor; and
- Seahill Road, Craigavad A2 to Craigowen Road.

Road Schemes

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all the road schemes which have received funding for the development of plans or for construction, as a result of Ministerial direction, since 1998.

(AQW 10/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is not aware of any major road schemes which have received funding for the development of plans or for construction, as a result of Ministerial direction, since 1998.

Dualling of the A26 Between Ballymena and Ballymoney

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the dualling of the A26 between Ballymena and Ballymoney.

(AQW 13/11-15)

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

My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Investment Delivery Plan (IDP) for Roads, which was published in 2008, identifies the dualling of the A26 between Glarryford and the A44 Drones Road junction during the plan period 2008 – 2018.

Unfortunately, the funding levels within the current budget do not allow for construction to start before 2014/15 at the earliest.

The timing of delivery will be dependent on the allocation of finances beyond the Budget 2011-15 period. However, in the meantime, Roads Service will continue to develop the scheme through the normal statutory processes.

Abbey Road, Millisle

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to resurface the Abbey Road, Millisle.

(AQW 29/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it plans to carry out a resurfacing scheme on the urban section of Abbey Road, Millisle, during the current financial year.

On-street Car Parking

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the introduction of on-street car parking for town centres.

(AQW 31/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In response to the potential impact on retail trade, I intend to review the policy of introducing new on-street parking charges in towns throughout Northern Ireland.

A2 Upgrade Project in East Antrim

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to review his Department's spending plans and whether the A2 upgrade project in East Antrim will be a priority.

(AQW 32/11-15)

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

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

Car Parking Charges

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development if he intends to implement car parking charges in towns.

(AQW 72/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In response to the potential impact on retail trade, I intend to review the policy of introducing new on-street parking charges in towns throughout Northern Ireland.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 5315/11, in relation to his Department's response to each of the five Freedom of Information requests, how many, in the first

instance, included the draft letter prepared by the former Permanent Secretary, Paul Priestly, for Mr Peter Dixon regarding the Public Accounts Committee hearings of 1 July 2010.

(AQW 117/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Four of my Department's responses to the Freedom of Information requests referred to, included a copy of the draft letter prepared by the former Permanent Secretary, Mr Paul Priestly, for Mr Peter Dixon regarding the Public Accounts Committee hearings of 1 July 2010.

Coleraine to Londonderry Railway Line

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to bring forward the date of 2014 for the relay of the Coleraine to Londonderry railway line, given that the new rolling stock will be in service from 2011.

(AQW 122/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The original plans for the Coleraine to Londonderry Track relay project would have resulted in the completion of the project by 2013 to coincide with the introduction to service of all 20 new trains. The budget, approved by the Executive, makes provision for the commencement of the track relay in 2014. This reflects capital availability of only £20m in year 4 of the budget period. Given the budget outcome, it is not possible to start the work earlier than 2014.

Translink are currently identifying interim measures to be undertaken to ensure the continued running and safety of the line up until 2014. Funding has been provided for this purpose.

Department for Social Development

Pensioners' Bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline when the pensioners' bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor, will be renovated.

(AQW 6/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The pensioners' bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate had initially been programmed for a Multi Element Improvement scheme that would have seen significant work undertaken to upgrade homes in the area. However due to pressures across the housing budget, this scheme, along with all other Multi Element Improvement schemes, are now being reviewed.

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

Flats in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development when he intends to complete the refurbishment of the flats in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor, as part of the Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme.

(AQW 28/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I understand that 17 of the 24 flats in question are currently vacant and have become increasingly hard to let. These vacant properties are adding to the blight in the surrounding area and are now attracting an element of those who would use them for anti social behaviour.

I have asked a senior official within Housing Division to meet with the Housing Executive as a matter of urgency to identify how the future of these flats can be addressed taking account of the significant concerns already expressed by the community and I will be happy to update the member once that way forward has been identified.

New Social Housing

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what new social housing the Housing Executive intends to provide over the next four years.

(AQW 33/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The recent budget settlement will provide for approximately 6,000 new homes over the next four years. In addition to this, I want to look at how we can make our budget go even further, for example through more collaborative working and procurement.

A draft three year programme outlining where this housing could be delivered over the next three years will be published shortly and I will advise the member of that when available.

Minimum Price for a Unit of Alcohol

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development whether he plans to introduce legislation to set a minimum price for a unit of alcohol.

(AQW 39/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A joint DSD/DHSSPS consultation document on the minimum pricing of alcohol was published on 7 March. In addition to seeking views on the introduction of a minimum price for a unit of alcohol, the consultation also seeks views on other possible pricing interventions including banning below cost selling and VAT and duty rises. The consultation ends on 26 June after which time I will discuss the outcome with the Health Minister before agreeing the way forward.

Campsie Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many properties were part of the Campsie Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme; (ii) whether any complaints about the Scheme were received from residents; (iii) whether the quality of the work which was carried out on the Campsie Scheme has been evaluated; and (iv) how much Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme funding has been allocated to the Omagh Group Repair Scheme in each of the last three years.

(AQW 50/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assume the Member is referring to the Omagh Group Repair scheme. In relation to:-

- (i) 47 properties at Campsie Avenue and Campsie Crescent, Omagh were included in the Omagh Group Repair scheme.
- (ii) No formal complaints were received under the Housing Executive's formal complaints procedure. However, 24 owners raised issues with the Housing Executive including workmanship, length of time to complete the works and alleged damage caused by the contractor to their property.
- (iii) All matters raised were investigated and responses given to the owners of the properties concerned. During the course of the scheme the work was checked by the Housing Executive's Clerk of Works and by the Contract Administrator (an external Consultant who had been appointed by the Housing Executive) and Practical Completion Certificates were issued in 2009. Building Control officers also inspected the work. Three owners however denied access to the Technical Officers to inspect the work at the end of the six month defects period and these properties are currently the subject of legal action initiated by the owners against the contractor, the consultant and the Housing Executive.
- (iv) The Omagh Group Repair Scheme was not financed from Neighbourhood Renewal Area funding. Funding for the scheme totalling £350,000 in 2008/09 and £69,000 in 2009/10 was provided by the Housing Executive and no payments were made on this scheme during 2010/11.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 3 June 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Protocols and Guidance: OFMDFM

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

(AQW 112/11-15)

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

Planning Appeals Commission

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

(AQW 183/11-15)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Public Inquiries are not conducted for planning appeals.

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

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

Appeals

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

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

Major Proposals (Article 31)

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

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

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

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

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

Victims and Survivors Service

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

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

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Botulism

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

(AQW 119/11-15)

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

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

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

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

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

Agrifood Sector

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

(AQW 120/11-15)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Farm Testing

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

(AQW 146/11-15)

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

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

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

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

Sheep Electronic Identification Tags

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

(AQW 237/11-15)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Common Agricultural Policy Reform

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

(AQW 242/11-15)

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

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Gaelic Games Tourism

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

(AQW 42/11-15)

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

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

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

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

External Consultants

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

(AQW 157/11-15)

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

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

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

Graduates with a Discipline in Arts and Humanities

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

(AQW 168/11-15)

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

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

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

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

Yachting

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

(AQW 170/11-15)

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

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

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

Libraries NI: Expenditure

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

(AQW 216/11-15)

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

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

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

Libraries NI: Closures

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

(AQW 217/11-15)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Libraries NI: Consultation

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

(AQW 218/11-15)

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

Somme Heritage Association

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

(AQW 277/11-15)

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

Sick Leave

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

(AQW 337/11-15)

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

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

Department of Education

Ballymoney High School: Newbuild

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

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

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

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

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

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

Castle Tower Special School, Ballymena: Newbuild

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

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

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

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

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

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

Academic Selection

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

(AQW 40/11-15)

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

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

Preparatory Schools: Funding

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

(AQW 74/11-15)

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

Primary School Admission: Appeals

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

(AQW 78/11-15)

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

Children with a Disability: Support

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

(AQW 138/11-15)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Educational Underachievement

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

(AQW 148/11-15)

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

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

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

External Consultants

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

(AQW 163/11-15)

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

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

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

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

North Down Area: Capital Funding for Schools

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

(AQW 175/11-15)

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

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

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

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

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

Schools Estate

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

(AQW 184/11-15)

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

Students with Special Needs: Summer Schemes

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

(AQW 189/11-15)

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

Academic Selection

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

(AQW 206/11-15)

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

Strabane Academy: Newbuild

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

(AQW 210/11-15)

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

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

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

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

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

Ballymote Area of Downpatrick: Youth Services

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

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

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

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

Devenish College in Fermanagh

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

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

Department for Employment and Learning

Institutions Teaching English to Foreign Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

Educational Underachievement

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

(AQW 27/11-15)

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

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

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

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

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

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his Department's position on the proposed merger of Stranmillis College and Queen's University, Belfast.

(AQW 88/11-15)

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

Tuition Fees

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his Department's position on the increase in tuition fees.

(AQW 167/11-15)

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

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

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

North West Regional College

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

(AQW 173/11-15)

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

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

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

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

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI: CEO

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

(AQW 3/11-15)

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

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

Ballycastle: Hotel Group Investment

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

(AQW 34/11-15)

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

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

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

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and Gaelic Games

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

(AQW 36/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

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

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

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

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

Gaelic Games

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

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

Geothermal Energy Products

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

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

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

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

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

Credit Unions

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

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

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

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

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

(AQW 67/11-15)

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

EU Legislation

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

(AQW 121/11-15)

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

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

Banbridge and Craigavon: Promoting as Tourist Destinations

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

(AQW 149/11-15)

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

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

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

Farm Accidents

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

(AQW 153/11-15)

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

Department of the Environment

Single-Use Carrier Bags

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

(AQW 41/11-15)

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

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

Rose Energy's Incinerator at Glenavy

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

(AQW 45/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) and (ii)

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

As required by the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 1999 the receipt of the further environmental information was advertised in the press on 31 March and 1 April 2011. In addition, neighbours within a 1km radius of both application sites were re-notified

by letter on 24 March 2011. There was a 4 week period for public comment on the further environmental information and that period has now ended. In addition, a re-consultation exercise was also carried out with a number of consultees on 24 March 2011. That re-consultation exercise in respect of both applications is currently ongoing. A number of detailed third party objection submissions have also recently been received by the Department and planning officials are currently in the process of carrying out a further re-consultation exercise with a number of the consultees on the specific matters contained in those objections.

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

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

Tax Discs Processed by Telephone

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

(AQW 77/11-15)

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

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

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

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

Fly-Posting

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

(AQW 102/11-15)

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

Anyone benefitting from displaying an advertisement illegally is already guilty of an offence under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 and can be fined up to a maximum of £2,500. At present however, there is a defence for such a person, namely where he/she proves that the advertisement was displayed without his/her knowledge or consent. This makes it very difficult to secure a conviction. The 2011 Act therefore amends the statutory defence so that a person has to prove that the advertisement was displayed without his/her knowledge; or that he/she either took all reasonable steps to prevent the display, or subsequently to secure its removal. This change will make it much less easy for beneficiaries of fly-posting to escape conviction, as they will need to prove that they did everything reasonably possible to ensure that any advertisement they benefit from is not displayed illegally.

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

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

Motorcyclists: Safety

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

(AQW 123/11-15)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Local Council Staff

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

(AQW 136/11-15)

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

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

2009/2010 DISTRICT COUNCIL STAFF FIGURES

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

Council	Full time staff	Part time staff
Total	8,741	2,811

Local Government: Reform

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

(AQW 145/11-15)

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

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

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

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

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

Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Review

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

(AQW 226/11-15)

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

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

Department of Finance and Personnel

Invest NI: CEO

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

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

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

Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill

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

(AQW 23/11-15)

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

Registering a Newborn Child

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

(AQW 80/11-15)

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

Registering a Newborn Child

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

(AQW 82/11-15)

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

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Transferring Orthopaedic Consultants and Nurses

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

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

(AQW 25/11-15)

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

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

Musgrave Park Hospital: Orthopaedic Consultant

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

(AQW 48/11-15)

Mr Poots:

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

Orthopaedic Patients

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

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

(AQW 49/11-15)

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

They have advised me that:

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

Republic of Ireland Residents Receiving Hospital Care in Northern Ireland

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

(AQW 69/11-15)

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

(I) PRIVATE FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

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

(II) CONTRACT ARRANGEMENTS

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

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

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

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

Dental Practices

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

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

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

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

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

North Down Area: Mental Health Provision

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

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

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

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

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

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

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

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

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

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

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

George Sloan Adult Centre, Ballymena

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

(AQW 106/11-15)

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

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

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

Omagh: Local Enhanced Hospital

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

(AQW 107/11-15)

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

Children with Chronic Orthopaedic Problems

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

(AQW 111/11-15)

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

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

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

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

Source: Western HSC Trust

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

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

Source: Western HSC Trust

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

Antrim Area Hospital: Accident and Emergency Department

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

(AQW 118/11-15)

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

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

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

Accident and Emergency Department: Trolley Waits

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

(AQW 130/11-15)

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

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

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

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

Mid-Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt

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

(AQW 137/11-15)

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

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

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

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

Enniskillen: New Hospital

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

(AQW 172/11-15)

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

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

Enniskillen: New Hospital

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

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

(AQW 195/11-15)

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

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

S2 Certificate Arrangements

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

(AQW 293/11-15)

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

Department of Justice

Prisoner Assessment Unit, Belfast

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

(AQW 19/11-15)

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

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

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

Solicitors Protest Against Fees

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

(AQW 98/11-15)

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

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

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

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

Sex Offender

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

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

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

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

I cannot provide details of individual cases.

Colombia Three

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

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

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

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

Convictions for Trespassing and Illegal Entry to a Quarry

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

(AQW 161/11-15)

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

Department for Regional Development

New Footpath Schemes

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

(AQW 59/11-15)

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

Ballymacconnell Road South in Bangor: Traffic-calming Measures

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

(AQW 60/11-15)

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

Ashfield Area of Donaghadee: Old Footpaths

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

(AQW 61/11-15)

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

A26 between Glarryford and the Frosses/Drones Road Junction

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

(AQW 66/11-15)

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

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

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

A5 Project

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

(AQW 70/11-15)

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

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

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

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

Northern Ireland Water

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

(AQW 73/11-15)

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

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

Northern Ireland Water: Customers

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

(AQW 83/11-15)

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

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

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

Lough Cowey, Portaferry

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

(AQW 84/11-15)

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

Cannyreagh Road in Donaghadee

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

(AQW 87/11-15)

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

Kilcooley Estate, Bangor: Footpath Resurfacing Scheme

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

(AQW 89/11-15)

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

Loughview Village, Carrickfergus

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

(AQW 90/11-15)

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

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

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

A2 Upgrade

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

(AQW 91/11-15)

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

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

Access for People with Disabilities at Bus and Railway Stations

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

(AQW 100/11-15)

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

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

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

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

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

(AQW 101/11-15)

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

Ballynahinch: Wastewater Treatment Works

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

(AQW 108/11-15)

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

Annual Maintenance Cost of a Dual Carriageway Elevated Crossing

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

(AQW 128/11-15)

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

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

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

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

Door-to-Door Transport Service

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

(AQW 141/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

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

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

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

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

Door-to-Door Transport Service

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

(AQW 143/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

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

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

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

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

North Down: Salt and Grit Stock

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

(AQW 152/11-15)

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

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

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

(AQW 182/11-15)

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

Department for Social Development

Dunclug area of Ballymena

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

(AQW 43/11-15)

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

Ballyree Drive Area in Bloomfield Estate, Bangor

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

(AQW 85/11-15)

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

Rathgill Park, Bangor: Flats

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

(AQW 86/11-15)

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

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

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

Fair Rents Officer

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

(AQW 126/11-15)

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

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

Rent Control applies to:

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

Extreme Weather Conditions

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

(AQW 133/11-15)

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

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

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

Kilcooley Estate in Bangor

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

(AQW 140/11-15)

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

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

Bangor Social Security Office

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

(AQW 169/11-15)

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

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

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

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 10 June 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Staff Who Develop a Disability

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail, under the Disability Discrimination Act (NI) 1995, the support and enhancements that employers are required to provide for staff who develop a disability, including the assistance that must be offered in the workplace.

(AQW 135/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): We would refer you to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's Disability Code of Practice, Employment and Occupation (NIA 167/03) which came into effect on 13 June 2006. A copy of the Code can be found at:

<http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/DisEmploymentCOP05F.pdf>

This Code of Practice deals with the duties under Part II of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which is based on the principle that disabled people should not be discriminated against in employment or when seeking employment.

Northern Ireland Friends of Israel

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much funding their Department has allocated to Northern Ireland Friends of Israel in each of the last three years.

(AQW 154/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This organisation has not received any funding from OFMDFM.

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the cost to their Department of engaging external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 155/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The table below details the cost to OFMDFM of engaging external consultants in each financial year since May 2007. These figures include external consultancy incurred by the Department's Arms Length Bodies.

OFMDFM EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY EXPENDITURE

	2007/08 (£'000s)	2008/09 (£'000s)	2009/10 (£'000s)	2010/11* (£'000s)
Core Department	2,760	805	1,700	1,078
Arms Length Bodies	3,935	1,670	1,979	2,109

	2007/08 (£'000s)	2008/09 (£'000s)	2009/10 (£'000s)	2010/11* (£'000s)
Total	6,695	2,475	3,679	3,187

* 2010/11 External consultancy figures are draft at this stage pending the completion of the audit of OFMDFM and its Arms Length Bodies' Financial Statements.

Racial Equality Forum

Ms Lo asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Racial Equality Forum.
(AQW 219/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Following a meeting of the Racial Equality Forum in November 2009, it was agreed that a Racial Equality Panel should be established to take forward the business of the wider Forum, with the Forum meeting once a year.

The Panel has now met on three occasions, most recently on 17 May, with the next meeting scheduled for 8 September. As a priority, the Panel is currently considering the revision of the Racial Equality Strategy 2005-2010 and members have submitted comments and amendments for discussion. It is anticipated that the Panel's work on the strategy will continue over the summer with a view to presenting a draft document to a meeting of the Racial Equality Forum for consideration in the autumn.

The Forum also agreed that a thematic sub-group should be established to consider immigration-related issues within the local context. This sub-group, chaired by the Law Centre (NI), has met on five occasions, most recently on 14 April. The Thematic Sub-Group on Migrant Workers, led by DEL, also continues its work.

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mr McDevitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they intend to publish all the responses that were received on the consultation on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.
(AQO 6/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have agreed to forward the responses to the cross-party working group which we are establishing to take forward development of the Programme. We will provide responses to the OFMDFM Committee and we will publish all responses on the Department's website in due course.

We were heartened by the interest, effort and engagement of all those who took part in the consultation and we want to give the views of all those people due consideration as we look at how we will build on and strengthen the document.

Minister of Justice

Mr McMullan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had with other political parties in relation to the appointment of a Minister of Justice in May 2012.
(AQO 7/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This issue was discussed with party leaders during a meeting prior to the running of d'Hondt.

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation

Mr Givan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in relation to the establishment of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation.
(AQO 8/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Officials are currently finalising arrangements for a public appointments competition to secure both a Chair and members of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation.

We intend that the Development Corporation will be in place later this year.

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mr Doherty asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration will be finalised and published.

(AQO 9/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The five main political parties have agreed to appoint representatives to a working group that will seek consensus on issues that will enable the publication of a Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.

This group will consider the consultation responses, and all departments will be asked for their input. All consultation responses will be shared with the working group as well as the OFMDFM Committee.

A road map that sets out the steps and timetable for the strategy and a robust action plan will be brought forward.

We anticipate that the strategy and action plan will be ready for the autumn and December respectively.

OFMDFM: Fraud

Mr Sheehan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps have been taken in response to the allegations of malpractice or fraud by some groups that are funded directly or indirectly by their Department.

(AQO 10/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Information received in relation to allegations of suspected fraud and irregularity regarding public funds and involving funded groups will result in the Department commissioning or being party to commissioning an investigation.

We have established an Oversight Group to manage and respond in a co-ordinated way to any ongoing investigations.

A dedicated official has also been allocated to report to this group which meets on a monthly basis.

Lessons learned from investigations into fraud and irregularity and recent audits are being applied to strengthen sponsorship control arrangements and minimise the risk of further irregularities occurring.

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation and Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre

Mr McCartney asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline any progress that has been made on the establishment of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation and on the development of the Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution facility.

(AQO 11/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM officials are currently finalising arrangements for a public appointments competition to secure both a Chair and members of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board.

We intend that the Development Corporation will be in place later this year.

An application for around £18.2m (20m Euros) for the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre was submitted on 14 January for PEACE III funding. We hope to have a positive decision on this funding by summer 2011.

Investment: Government Funding

Mr Brady asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Budget Review Group and whether it will continue its work during this Assembly term.

(AQO 12/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Budget Review Group made an important contribution to the process to develop the Budget 2011-15 and will continue to meet during this Assembly term.

The Budget Review Group's work will include exploring additional potential options for revenue raising to be taken forward in the medium to longer term. The Group will also take forward the Review of Arms Length Bodies so that recommendations can be made to the Executive.

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation

Mr Elliott asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in relation to the establishment of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation.

(AQO 14/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM officials are currently finalising arrangements for a public appointments competition to secure both a Chair and members of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board.

We intend that the Development Corporation will be in place later this year.

Northern Ireland Memorial Fund

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many individual victims and survivors have applications for assistance pending with the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund.

(AQO 15/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: According to the latest figures supplied by the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, there are currently 694 applications for grant assistance awaiting the issue of a letter of award from the Fund. There are a further 1,459 grant applications which have still to be formally assessed by the Fund.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost to her Department of engaging external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 156/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The costs incurred by the Department on engaging external consultants in the financial years since May 07 is as follows:-

Year	Total Spend
07/08	£480,121
08/09	£488,450
09/10	£404,050
10/11	£332,550

(may be subject to change after the DARD accounts have been audited)

Information on external consultancy services is recorded in accordance with DFP guidance issued in December 2009.

I am focused on further reducing the level of this Department's expenditure on external consultants and, in line with the action taken by my predecessor, it will continue to be a requirement for any plans to procure external consultants to be subject to my approval.

Botulism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there has been an increase in the number of reported cases of botulism over the last three years; and in which areas increases were recorded.

(AQW 196/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I will deal with questions 196/11-15, 197/11-15 and 198/11-15 together.

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

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

The main source of the botulinum toxin is believed to be the carcasses of chicken that have become embedded in poultry litter. Direct or indirect contact by cattle with such litter can increase the risk of botulism in cattle. While the spreading of poultry litter on land is permitted by the Animal By-Products (Enforcement) Regulations (NI) 2011, the Regulations require that chicken carcasses must be disposed of by rendering in an approved processing plant or by incineration in an approved incinerator. Contaminated litter must not be applied to land and to do so is an offence.

Under the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (NI) 2010, farmers are also required when storing poultry litter in field heaps to ensure that it is covered by an impermeable membrane within 24 hours of placing in the field. The field storage of poultry litter will be reviewed in September 2011 taking account of research into whether it has a detrimental impact on water quality.

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

As botulism is not a notifiable disease under the Diseases of Animals Order (1981), there is no requirement to report the disease to DARD. Therefore my Department does not hold information about the number of reported cases over the last three years or the on-going incidences of botulism in cattle.

The Agri Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), which carries out testing of suspect botulism cases as part of its commercial testing service to farmers, has provided the following information about the number of suspect botulism cases submitted for testing over the last three years and the number of positive bovine cases identified:

Cases submitted for testing for botulism to AFBI by year.

Year	Submissions	Positive Results
2008	92	14
2009	88	14
2010	109	14

There has been no increase in the last three years of the number of positive cases recorded by AFBI. AFBI has stressed the need to exercise caution when determining trends based on these results due to reporting patterns.

My Department does not hold information about the prevalence of botulism in cattle in the north of Ireland. AFBI has advised that it is impossible to assess the prevalence of botulism here from the results of its testing service, as the information available reflects only the positive bovine cases identified as a result of voluntary submissions. The nature of the botulism toxin and relatively small dose required to kill bovines also means that definitive laboratory diagnosis is difficult. It is therefore not possible to make comparisons with other EU member states.

Botulism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the prevalence of botulism in Northern Ireland cattle compared to that of other EU member states.
(AQW 197/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer you to the answer given in AQW 196/11-15.

Botulism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the on-going incidences of botulism in cattle; and if she will make a statement on this matter.
(AQW 198/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer you to the answer given in AQW 196/11-15.

North Down: Tree Population

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in which areas of North Down her Department is planning to increase the tree population.
(AQW 228/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's Forest Service will continue to encourage an increase in woodland cover, primarily through its Woodland Grant Scheme which is funded through the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. Targets to extend the area of woodland are published annually in the Forest Service business plan and the grant scheme is available to landowners throughout the north, including those in North Down.

Woodland creation in locations where tree planting seem particularly desirable will be encouraged and an indicative map showing these areas can be viewed on the Forest Service website at; http://www.dardni.gov.uk/forestservice/indicative_map_for_woodland_creation_2009.pdf.

Farmers: Average Age

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what initiatives her Department has adopted in the last twelve months to encourage a decrease in the average age of farmers.
(AQW 234/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD is aware of the current age profile of farmers in the north and the high proportion of farmers who are aged over 55. Whilst DARD aims to provide support for all farmers, the Department will also continue to promote opportunities for younger farmers where it can.

A recent example of this is tranche 2 of the Farm Modernisation Programme where additional marks were awarded to applicants who were younger members of farm households. My predecessor also recently renewed the Department's funding to the Young Farmers Clubs asking them to focus their work in areas such as succession planning.

In addition, my Department has continued its work on bringing through the new generation of farmers. Over the last 12 months the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, (CAFRE), has continued to offer a wide range of further and higher education courses in agriculture and related subjects. Courses are available from Level 2 (craft level) to Honours degree and in the 2010/11 academic year, 730 students from a CAFRE total of 1671 enrolments, enrolled on these programmes. The education programmes delivered by CAFRE combine practical farming skills, with theoretical knowledge and aim to prepare students for employment in the farming or ancillary agriculture industry.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken in the last twelve months to prevent the spread of Bovine Tuberculosis; and for her assessment of the effectiveness of (i) a badger cull; and (ii) a badger vaccination programme to prevent the spread of the disease.

(AQW 238/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has continued to apply and enhance our EU Commission approved bovine tuberculosis (TB) eradication programme, which helps to safeguard our £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry. This eradication programme centres on the detection of diseased or high risk animals, the compulsory removal of these animals from their herd of origin to slaughter, and the restriction of movements of cattle from infected herds until they are tested clear.

Our programme has been successful in reducing the TB annual herd incidence from almost 10% in 2002 to 5.10% at 31 March 2011 with considerable progress being made in the past year. The number of reactors in 2010 at 6,400 was 22% lower than in 2009 and was the lowest since 1998. Also, the number of TB breakdown herds in 2010 at 1,150 was the lowest since 1996 when TB levels were on a rising trend.

My Department continues to enhance its TB eradication programme. Since the beginning of 2010 we remove as reactors those animals that give an inconclusive result to a second consecutive TB test (rather than a third test as before). Also in December 2010 we commenced to use DNA identity tags on reactors to help reduce the potential for animal substitution post-valuation to reduce the risk of fraud and further disease spread. We have also recently commissioned the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to conduct a scientific review of the way we use the gamma interferon blood test in the TB programme to make sure we are making best use of it. In addition, we have continued to improve the rigour of our TB testing process through improved communications with Private Veterinary Practitioners (PVPs) and developments in the PVP supervision system; and improving the rigour of our own delivery through monitoring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Fieldwork for our TB Biosecurity Study, which is assessing what critical differences there are between TB breakdown and TB clear herds in a TB high incidence area in County Down, was progressed in 2010/11 and that exercise is nearing completion. The results from this Study will be available later this year and should add to our knowledge of TB risk factors and help inform new biosecurity advice for farmers.

TB is a complex and multi-factorial disease and the issue of badgers and bovine TB is similarly complex. We know there is a link between TB in badgers and TB in cattle. But we do not know the extent to which badgers contribute to the incidence of TB in cattle here. To date, research involving badger culling elsewhere presents a mixed picture of its cost benefit and effectiveness in reducing

disease levels in cattle and is not, in itself, a straightforward solution to the TB problem. Interventions to address the wildlife risk factors may include improving biosecurity, as well as more direct intervention such as vaccination of badgers, which may be the most feasible solution in the long-term. However, I appreciate it may be some time yet before a viable oral vaccine for badgers can be deployed in a cost effective way.

As the badger is a protected species, any direct interventions in the badger population here would be subject to the agreement of the Environment Minister; the issue of appropriate licences; and the availability of the substantial additional funding that would be needed.

It is also important that we do not duplicate the expensive research work that is ongoing in other areas, but that we can draw down the lessons from that work and also collaborate with others where appropriate. Therefore, we are closely tracking the developments in the south of Ireland and Britain in relation to badger vaccination research. We are also closely monitoring the development of badger cull proposals in England and Wales. I shall be very interested to see how their proposals evolve and are implemented; and whether they successfully withstand legal challenge.

A number of Literature Reviews were also commissioned in 2010 in relation to research on: cattle to cattle transmission of TB; badger to cattle transmission; cattle TB tests and effective deployment; TB tests in badgers; and badger vaccines. The results of these reviews will help to clarify the critical knowledge gaps we need to address, while avoiding duplication of the expensive scientific research work that is ongoing in other areas. Additional funding has been allocated in DARD's budget over the next four years, which will enable us to commission further TB and wildlife research and studies to provide a robust evidence base to guide the TB eradication strategy.

I am fully committed to eradicating TB and I will work towards this end.

Local Lamb Processing

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken in the last twelve months to encourage an increase in the local lamb processing capacity. **(AQW 240/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: Any decision to increase lamb processing capacity is a commercial matter for processing companies and will be driven by an increase in demand.

DARD support to the processing sector is available in relation to capital investment, technical advice and skills development. The main funding instrument for agri-food companies is the Rural Development Programme (RDP), which includes the Processing and Marketing Grant (PMG) scheme. PMG funding is available for the construction of new premises, refurbishment of old premises and/or the purchase of new plant and equipment. Over the past twelve months the Department has committed funding of £2.9m to nine PMG projects and over the same period paid out grant of £2.52m against all approved projects across the Scheme.

In addition, the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC), a DARD sponsored NDPB, provides a range of services to the beef and sheepmeat industry, which includes the promotion of lamb. In the last 12 months, LMC:-

- carried out 220 beef/lamb cookery demonstrations, taking part in home economics classes in post primary schools across the north of Ireland.
- continued to support L'Agnean Presto, a promotional campaign highlighting the versatility of lamb in France - one of our key export markets.
- carried out a lamb promotional campaign on six radio stations across the north.
- undertook lamb retail sampling in three major multiple supermarkets across the north.

Botulism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of cases of botulism in cattle recorded by her Department in each month since January 2010.

(AQW 244/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I will deal with questions 244/11-15, 247/11-15 and 248/11-15 together.

Botulism is a severe, often fatal form of food poisoning which can affect most animals. The bacteria that cause botulism are commonly found in the environment and the disease does not spread from animal to animal. As botulism is not a notifiable disease under the Diseases of Animals Order (1981), no statutory action is taken in cases or suspected cases of botulism and there is no requirement to report the disease to DARD. Therefore my Department does not record the number of cases of botulism in cattle.

I recognise that botulism in cattle can cause significant problems for farmers and treatment is rarely successful. It is therefore better to minimise the risk of the disease occurring, primarily through biosecurity measures and also through use of vaccine.

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

The main source of the botulinum toxin is believed to be the carcasses of chicken that have become embedded in poultry litter. Direct or indirect contact by cattle with such litter can increase the risk of botulism in cattle. While the spreading of poultry litter on land is permitted by the Animal By-Products (Enforcement) Regulations (NI) 2011, the Regulations require that chicken carcasses must be disposed of by rendering in an approved processing plant or by incineration in an approved incinerator. Contaminated litter must not be applied to land and to do so is an offence.

Under the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (NI) 2010, farmers are also required when storing poultry litter in field heaps to ensure that it is covered by an impermeable membrane within 24 hours of placing in the field. The field storage of poultry litter will be reviewed in September 2011 taking account of research into whether it has a detrimental impact on water quality.

AFBI operates a commercial testing service through which farmers may submit samples for post-mortem testing when botulism is suspected. AFBI has provided the following information about the number of positive bovine cases that have been identified each month since January 2010 through testing samples submitted by farmers:

Positive bovine cases identified through testing for botulism to AFBI by month since January 2010.

Month (2010)	Positive Results	Month (2011)	Positive Results
January	0	January	0
February	1	February	0
March	0	March	1
April	0	April	1
May	2		
June	1		
July	4		
August	1		

Month (2010)	Positive Results	Month (2011)	Positive Results
September	2		
October	2		
November	1		
December	0		

The toxin types isolated during 2010 were Type D (9 cases), Type C/D (5 cases). Type E and A were also detected (1 case). To date in 2011 both cases have been type D. The vast majority of bovine botulism is caused by either type D, or C/D. This has been the case for the period for which records are available.

Botulism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what services her Department can provide to help farmers whose cattle have been affected by botulism and reduce the risk of the spread of the disease to other cattle.

(AQW 247/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer you to the answer given in AQW 244/11-15.

Botulism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the strain of botulism currently affecting cattle; and whether it differs from any of the strains detected in the recent past.

(AQW 248/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer you to the answer given in AQW 244/11-15.

Building Sustainable Communities, Capacity Building Programme

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she will take to ensure that the Building Sustainable Communities, Capacity Building Programme will be progressed.

(AQW 264/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As you know, the previous Minister, Michelle Gildernew MP, MLA agreed that the original pilot scheme for Building Sustainable Communities in rural border areas should be extended, following an evaluation of the outcomes in 2009. Due to priorities being discussed at the time of Budget 2010, the new Programme was put on hold.

My officials are now assessing the Action Plans which were prepared some 2 years ago by the groups involved to ensure that the actions listed remain relevant, and are complementary to the other new, similar Programmes which have been developed in the interim. Additionally my officials are evaluating all aspects of rural community development through the means of an economic appraisal, and the Building Sustainable Communities Programme will be part of that.

I expect this work to take no more than 3-4 months, following which a new programme will be tendered.

Staff Sick Leave

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

(AQW 282/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department must apply the terms set out in the NI Civil Service Inefficiency Sickness Absence policy. This policy includes Review Points at which a sickness absence record must be examined. The NICS Review Points are 4 occasions or 10 working days in a rolling 12 month period.

In the case of probationers or those appointed on a fixed-term or temporary basis, each absence will prompt a review.

An electronic alert is issued to the line manager and to Departmental HR whenever a member of staff reaches the Review Point and inefficiency action, including written warnings and ultimately dismissal, may be initiated at that stage.

Single Farm Payments

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many people are still awaiting their Single Farm Payment; and what this figure represents as a percentage of the applicants.

(AQW 287/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department received 38,178 valid claims to the Single Farm Payment Scheme in the 2010 scheme year. Of these, 937, which represents around 2.5% of the total number received, had yet to be finalised, as at 2 June 2011. Not all of the remaining claims may be due a payment because of ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given the significance of the forthcoming review of a new Common Agricultural Policy, what is her Department's definition of an 'active farmer'.

(AQW 289/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: For the purposes of administering the Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme, DARD is obliged to apply the definition of a farmer as detailed in EU Regulations. Currently, these Regulations do not refer to or define an 'active farmer'. The EU Commission is exploring ways in which SFP might be targeted to applicants who are undertaking some level of agricultural production while avoiding undermining the decoupled status of the SFP. One possibility that might be under consideration by the Commission is to link eligibility for SFP to the proportion of total income that an applicant receives from agricultural activity. That approach, of course, runs the risk of excluding certain part-time farmers, or farmers with other sources of income (such as pensions), from the SFP Scheme. Setting any level of production or income threshold as an eligibility condition always runs such a risk, as well as creating an additional administrative burden for claimants and administrators alike. That is why these matters need to be considered extremely carefully. Therefore, in its March 2011 submission to the EU Commission, DARD strongly urged that the use of an 'active farmer' requirement be left as an option for Member States and regions to apply if they considered it appropriate and feasible, with the Commission respecting the decision made by these Member States and regions. In other words, the issue of whether or not to apply an 'active farmer' requirement, and the nature of that requirement, should be debated and decided at a local level to suit local circumstances. This would be infinitely preferable to a mandatory EU-wide approach that ignores regional needs, lacks clarity, is difficult and costly to implement and which creates an exposure to EU audit criticism and sanction.

Video Image Analysis (VIA) System

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) for an update on the introduction of the video image analysis (VIA) system; (ii) whether there has been any notable disparity in grading in locations where VIA has been introduced compared to manual grading; (iii) were the producers paid the higher value on the occasions where carcass grades differed by VIA and manual grading; and (iv) if so, how many times did this occur and to what value.

(AQW 323/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: EU Regulations require all beef carcasses to be graded. The legislation permits this to be done manually or mechanically, but both human graders and machines must be licensed by the Department. Automated carcass classification (VIA) has been used by 7 meat processors in the north of Ireland since 28 March 2011. Following the switch over to automatic grading DARD Senior Technical Inspectors have been carrying out weekly unannounced checks on the machines and taking

whatever action is appropriate. The results of the monthly checks are published on the DARD website. The European Union Community Inspection Committee carried out an inspection on Beef Carcass Classification from 25 – 27 May 2011. The inspectors comprised 2 individuals from the European Commission and experts from 9 European Countries. The final report is expected to be available in the Autumn. The inspectors provided verbal indications that they found the standard of beef carcass classification using VIA to be satisfactory. They also indicated that they were content with the manner in which DARD carried out its checks.

It is early days in the use of VIA in the north. Based on information collated by the Livestock and Meat Commission the proportion of U grades dropped from 20.3% of the national kill in March 2011 to 12% in April 2011, since the introduction of VIA. The proportion of P grades increased from 6.2% to 11.8% during the same time period.

Where a machine fails to grade a carcass these will be classified by manual graders and the price paid is based on the manual grade. Each processor is required to have at least one licensed grader. When DARD checks are carried out both VIA and manual grades are available for the 40 - 80 carcasses which have been checked. This information is used by DARD to check if a machine is complying with the requirements of the Regulations. This information is not used by the factories to adjust prices either up or down.

The grade allocated by the VIA machine must not be changed. However, if a farmer wishes to appeal the price which has been paid the factory can adjust the price paid to producers. Consequently appeals are between the farmer and the factory. DARD does not hold information relating to this.

Fishing, River and Water and Marine Matters

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she would consider establishing a review committee to look at how best to co-ordinate fishing, river and water and marine matters within one Department.

(AQW 380/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have no plans to establish a review committee. But should the Executive wish to examine the number and function of Departments at some time in the future this kind of issue would be considered in the round.

DARD Direct Office: Newtownards

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the establishment of a DARD Direct Office in Newtownards.

(AQW 455/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: You will be aware that Newtownards is one of the 12 locations selected for a DARD Direct Office. The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) has responsibility to provide office accommodation for NICS Departments. We have been working with DFP to identify, secure and develop office accommodation, which optimises alignment to the DARD Direct specification for each location.

Currently DFP is seeking to secure a property at Newtownards. If this is successful, I am hopeful the new office can be delivered within the next year.

Groceries Code Adjudicator Bill

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the proposed Groceries Code Adjudicator Bill and its potential impact on Northern Ireland.

(AQW 501/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At the outset I want to make clear that the regulation of anti-competitive practice and agreements and the abuse of dominant position in the market are reserved matters. Nevertheless, I consider the publication of the Coalition Government's draft Groceries Code Adjudicator Bill to be an

important development which should benefit everyone in the food chain. In particular it should help ensure that farmers receive a fair price for their produce.

For many years producers and others in the supply chain have felt that the large retailers wielded too much power. To address their concerns a new strengthened and extended Groceries Supply Code of Practice was introduced in February 2010. This new Code requires retailers to improve their dealings with suppliers particularly on contractual terms, the keeping of records and the right of arbitration. However, although these changes are an improvement on the previous regime, the power that large grocery retailers have over their suppliers still creates pressures on some producers. In light of this it is clear that the Code would be more effective with an adjudicator in place to enforce it.

It is proposed in the Bill that the adjudicator should be able to act as arbitrator in disputes between retailers and suppliers; to carry out investigations of suspected breaches of the Code by retailers; to enforce the requirements of the Code; and to publish advice and guidance on aspects of the Code. In so doing the adjudicator will be able to protect the identity of those making a complaint and where appropriate to name and shame the retailers. I welcome this approach and the overall aim to ensure that fair trading practices pertain throughout the food supply chain. We want to see a food industry where farmers and food processors are getting a fair deal. This would be good for our agri-food industry and the north of Ireland's economy.

Agri-food

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the agri-food industry has a key role to play in moving our economy out of recession.

(AQO 22/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I believe that the agri-food sector has a key economic role to play in building economic recovery. Not only is it one of the largest sectors, it has proven resilient in these difficult economic times, contributing almost £3 billion in sales and £1 billion per year in terms of gross value added, providing over 50,000 jobs across the supply chain. Indeed, a recent Northern Bank report backs this up by forecasting that the agriculture sector will have the second highest level of growth this year.

I want to see development that has a place for small producers and processors alongside the bigger players. One way we can do this is to ensure that research, technology transfer and skills are available to all. Investment in education, training and skills are crucial to developing a high growth agri-food sector, and my Department is at the forefront in this area.

My Department is committed to providing support for the sector's expansion and a joint strategy, 'Focus on Food' was launched in June 2010 setting out a shared government and industry vision for a productive, sustainable and competitive sector.

Underneath this overarching Strategy, my Department provides a wide range of support to the agri-food sector and I will continue to work with others to ensure a successful, sustainable and thriving industry.

In conclusion, Agriculture will be a key player in meeting the challenges of building economic recovery. Over this Assembly term I will work hard to widen our agri-food sector and to ensure its' position as a central contributor to the Executive's economic recovery plan.

Circuses: Wild Animals

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has any plans to introduce a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses.

(AQO 23/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My priorities on animal welfare over the coming period will be the roll-out of the new provisions in the Welfare of Animals Act 2011, including new subordinate legislation on the welfare of farmed animals, dog breeding establishments and the tail docking of dogs. Engaging with Councils as they prepare for their new enforcement role in relation to non-farmed animals is also a key priority. I am also fully committed to the roll-out of the Dogs Amendment Act 2011.

I would assure you that the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 provides a range of new powers to regulate any activity involving animals. In time, I would want to take advice on the legal implications and on the proportionality of all the options open to me, for example a ban or the introduction of a robust regulatory system so that the welfare of wild animals in circuses is fully protected. Before making any decision I would also want to examine developments in Britain, the south and Europe and also to engage with stakeholders, including circus operators, and their representatives, to ensure that their views are properly considered.

Bovine Technologies

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's strategy to eradicate bovine tuberculosis.

(AQO 24/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased that there has been considerable progress in reducing Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) incidence in cattle here, with the herd incidence almost halved from nearly 10% in 2002 to 5.10% at 31 March 2011. The number of reactors in 2010 at 6,400 was 22% lower than in 2009 and, indeed, was the lowest since 1998. Also, the number of TB herd breakdowns in 2010 at 1,150 was the lowest level since 1996 when TB levels were on a rising trend.

While these figures are encouraging, I know that TB is a very complex and challenging disease that is difficult to eradicate and I recognise the adverse impact TB has on those farms affected. I am fully committed to eradicating TB from cattle here and I will work towards this end.

We will continue to enhance DARD's TB eradication programme and its delivery. Securing approval each year from the EU Commission for our TB eradication programme will be vital in ensuring the continuation of our £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry. We will also look for more effective and efficient ways of reducing transmission of TB between cattle and between wildlife and cattle.

The fieldwork for our TB Biosecurity Study, which is assessing what differences there are between TB breakdown and TB clear herds in a TB high incidence area in County Down, is nearing completion. The results from this Study should add to our knowledge of TB risk factors and help inform better biosecurity advice for farmers. We are also reviewing the way we use the gamma interferon blood test in the TB eradication programme to ensure we are making the best use of it. We are closely tracking the developments in Britain and the south of Ireland in vaccination research and the consultation proposals in Britain for badger interventions so that we can draw down the lessons from that work and collaborate where appropriate.

The additional funding that has been allocated within the DARD budget over the next 4 years will enable us to commission TB and wildlife research and studies to provide a robust evidence base to guide our TB eradication strategy. A number of literature reviews are presently being conducted of existing and ongoing research in relation to cattle to cattle transmission of TB; badger to cattle transmission; cattle TB tests and effective deployment; TB tests in badgers; and badger vaccines. The results of these reviews will help identify the critical knowledge gaps we need to give priority to in the north of Ireland while avoiding duplication of expensive work that is ongoing in other areas.

Over the coming period I shall also want to discuss with industry stakeholders how we can continue to work towards TB eradication.

DARD: Headquarters

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the economic benefits of moving her Department's headquarters outside Belfast.

(AQO 25/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The proposed relocation of the DARD headquarters out of Greater Belfast has its origins in the Bain Report on the Relocation of Public Sector Jobs. As intimated in the Bain Report a move to a

rural location will have significant economic and social benefits and these will be fully articulated in the business case to be developed as part of the relocation project.

However, it is clear that the proposed relocation will stimulate the rural economy through increased local spending, provision of high quality and well paid public sector jobs and potentially jobs associated with the construction of and the ongoing servicing of a new building. It will also help to share wealth across the economy and contribute to better-balanced economic growth, by commencing to address disparities in the distribution of public sector jobs in the north of Ireland.

Furthermore, the proposed DARD headquarters relocation represents an important first step to relocate a significant share of public sector jobs and could pave the way for a much larger programme of relocation within the public sector, which would greatly enhance the economic and social development of our rural communities; bringing a greater realisation of the outcomes envisaged by Bain.

Woodland

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department's commitment to double woodland cover will be included in the next Programme for Government.

(AQO 26/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am committed to the Forest Service Strategy of doubling woodland cover in the long term. The Programme for Government has not as yet been finalised, but it is my intention that woodland creation targets are included.

Woodland expansion targets have been difficult to achieve in the recent past. From 2007/08 to 2009/10 we have seen a decline in the area of woodland created. This has been due to a number of factors, including the farmer definition within the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme. A number of applicants with approvals may have chosen to delay their commitment to woodland creation in the hope that the farmer definition criteria will be amended. We have received a negative response from the EU Commission on this issue and we will be advising woodland stakeholders.

We also believe that competition exists between the Woodland Grant Scheme and other Departmental land-based schemes, such as the Countryside Management Scheme, which can appear more attractive to farmers, and this presents a barrier to uptake of woodland schemes. This issue will be considered in the context of a review of Agri-environment programmes in consultation with Policy and Service Delivery Group colleagues.

During 2009, we increased Woodland grant Scheme grant rates to help achieve an increase in woodland creation. We are also taking a range of other actions to maximise woodland creation. This action includes contacting landowners with approval to plant woodland, but who have not yet submitted a claim, to encourage and support them to plant. We are promoting forestry grant schemes, and considering how best to integrate woodland creation with other Departmental land-based management schemes, for example Countryside Management Scheme, to achieve the priorities set for both agriculture and forestry. This work has resulted in a slight increase of 18% in new woodland creation during 2010/11 compared with the previous year.

Forest Service will continue to build on this increase by including a target in their Business Plan 2011/12 around an appropriate programme of work on how best to incentivise and promote woodland expansion.

Agri-food

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what specific measures she will take to assist the agri-food sector further.

(AQO 27/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I believe that the agri-food sector has a key economic role to play in building economic recovery. Not only is it one of the largest sectors, it has proven resilient in these difficult economic times, contributing almost £3 billion in sales and £1 billion per year in terms of gross value added,

providing over 50,000 jobs across the supply chain. Indeed, a recent Northern Bank report backs this up by forecasting that the agriculture sector will have the second highest level of growth this year.

I want to see development that has a place for small producers and processors alongside the bigger players. One way we can do this is to ensure that research, technology transfer and skills are available to all. Investment in education, training and skills are crucial to developing a high growth agri-food sector, and my Department is at the forefront in this area.

My Department is committed to providing support for the sector's expansion and a joint strategy, 'Focus on Food' was launched in June 2010 setting out a shared government and industry vision for a productive, sustainable and competitive sector.

Underneath this overarching Strategy, my Department provides a wide range of support to the agri-food sector and I will continue to work with others to ensure a successful, sustainable and thriving industry.

In conclusion, Agriculture will be a key player in meeting the challenges of building economic recovery. Over this Assembly term I will work hard to widen our agri-food sector and to ensure its' position as a central contributor to the Executive's economic recovery plan.

Single Farm Payments

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she envisages significant changes to the Single Farm Payments Scheme as a result of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. **(AQO 28/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: There are several important issues that will be under discussion in the forthcoming CAP reform discussions that could have a significant impact on the Single Farm Payment Scheme.

The most important concerns the CAP budget, not only its overall size but its distribution to Member States, regions and farmers. I will be arguing very strongly that the CAP budget must be kept at as high a level of possible and that the share of SFP monies coming to the north of Ireland is maintained. As regards the distribution of these monies towards farmers, all the indications are that the EU Commission is determined to move away from historically based payments, but in order to minimise the impact on farmers, I will be seeking a long transition period.

Another issue is the possible environmental requirements expected from farmers in return for receiving these payments, which is referred to as 'greening' of the CAP. I can understand the desire of the Commission to improve the justification of CAP payments, but I will want to ensure that the measures suggested are justified, proportionate and avoid imposing significant additional costs and administrative burdens on farmers.

There is also a suggestion that the SFP should be restricted to 'active' farmers. While I am sympathetic to this concept, this is an issue that needs to be thought through very carefully as it could easily result in unintended and undesirable consequences, such as excluding some part-time farmers from support and imposing a heavy bureaucratic burden for all.

Finally, I would like to see a €100,000 cap on the total level of SFP receipts for any individual applicant. It is difficult to justify very large payments which simply undermine the credibility of the entire support regime.

In conclusion, I must point out that the CAP reform package has to be agreed by 27 EU Member States and the European Parliament and so it is not possible to be definitive about how the SFP scheme will change post 2013.

Chicken Litter

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department has developed any plans for the disposal of chicken litter if the proposed incinerator at Glenavy does not get approval.

(AQO 29/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has worked with the poultry sector over many years on the issue of disposal of poultry litter. Presently, the predominant disposal option employed by the industry is to land spread as a fertiliser. Poultry litter is also used in the production of mushroom compost and has been exported to Britain for incineration and energy production.

The spreading of poultry litter on land as a fertiliser is governed by the Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) Regulations which implement the EU Nitrates Directive. The NAP Regulations apply to all farms across the north of Ireland and include a limit on how much manure can be spread, when it can be spread and how it must be stored. The purpose of these controls is to prevent excess or inappropriate applications of manures which could result in losses of nitrogen and phosphorus to water and consequent water pollution. The NI Environment Agency is responsible for inspection and enforcement of the NAP Regulations.

The NAP Regulations effectively restrict the land available for spreading poultry litter and the poultry industry faces the challenge of finding sustainable land for spreading. Therefore, the poultry industry has brought forward the Rose Energy incinerator proposal as an alternative to land spreading.

Last year, my Department, the Department of Environment and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment established a working group with representatives of the poultry industry to investigate any viable interim options for low cost temporary storage measures and use of poultry litter pending the establishment of a sustainable long-term technical alternative to land spreading.

The working group has actively investigated a range of options including alternative treatment systems available in Britain, the south of Ireland and further afield. Conclusions of this work to date indicate that most potential options are either not available due to lack of capacity or are cost prohibitive.

DARD will continue to work closely with the poultry industry and provide advisory and technical support to help the sector comply with NAP requirements. In conjunction with the Agri Food and Biosciences Institute, we monitor the development of emerging technology and methods for disposal of poultry litter on an ongoing basis. Industry efforts continue to secure environmentally sustainable and viable ways to manage poultry litter and reduce reliance on land spreading.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she intends to take to reduce the incidence of bovine tuberculosis on farms.

(AQO 30/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased that there has been considerable progress in reducing Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) incidence in cattle here, with the herd incidence almost halved from nearly 10% in 2002 to 5.10% at 31 March 2011. The number of reactors in 2010 at 6,400 was 22% lower than in 2009 and, indeed, was the lowest since 1998. Also, the number of TB herd breakdowns in 2010 at 1,150 was the lowest level since 1996 when TB levels were on a rising trend.

While these figures are encouraging, I know that TB is a very complex and challenging disease that is difficult to eradicate and I recognise the adverse impact TB has on those farms affected. I am fully committed to eradicating TB from cattle here and I will work towards this end.

We will continue to enhance DARD's TB eradication programme and its delivery. Securing approval each year from the EU Commission for our TB eradication programme will be vital in ensuring the continuation of our £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry. We will also look for more effective and efficient ways of reducing transmission of TB between cattle and between wildlife and cattle.

The fieldwork for our TB Biosecurity Study, which is assessing what differences there are between TB breakdown and TB clear herds in a TB high incidence area in County Down, is nearing completion. The results from this Study should add to our knowledge of TB risk factors and help inform better biosecurity advice for farmers. We are also reviewing the way we use the gamma interferon blood test in the TB eradication programme to ensure we are making the best use of it. We are closely tracking

the developments in Britain and the south of Ireland in vaccination research and the consultation proposals in Britain for badger interventions so that we can draw down the lessons from that work and collaborate where appropriate.

The additional funding that has been allocated within the DARD budget over the next 4 years will enable us to commission TB and wildlife research and studies to provide a robust evidence base to guide our TB eradication strategy. A number of literature reviews are presently being conducted of existing and ongoing research in relation to cattle to cattle transmission of TB; badger to cattle transmission; cattle TB tests and effective deployment; TB tests in badgers; and badger vaccines. The results of these reviews will help identify the critical knowledge gaps we need to give priority to in the north of Ireland while avoiding duplication of expensive work that is ongoing in other areas.

Over the coming period I shall also want to discuss with industry stakeholders how we can continue to work towards TB eradication.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Shared Culture

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to promote a shared culture.

(AQW 191/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I am committed to supporting efforts which promote and celebrate cultural diversity but also encourage respect for those with different cultural perspectives and traditions.

My Department funds a range of initiatives through the arts, libraries, sports, museums and the North South language body which provide scope for the community to find out about, explore and enjoy familiar cultural traditions and experience those which are different. Such programmes contribute positively towards building a shared and better future for all our people.

Shared Cultural Awareness

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the benefits of promoting shared cultural awareness in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) on an all Ireland basis.

(AQW 192/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Our recent history has emphasised the importance of working to create a shared and better future for all our people.

Helping people to explore difference, remove barriers and improve understanding contributes towards greater awareness of and respect for all our cultural traditions.

My Department sponsors a range of initiatives which promote cultural awareness, improved understanding and respect for all cultural traditions on the island of Ireland.

Shared Cultural Awareness

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of whether cultural awareness is best promoted at a national or international level.

(AQW 193/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I want to build a society where people can live, work and socialise in safe and inclusive communities which understand and respect cultural differences.

Promoting cultural awareness helps to break down barriers between people from different traditions and counteracts stereotypical thinking. National and International initiatives demonstrate our rich and

diverse cultural heritage, global connections and the growing confidence of our communities. Exploring and celebrating our cultural offerings helps us to discover and share our stories and traditions with each other and with visitors.

Organisations Seeking Funding

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the organisations that have contacted her Department seeking funding since she came to office; and to list the organisations she has written to since taking up office.

(AQW 278/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since my appointment as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure the following organisations have contacted my Department seeking funding:

- Newry and Mourne Museum Committee
- Cycling Ulster
- COFLA Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich Memorial Library and Archive
- Ballymurphy Massacre Committee Truth and Reconciliation.

And I have written to the following organisations:

- NILGA
- Special Olympics Ireland
- Belfast Deaf United
- Crescent Arts Centre
- Hands Around the World (London 2012 Inspire Mark)
- NI Champions(London 2012 Inspire Mark)
- Moyle District Council
- NICSSA

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department will help Ballymena Borough Council restore Arthur Cottage, Ballymena to its former status following the recent fire; and if she will work with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure that this happens as soon as possible.

(AQW 322/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department in financial terms is not in a position to assist Ballymena Borough Council in the restoration of Arthur Cottage following the recent tragic fire. I will consider each and every request for Departmental assistance as and when they are received.

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what assistance her Department will give to Ballymena Borough Council to re-build Arthur Cottage, Ballymena following the recent fire.

(AQW 325/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In financial terms my Department is not in a position to assist Ballymena Borough Council in the restoration of Arthur Cottage following the recent tragic fire.

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action her Department is taking to assist with the restoration of Arthur Cottage, Ballymena which was recently damaged by fire.

(AQW 326/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In financial terms my Department is not in a position to assist in the restoration of Arthur Cottage following the recent tragic fire.

Fishing, River and Water and Marine Matters

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she would consider establishing a review committee to look at how best to co-ordinate fishing, river and water and marine matters within one Department.

(AQW 381/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware that responsibility for fishing, river and water and marine matters are spread across four Government Departments, namely Environment, Agriculture and Rural Development, Regional Development and Culture, Arts and Leisure. There are also a number of Government Agencies involved, including the Rivers Agency, the Loughs Agency and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

This matter has come under scrutiny before, with the Environmental Governance Review Panel producing a report in May 2007 entitled "Foundations for the Future" which made a series of recommendations on the management of the environment in Northern Ireland. The report commented that the responsibilities for the governance of the water environment are the most fragmented.

Some exploratory work has been carried out in relation to where responsibility for salmon and inland fisheries, which currently rests with my Department, may best lie in any new arrangements.

The position in relation to inland waterways is also fragmented, complex and somewhat confusing to the public.

I consider there is merit in building on the work that has already been done, but the manner in which this cross cutting matter is taken forward is an issue for the Executive.

DCAL: Arm's-length Bodies

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what progress has been made on a review of the numbers of arm's-length bodies of her Department.

(AQO 41/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In November 2010, the Department initiated a review of its Arms Length Bodies. A two stage approach to this review was adopted. The aim of the first stage was to carry out a high level initial examination of the key issues in order to identify which Arms Length Bodies might be considered for a change in status or structure. This stage of the review has now been completed.

The second stage will then take forward those Arms Length Bodies identified in stage one as having the potential for change and examine the available options in more detail.

It is envisaged that the second stage will take longer to complete (possibly 12-18 months) and will include scope for consultation with both the Arms Length Bodies themselves and other stakeholders.

Clearly, in taking forward this further analysis, the Department will need to align closely with any work that the Budget Review Group undertakes in this area. My officials will therefore continue to liaise with colleagues in OFMDFM in progressing to the next phase.

Windsor Park, Belfast: Redevelopment

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the first tranche of funding will be available for the re-development of Windsor Park, Belfast.

(AQW 525/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Executive's endorsement, on 10 March 2011, of a stadium development funding package includes Government's contribution of around £25m towards the Irish Football Association's plans for the redevelopment Windsor Park, Belfast.

However, the position on when funding can be made available to the IFA (and the Governing Bodies of the other sports) is wholly dependent on the development of Project plans and the identification of associated timescales for each key element. The Department and Sport NI are actively engaged with the Governing Bodies of all the sports to urgently progress this and other aspects of project development.

Football

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has made, or intends to make, any representations to the relevant authorities about people born in Northern Ireland playing football for the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 576/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Good Friday Agreement provides for people from the North of Ireland to claim either Irish or British nationality. Under current FIFA rules, this in turn permits association football players from the region to choose whether they represent the Republic of Ireland or NI at international level. I am aware that previous Sports Ministers have written to FIFA on this matter and that the governing body for the sport here, the Irish Football Association (IFA), has appealed the ruling with both FIFA and the Court of Arbitration for Sport. On each occasion FIFA's ruling has been upheld. I do not, therefore, intend to make any further representations to the relevant authorities. Any change to this ruling would be a matter for the IFA, Football Association of Ireland and FIFA in the first instance.

Motorsport Infrastructure

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding has been allocated to improve motorsport infrastructure in each of the last four financial years.

(AQW 593/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for improving motorsport infrastructure rests, in the first instance, with the organisers of motorsport events and the governing bodies of the sport. However, my Department, through Sport NI, has allocated funding to motorsport to help it bring about health and safety improvements at a number of venues across the North of Ireland. This funding has been made available via the 2&4 Wheel Motorsport Steering Group Limited which is the umbrella body for the four governing bodies of motorsport in the region. In the last four financial years Sport NI has allocated funding to capital projects within motorsport as follows:

Financial Year	Funding allocated
2007/08	£250,000
2008/09	£100,000
2009/10	£1,944,682
2010/11	£68,701
Total	£2,363,384

DCAL: Capital Budget 2011-15

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her Department's capital budget for the 2011-15 period.

(AQO 39/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL has been allocated £158.2m capital budget for the period 2011-15.

The capital budget allocation for each year is as follows:

2011/12	£16.3m
2012/13	£34.7m
2013/14	£29.7m
2014/15	£77.5m

Allocations to sectors are as follows:

	Budget Allocation 2011 - 15 £m
Arts	5.31
Museums	4.27
Libraries	11.77
Sport	23.37
Major Regional Sport Stadiums	110.00
Inland Waterways and Inland Fisheries Group	4.18
N/S Body - Waterways Ireland	0.75
Public Record Office (NI)	0.78
Public Record Office (NI) - Receipts	-2.20
Total	158.23

Tollymore National Outdoor Centre

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding, in total, her Department has allocated to the Tollymore National Outdoor Centre since the opening of its new building.

(AQO 42/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Sport NI draft income and expenditure account to 31 May 2011 shows that my Department, through Sport NI, has allocated the following amounts to Tollymore National Outdoor Centre since its new building opened to the public in April 2010.

Resource: £744,885 (net of self-generated income)

Capital: £467,468

Non-cash Costs: £285,833

Libraries NI

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the Board of Libraries NI will be reappointed.

(AQO 43/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Libraries NI Board consists of 19 members, 11 of which are Councillors.

In accordance with their Terms & Conditions of Appointment the tenure of the Councillors on the Board ended at the date of the Council Elections on 5th May 2011.

It is my wish to reappoint those 9 Councillors who were successful at the May 2011 elections, and who may desire to remain on the Board, for a full period ending at the next Council elections. This is subject, of course, to them continuing to meet their Terms and Conditions of Appointment. My officials are currently preparing the necessary paperwork to complete this process. I wish to fill the remaining vacancies through the most appropriate and efficient process.

The 8 non Councillor members remain on the Board.

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of the hurt caused to the Travers family by the appointment as a Special Adviser of a person duly convicted of the murder of Mary Travers, whether she will revoke the appointment and apologise.

(AQO 44/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am very conscious of the hurt experienced by all victims of the conflict, including the Travers family. The killing of Mary Travers was wrong and I regret very much that it happened.

I hope that this expression of regret will be accepted as genuine by her family. I am conscious of course that words will do little to lessen the grief suffered by the Travers family. The same applies to the families of all other victims.

The reality is that we live in a society emerging from conflict. And it is important to remember that there were many parties to this conflict including various armed groups, state forces, governments and individuals.

I do not accept that those who were once part of the conflict cannot be part of the building of a peaceful future.

Republicans have made an invaluable contribution to the construction of the peace process. Without their contribution we would not have a peace process. Mary McArdle has played an important role over the past 13 years in building support for this process.

I am therefore happy for Mary McArdle to continue in her position as my Special Adviser.

Multi-Sports Stadium

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether a multi-sports shared stadium is still a viable option.

(AQO 45/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Governing Bodies of association football, Gaelic Games and rugby were asked to come forward with options on stadium provision to meet their long-term strategic requirements. The outcome clearly indicated that they saw three separate and individually-tailored stadiums as the most practical and effective way as achieving this. The Executive subsequently agreed that we move forward on that basis.

As a consequence my Department and Sport NI worked closely with the three sports on developing stadium proposals. This culminated in the production of an Outline Business Case covering all three sports which has closely examined all the options, and variations of options, including ground sharing.

The completed Outline Business Case, identifying the preferred options for the sports i.e. three separate stadiums, has been approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel. In addition, on 10 March 2011, the Executive endorsed the proposal that the available funding of £110m secured in Budget 2010 should be used to take forward regional stadium development on this basis.

Department of Education

'Inquiry into Successful Post-Primary Schools Serving Disadvantaged Communities'

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking in response to the findings of the Committee for Education's 'Inquiry into Successful Post-Primary Schools Serving Disadvantaged Communities'.

(AQW 164/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): My predecessor, in her response to the Assembly debate on the Committee's report (21 March 2011, Official Report Vol 63 No 6), set out the actions already being taken to address its findings. In particular, she noted that the Committee's findings supported the characteristics that make for a good school, as set out in the school improvement policy, a policy that will remain a priority for me.

I am familiar with the Committee's report, on which we worked together. I am therefore well placed to take account of its findings in continuing to implement the school improvement policy. I am mindful that the report was from the previous Assembly's mandate, but should the current Committee decide that it wishes to follow up on the report, I would be happy to provide it with a detailed response.

Co-ordinated Educational Planning

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to outline the extent to which there is co-ordinated educational planning between the divisions responsible for primary school provision and the provision of crèche and pre-school facilities.

(AQW 185/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The planning of pre-school and primary school provision is, in the first instance, the responsibility of the school managing authorities, who bring forward Development Proposals to shape or re-shape local provision for consideration by my Department.

All development proposals are considered in the context of the existing provision in the wider area, the Sustainable Schools Policy and any other relevant DE policy. The aim is to ensure that the proposals comply with DE policies and are viable and sustainable in the longer term. In addition, the views of the Education and Training Inspectorate and DE officials who have responsibility for policies which are directly linked to the proposal are sought and used in the decision making process.

When the Education and Skills Authority is established it will be responsible for the strategic planning of education provision on an area basis, including preschool and primary education.

Preparatory schools: Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the reasons why the results of the Equality Impact Assessment on funding for preparatory schools have not been published; and (ii) when they will be published.

(AQW 212/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 74/11-15 tabled by Anna Lo MLA, and published in the official report dated 3 June 2011.

Preparatory schools: Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education when all the consultation responses to the review of funding for preparatory schools will be published.

(AQW 213/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: During the consultation on the draft Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) over 400 responses were received. It has never been my Department's intention to publish all of the responses received during the EQIA consultation as to take forward an exercise to redact such a large quantity of information would be impracticable. The main focus throughout the EQIA process has been a detailed and thorough analysis of the responses received to ensure that all points of view have been examined, considered and documented. The findings of the analysis will then be published in both a qualitative and quantitative format.

My Department will shortly be writing to all those who participated in the consultation to advise of the EQIA's publication which will be available on the Department's website.

Nursery School Places

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded nursery school places that will be available in the Bangor area from September 2011.

(AQW 241/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All pre-school places in statutory nursery schools or in nursery units in Primary Schools are fully funded by the Department of Education. There are 416 places in statutory nursery schools and nursery units in Primary schools in the Bangor area. 104 are F/T places and 312 are P/T places. These places will be available from September 2011. In addition pre-school places are available in settings in the voluntary/private sector, funded by DE.

For the 2010/2011 year a further 279 pre-school places are available in voluntary and private playgroup settings in the Bangor area. This number may increase for September but the exact numbers required are not available as the admissions process is not yet complete.

Physical Exercise: School Children

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many hours a week of physical exercise children get in (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools.

(AQW 251/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Physical education is a compulsory part of the revised curriculum for all pupils at every Key Stage (4-16 years old).

The legislation governing the revised curriculum prevents the Department from prescribing the amount of time to be allocated to any particular subject. The Department has, however, issued guidance to schools recommending a minimum of two hours of PE per week. This guidance is available on the Department's website, www.deni.gov.uk.

Staff Sick Leave

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Education what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of staff taking two or more periods of sick leave in a year.

(AQW 283/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department manages sickness absence in line with the NICS Inefficiency Sickness Absence policy NICS Inefficiency Sickness Absence Policy. Review points for managing sickness absence are set out in the policy: 4 occasions or 10 working days in a rolling 12 month period for frequent short-term absence. In the case of probationers or those appointed on a fixed-term or temporary basis, each absence will prompt a review. My Department considers inefficiency action

whenever a review point is reached. Long-term sickness absence (defined as 20 working days or more) is managed through a series of review meetings and inefficiency action is considered as appropriate.

Lisanelly Shared Education Campus, Omagh

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made on the proposed shared education campus at Lisanelly, Omagh.

(AQO 55/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In April this year the Lisanelly site transferred into the ownership of the Department of Education which represents a further step towards this project becoming a reality. Rarely do sites of this size become available so close to the centre of a major town. It offers Omagh the opportunity to lead the way in developing a new shared state-of-the-art campus capable of servicing the needs of all its young people for generations to come.

Exemplar designs have been produced which help bring the project to life and provide a better understanding of what a shared education campus might look like, what could be achieved and the facilities that could be provided to meet the needs of all young people in Omagh and surrounding areas. These designs have been the subject of extensive public consultation and feedback from the community has been very positive, particularly from the young people.

Currently the Outline Business Case is progressing and will include a short-list of options, a financial model and an organisational plan. While the current financial climate is challenging I am committed to progressing with full exploration of the potential of a shared education campus at Omagh.

Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education to outline progress on the application for a new build for Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim.

(AQO 51/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Parkhall Integrated College is a controlled, co-educational, post-primary school for the 1116 age group, operating on split sites in Antrim town and with a 2010/11 enrolment of 682. The school was granted conditional integrated status in September 2009.

The project for Parkhall was included in last year's Capital Review and assessed as being 'Fully Compliant'. It is one of 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. A revised Economic Appraisal was received by the Department in February 2011.

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

It is incumbent on the Department, particularly in a constrained financial climate, to consider how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people.

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

High School, Ballynahinch

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Education for an update on his Department's plans for a new build for the High School Ballynahinch.

(AQO 52/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The High School, Ballynahinch is a controlled, co-educational, post-primary school for the 1116 age group.

In the Capital Review commissioned by my colleague, Cairtriona Ruane, a question was raised over the longer term viability of this school given an enrolment of below 400 pupils which is considerably

less than the Sustainable Schools Policy minimum. It is one of the 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. The project is for a new replacement school on the existing school site.

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

It is incumbent of the Department, particularly in a constrained financial climate, to consider how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people.

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

Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

Mrs Lewis asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new build for Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

(AQO 53/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Parkhall Integrated College is a controlled, co-educational, post-primary school for the 1116 age group, operating on split sites in Antrim town and with a 2010/11 enrolment of 682. The school was granted conditional integrated status in September 2009.

The project for Parkhall was included in last year's Capital Review and assessed as being 'Fully Compliant'. It is one of 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. A revised Economic Appraisal was received by the Department in February 2011.

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

It is incumbent of the Department, particularly in a constrained financial climate, to consider how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people.

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

Education: Review of Public Administration

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made on the reform of public administration within the education sector.

(AQO 54/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The case for reform within Education remains as strong as ever, and I am confident that the need for early progress is recognised on all sides of the house.

It is timely to reflect on why reform is so important.

The RPA is not about the needs of organisations; it is about giving all children and young people the educational opportunity that they deserve.

We have many excellent schools, but we also have too many that are not viable or sustainable.

Our education system produces some outstanding exam results each year, but too many children – some 42% - leave school without the qualifications for further education or employment.

Overall, our performance against international comparators is falling back, with serious implications for the economy.

The current administration arrangements are no longer fit for purpose, and cannot meet these challenges.

We now have an opportunity move forward and to bring about much needed reform.

Any new legislation would reflect the established fundamental principles of the Review of Public Administration. In preparing the Bill, my Department would also take account of the concerns raised by stakeholders.

I would like to be in a position to bring policy proposals to the Executive in the near future.

Primary Schools: Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education for an update on the amalgamation of Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street Primary Schools, Belfast.

(AQO 57/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) has indicated that it is working on proposals for a new school to amalgamate these three schools, potentially in a new build primary school, but work is at an early stage of a lengthy process.

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

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

My officials have therefore asked the Board to consider the possibility of amalgamation in advance of any major capital investment.

Preschool Places

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education why his Department does not take into account the birth rate when planning for the number of preschool places.

(AQO 58/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards manage the Preschools admissions process on behalf of the Department. This is done taking into account a number of factors including historical preschool pupil numbers, known demographic changes, and preschool capacity in particular areas. Whilst the birth rate statistics are useful to provide overall figures, they are not sufficiently detailed to predict demand for preschool places in any particular area.

There is no statistical data available which provides detailed information on the projected number of children which will be in their final preschool year – those aged between 3 years 2 months and 4 years 2 months – each September in a particular area. In addition the non – compulsory nature of preschool means it is also difficult to predict how many parents will choose to avail of the pre-school opportunity for their child.

Whilst considering the number of preschool places likely to be required each year, the P1 number, which is collated as part of the annual School Census, is used as a proxy for the size of the pre-school cohort.

Schools Estate

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education how he intends to make better use of the Schools Estate.

(AQO 60/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to ensuring enhanced use of schools premises. The department already promotes this through programmes such as Extended Schools, Full Service programmes and our key school improvement policy "Every School a Good School".

All schools should consider the potential benefits of their premises being made available for wider community use and local arrangements between the school and their community are already common practice.

A Working Group established by the previous Minister of Education presented a report to the department, which included a set of case studies and guidance. The report also included a series of recommendations to help inform policy and operations aimed at enhancing the wider community use of school premises.

I will wish to review this work and decide an appropriate way forward. In doing this, I will need to balance the advantages to the broader community against placing unnecessary cost or administrative burdens on schools.

Department for Employment and Learning

Staff Sick Leave

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of staff taking two or more periods of sick leave in a year.

(AQW 284/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The Department for Employment and Learning must apply the terms set out in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Inefficiency Sickness Absence policy. This policy includes Review Points i.e. points at which a sickness absence record must be reviewed and consideration given to taking inefficiency action.

The NICS Review Points are 4 occasions or 10 working days in a rolling 12 month period. In the case of probationers or those appointed on a fixed-term or temporary basis, each absence will prompt a review.

An electronic alert is issued to the line manager and to Departmental HR when a member of staff reaches the Review Point and inefficiency action, including Written Warnings and ultimately dismissal, may be initiated at that stage, depending on the full circumstances of the case.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much funding his Department allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 300/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning does not fund any services, either fully or partly, under Neighbourhood Renewal. It does, however, deliver a range of programmes related to employment and skills which aim to address disadvantage and are targeted at the needs of individuals, many of whom live in Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Tuition Fees

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what progress has been made in relation to the review of tuition fee levels.

(AQW 351/11-15)

Dr Farry: In March of this year, my Department published a consultation paper seeking views on five options in relation to higher education tuition fees and a range of other student funding issues. An Equality Impact Assessment was published with the consultation paper. The options set out in the

consultation document were informed by a number of key factors, including the report and update from the independent review of variable fees and student finance arrangements.

The consultation period closes on Friday 10 June. Decisions on the way forward will be taken only after I have had an opportunity to analyse and consider the responses received. However, I recognise the importance of ensuring that this work is concluded as quickly as possible so we can provide clarity for all of the key stakeholders.

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

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Agrifood Sector

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department has taken in the last year to assist the agri-food sector.

(AQW 124/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Last year my Department, through Invest NI made 46 offers of Selective Financial Assistance to assist the Agri food sector. This totalled over £6m support leveraging £54m investment into the sector and generating 276 new jobs and safeguarding a further 1,214. The majority of these safeguarded jobs were due to a major £37m investment by O' Kane's/Moypark with Invest NI contributing £5m support.

In January 2011, I opened Linden Food's new £8m retail packing plant. Invest NI provided £497k of assistance to this project which will create 85 new jobs generating £1.6m in wages and salaries for the local economy. Sales at the company are projected to increase by a further £34m over the next 3 years. A further 230 offers of advisory support of approximately £2m were made in the last year towards marketing, management and innovation projects.

Invest NI's food sector marketing advisers achieved £13m of new business representing 380 new product listings for 100 companies. Invest NI also piloted a series of Northern Ireland company visits for 60 companies to TESCO, ASDA and Waitrose head offices in Great Britain to present Northern Ireland products directly to their HQ buyer teams.

A three year inward bound red meat mission programme was completed which saw almost 80 international red meat buyers visit NI, the vast majority for first time and an estimated new export business of £60m.

Last June, I together with the former DARD Minister Gildernew launched the Focus on Food growth strategy for the Agri food sector here, at Parliament Buildings. This strategy was prepared in collaboration with the Agri food sector and details the key performance targets and areas of action for the development for the sector. I also agreed the recommendations of an independent review of the delivery of this strategy.

I also launched the Short Term Employment Scheme in response to the economic downturn and specifically prioritised the food processing sector within that scheme to offer support for generating additional employment in the sector.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II: Visit to the Republic of Ireland

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the potential tourism benefits for Northern Ireland of the recent visit by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 150/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The recent visit by HM Queen Elizabeth II provided an excellent opportunity to showcase both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, to a huge audience of potential holidaymakers in Great Britain and across the globe. The visit, which has been hailed a huge success, will deliver spin-off benefits for tourism in Northern Ireland.

Tourism Ireland had an extensive promotional campaign in place in GB, our largest tourism market, during the Queen's visit, to maximise this opportunity. TV and radio advertisements aired on key channels, along with print media and online advertisements to coincide with the visit.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board also encouraged visitors to the Republic of Ireland to visit Northern Ireland through its seasonal marketing campaign, including extensive advertising and promotional stands at Dublin Airport, seaports, key events and key tourist hotspots in Dublin city centre.

EU Legislation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, since May 2007, whether her Department has taken any different approaches to that of Great Britain when making regulations or implementing EU legislation; and to provide examples.

(AQW 180/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information is not held centrally and could only be retrieved at disproportionate cost.

Mobile Phone Coverage in Rural Areas

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any action she has taken to encourage network operators to improve mobile phone coverage in rural areas.

(AQW 190/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The telecoms sector in the UK is fully privatised and independently regulated. For many rural parts of Northern Ireland (NI) mobile phone coverage is limited and the investment model for the mobile network operators is unsustainable given low customer numbers. A similar situation exists across the whole of the UK but is more acute in Northern Ireland.

The importance of mobile communication services is recognised in DETI's recent consultation document which has been brought to the attention of a wide range of stakeholders including the mobile phone operators.

The NI Broadband Fund, which I launched in August 2008, seeks innovative solutions to the provision of broadband services including mobile services. The Fund was highlighted to mobile operators. There have been five calls for projects to date but unfortunately none of the main mobile operators took up this funding opportunity.

I also met with the Northern Ireland Director of OFCOM earlier this year and urged the Regulator to do more to address the deficit in mobile coverage in Northern Ireland. Furthermore in response to the recent OFCOM consultation on spectrum, DETI has highlighted that steps should be taken to ensure rural areas benefit fully from the next generation of mobile services and that the coverage obligation of 95% proposed under this consultation must translate into at least the same coverage regionally for Northern Ireland.

Local Businesses: Bureaucratic Burden

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department has taken since May 2007 to reduce the bureaucratic burden on local businesses.

(AQW 221/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department oversees the Northern Ireland Better Regulation Strategy. The Strategy was reviewed and updated in 2007 and 2010. The Strategy commits all departments to carrying out regulatory impact assessments and ensuring that all regulation is necessary and proportionate. It is

overseen by an interdepartmental group of senior officials and by a Stakeholders Forum representing businesses, regulators and enforcers.

Travel and Subsistence Costs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, in tabular format, the travel and subsistence costs incurred by (i) the Minister (ii) the Special Adviser; and (iii) support staff on trips outside Northern Ireland since May 2007.

(AQW 222/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Travel and subsistence costs of trips outside Northern Ireland are provided in the table below:

COSTS FOR DETI MINISTER, SPECIAL ADVISER, SUPPORT STAFF

Annual Year	Travel & Subsistence £k
May 2007 – 31 March 2008	114,011
1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009	¹ 53,301
1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010	92,771
1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011	74,860

To disaggregate information on an individual basis would be available only at disproportionate cost to the Department.

1 Travel and subsistence costs do not include ROI or GB and would only be available at disproportionate cost.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department will be making a submission on behalf of the Executive to the Treasury consultation on Air Passenger Duty.

(AQW 269/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is leading on the Northern Ireland response to the HM Treasury consultation as APD is a taxation issue. My officials have been working closely with counterparts in DFP to ensure the Executive puts a strong case to HM Treasury in respect of the impact of APD on Northern Ireland.

Farm Safety

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the increase in fatal accidents, what action her Department has taken to improve farm safety in the last year; and what help and advice is available from the Department.

(AQW 288/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In recognition of the high risk inherent in farming, the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI), has in the last year, continued to deliver a range of targeted interventions aimed at promoting farm safety to farmers, farming families and farm workers. In addition to a proactive farm safety inspection programme, HSENI has promoted farm safety in the media; has worked closely with agricultural colleges and schools and has participated in agricultural events such as the Balmoral Show. Of particular note has been the continuation of the very successful, “Be Aware Kids” campaign, aimed at eliminating child deaths resulting from farming activities. Added to this has been a new “Stay Farm Safe” campaign aimed at addressing the vulnerability of the older farmer, who makes up a disproportionate number of the deaths resulting from farming incidents. HSENI has also developed a range of information and advisory materials and services on farm safety, that includes a free farm safety mentoring service delivered by HSENI’s small business advisory service Health and Safety Works NI, a free phone HSENI helpline and a farm safety section on its website.

Household Electricity Bill

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the average cost of a household electricity bill in Northern Ireland compares to the average bill in Great Britain.

(AQW 292/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The average household electricity bill in Northern Ireland during 2010 is estimated at £496 per annum. This is for a standard credit customer with annual consumption of 3,300kWh of electricity and includes VAT.

This compares with an average bill during 2010 in England and Wales of £431 per annum, and £457 per annum in Scotland for similar customers and annual usage.

Presbyterian Mutual Society Savers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the financial package that has been agreed by the Executive and the UK Government, when the Presbyterian Mutual Society savers will receive repayments of their savings.

(AQW 299/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Presbyterian Mutual Society (in Administration) creditors and members voted overwhelmingly on 6 May to accept the Administrator's proposed Scheme of Arrangement ("the Scheme"). The 28 day statutory notice period to facilitate, among other things, any challenges to the scheme ended on 10 June 2011. Following this the Administrator will seek the Court's final agreement to the scheme, which will include the appointment of Joint Supervisors, Mr. Arthur Boyd and Mr. John Hansen.

During the 28 day notice period my officials and their legal team have been working with the Administrators' team to address the necessary legal and contractual issues that require to be satisfied in order for the £175 million commercial loan and the £50 million financial assistance agreement, which is government's contribution to the Mutual Access Fund, to be paid to the Joint Supervisors. A key aspect of this is that government is satisfied that adequate security is available within the assets of PMS to enable the loan to be repaid in the event of default. This work continues apace.

Subject to the satisfactory completion of this work the Joint Supervisors will then be in a position to begin making payments to creditor and members. They have indicated that they are aiming for an early July 2011 timeframe.

Staff Sick Leave

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

(AQW 334/11-15)

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

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

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department will help Ballymena Borough Council restore Arthur Cottage, Ballymena to its former status following the recent

fire; and if she will work with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that this happens as soon as possible.

(AQW 342/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) understands that Arthur Cottage is fully insured and the council may well be able to restore the visitor attraction to its original state.

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department intends to take to assist with the restoration of Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, which was damaged by a fire.

(AQW 346/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) understands that Arthur Cottage is fully insured and the council may well be able to restore the visitor attraction to its original state.

Foyle Cup and Milk Cup Applications for Funding

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to explain the NI Tourist Board's decision to reject the Foyle Cup and the Milk Cup applications for funding.

(AQW 445/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) Events Fund was developed to support the draft DETI Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 in delivering increased visitors and spend to Northern Ireland.

The Foyle Cup and the Milk Cup applied to the new NITB funding scheme in February 2011. Unfortunately they did not score well across the ten key criteria to be eligible for funding. NITB took a holistic approach to scoring and events must score well in each criteria, and demonstrate how they met the criteria to be awarded points. The ten key criteria are; Product and Customer Fit, Visitor Numbers, Economic Impact, Media Impact, Event Viability and Management Experience, Capacity for Growth, NI Brand, Environmental Sustainability, Social Impact, and Universal Accessibility.

All applications were assessed using a scoring matrix. Each application was scored twice and a final score agreed between the two assessors. Those applications that raised concerns were marked again to ensure accuracy and fairness of their scores. For all applicants' only the information provided with the application form was scored against.

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what legislation her Department intends to introduce in (i) 2011/12; and (ii) the following years of this mandate.

(AQW 490/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Policy proposals for primary legislation are currently being developed in relation to Gas (Common Arrangements); Credit Unions; and Industrial and Provident Societies. It is likely that legislation on these matters will be introduced during the 2011/2012 Assembly session.

Proposals for primary energy legislation and amendments to the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 are also being developed to be introduced later in the mandate.

In addition the Department will be working on subordinate legislation in respect of Tourism, Health & Safety at Work; Consumer Affairs and Energy. These are subject to consultation with the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and, where appropriate, Executive agreement.

Further legislative proposals may be brought forward during 2011/12 and the following years of the mandate, as needed, to give effect to new, or changes to existing, policies.

Department of the Environment

Single Wind Turbine Planning Applications

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of single wind turbine planning applications in the Omagh and Strabane District Council area that have been (a) submitted; (b) refused; and (c) approved in each of the last four years; and (ii) of those refused how many applicants were not offered an opportunity to meet with the local councils to ensure that a full consultation process had been undertaken.

(AQW 54/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):

- (i) The total number of planning applications for single wind turbines received between 2006 and 2010 in the Omagh and Strabane LGDs was 140. See table 1 below

TABLE 1:

(a) Applications received for single wind turbines, 2006 to 2010 (Omagh and Strabane LGDs)

	Omagh	Strabane
2006/07	8	2
2007/08	6	4
2008/09	12	8
2009/10	15	18
2010/11 (up to 31st Dec 2010 only)	26	41
Total	67	73

- (b) & (c) Between 2006 and 2010, 64 single wind turbine applications were approved and 9 refused. See table 2 below

TABLE 2: SINGLE WIND TURBINE APPLICATIONS DECIDED 2006 TO 2010 (OMAGH AND STRABANE LGDS)

	Omagh		Strabane	
	Approved	Refused	Approved	Refused
2006/07	6	1	1	0
2007/08	7	3	3	1
2008/09	8	0	10	0
2009/10	5	4	7	0
2010/11 (up to 31st. Dec 2010 only)	3	0	14	0
Total	29	8	35	1

- (ii) Local councils are at liberty to engage independently with applicants at any stage of the planning process. As part of the process councils can request that an application is deferred to facilitate further discussion / consideration. Of the 9 applications refused 6 were deferred to allow for office meetings, further information or further reconsideration by the Department.

Planning Permission

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what action he intends to take to assist people from rural areas who are seeking planning permission to build a home and reside in their local community. **(AQW 65/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: All proposals for planning permission to build a home will be assessed against the policy provisions of PPS 21 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside', other relevant planning policies, the development plan, and other material planning considerations.

I am currently considering this issue further.

Chapel Road, Mayobridge: Premises

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to address the health and safety issues at the premises at Chapel Road, Mayobridge, which holds half a million tyres. **(AQW 110/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: The operator at Chapel Road, Mayobridge has a waste management licence which permits him to accept up to 7,000 tonnes of waste tyres at the site per year.

The licence includes a number of conditions to manage and control the safe storage, recycling and disposal of waste tyres. NIEA staff also regularly assess fire break separation, security and access and the operator's fire/emergency action plan. The Agency works closely with the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and local Environmental Health Department.

NIEA has suspended the site licence on two recent occasions and retains a partial Suspension Notice on the site. The operator can continue to process tyres and is permitted to import 1 tyre for every 2 tyres leaving the site up to a maximum amount.

NIEA has entered into an agreement with the company to implement a remediation plan for the site. This agreement includes measures in relation to health and safety and importantly includes a plan to reduce the total number of tyres held on site. A fire safety plan has also been commissioned as well as additional security. The Health and Safety Executive has been informed and has visited the site under their remit.

Over the past 8 months the company has considerably reduced the number of tyres on the site and currently there are approximately 2,682 tonnes or about 321,840 tyres. The company is required to submit weekly data returns to NIEA stating the number of tyres remaining on the site. The agreement in place requires the company to reduce the tonnage to about 700 tonnes by August 2011. Should the site operator fail to meet this target then NIEA will implement more stringent regulatory action.

Improvements have been made to the site since October 2010 however it is recognised that further improvements are required. NIEA will continue to monitor the site on a regular basis to ensure these are introduced in accordance with the agreement.

NIEA believes that unauthorised storage of tyres has taken place and in line with our Enforcement and Prosecution Policy a case file has been sent to the Public Prosecution Service.

The Department has also taken enforcement action under planning legislation seeking the cessation of the importation of tyres onto the unauthorised part of the site and the removal of all tyres externally stored at the site.

The company has submitted a planning application including an Environmental Impact Statement to regularise the situation, seeking planning permission to develop a tyre recycling facility on the entire site. The Department is currently processing this application.

I am considering this issue generally.

Hilden Mill, Lisburn

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for his Department's assessment of the cause of the fire at Hilden Mill, Lisburn; (ii) to detail the damage caused as a result of the fire; and (iii) for an update on the progress made in relation to the re-development of Hilden Mill since the fire.

(AQW 165/11-15)

- (i) **Mr Attwood:** I can confirm, that my Department has been advised by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, that the fire was caused by vandals who had entered the building, and set fire to plastic cables on the third floor.
- (ii) The fire has caused extensive damage to the top three floors, with a partial collapse of the roof. A structural crack has also appeared in the roof top water tank enclosure. I understand that a Building Control officer has carried out a visual assessment of the building along with the developer's architect, and the initial assessment is that the primary structure appears not to be compromised.
- (ii) NIEA officials have been in contact with the Developer's Architect Dawson Stelfox, who has contacted the owners, Galliard Homes, and provided them with an update on the condition of the structure. I understand that there may be some interest from other parties in acquiring part of the site. My officials are seeking to convene a meeting with interested parties, to discuss potential future uses for this historic and architecturally important site.

Red Squirrel Population

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his strategy to enhance the protection of, and increase in the red squirrel population.

(AQW 177/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The native Red Squirrel population in Northern Ireland is rapidly declining in numbers and distribution.

It is widely accepted that the presence and spread of the Grey Squirrel is the biggest threat to the conservation of the Red Squirrel across the UK and Ireland. This is primarily due to competition for food resources and the spread of disease.

My Department is working with Queen's University to develop a research project to determine the current infection status of squirrel pox in the local populations of Grey and Red Squirrels. A key objective of the project will be to identify the main route of transfer of the virus and suggest ways to limit opportunities for spread of the disease and how to best protect surviving populations of Red Squirrels.

The NIEA acts as chair of the Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum (NISF) working with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Forest Service, many non-governmental organisations and volunteer groups to develop and deliver best practice in Red Squirrel conservation.

An All Ireland Species Action Plan for the Red Squirrel was published in 2008, which included several objectives for conserving the Red Squirrel. This document recommended culls of Grey Squirrels in areas close to Red Squirrel strongholds. This plan also recommended the creation of Red Squirrel Reserves which can be defended against the ingress of the Grey Squirrel. To date six of these areas have been identified in State owned forests and the NISF aims to direct resources to control Grey Squirrels around these areas.

Archaeological Planning Conditions

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the job losses at the Built Heritage department of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to detail (i) what contingency plans are in place to ensure that archaeological planning conditions are monitored to ensure that they are adhered to by applicants and developers; and (ii) his Department's assessment of the impact of these job losses on the

monitoring and adherence to archaeological planning conditions, including the impact on the efficiency of the planning process.

(AQW 220/11-15)

- (i) **Mr Attwood:** Staff in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) will monitor archaeological planning conditions to ensure that they are adhered to by applicants and developers.
- (ii) The external contract used to support this work expired on 31 May 2011. Arrangements are now being made to retender this work on a competitive basis and it is expected this process will be completed later this year. In the meantime NIEA staff will seek to maintain the efficiency of the planning process and this may require a significant reprioritisation of their work, over the summer period, at least, while NIEA puts in place a new contract based, provision.

Marine Bill

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) if he can give an assurance on the delivery of a Marine Bill; and (ii) to detail the timescale for the delivery of the Bill.

(AQW 227/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am fully committed to the delivery of a Marine Bill. I am conducting further discussions with officials and external groups during the next two weeks to identify if the draft Bill can be enhanced. I have circulated an Executive paper and shall confirm timescale shortly.

Planning Bill

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to make the regulations that are required for the Planning Bill to become into operation.

(AQW 232/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I will make the regulations to bring the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 into operation at a time and in circumstances to be agreed by the Executive and only after new governance arrangements for councils, along with a revised ethical standards regime, including a mandatory code of conduct for councillors are in place.

Listed Buildings

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment which listed buildings he is currently reviewing.

(AQW 276/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department undertakes this function through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. It has an ongoing programme of review (known as the Second Survey) and approximately 670 listed buildings are currently under consideration as part of this programme.

Planning Applications: Time taken

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average time taken to process a planning application from start to finish.

(AQW 356/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The average processing times for the 2009/10 business year is contained within the Development Management Statistics Northern Ireland 2009/10 Annual Statistical Bulletin (April 2009 to March 2010) which is publically available on my Department's website.

The average number of weeks taken to process planning applications in the 2009/10 business year is set out in the table below:

Business Year	Major (average number of weeks)	Intermediate (average number of weeks)	Minor (average number of weeks)
2009/10	24	16	8

Average processing times for the 2010/11 business year will be published in July 2011. I intend to interrogate this information to identify how to accelerate processes.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Royal Victoria Hospital: MRI Scans

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current waiting time for reporting on an MRI scan at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast.

(AQW 199/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The table below shows the reporting times for MRI scans during the month of March 2011 (the most recent month for which published data are available), at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

		Reporting Turnaround Time at Royal Victoria Hospital						
Diagnostic Test	Priority	0-2 days	3-7 days	8-14 days	15-21 days	22-28 days	28 days +	Total Test Reports
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	Urgent	48	8	0	0	1	2	59
	Routine	476	204	48	96	4	111	939
	Total	524	212	48	96	5	113	998

Source: Departmental Return DRTT

Royal Victoria Hospital: MRI Scans

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether there is a backlog of MRI scans to be read at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast; (ii) how many scans are involved; and (iii) what steps are being taken to address any backlog.

(AQW 200/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can confirm that the Belfast Trust has advised me that the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast is currently working to clear a backlog of scans to be reported at the hospital

- (ii) There are 430 neuro-radiology scans remaining to be reported at the hospital. Of these, 252 scans are currently waiting more than 28 days to be reported on. These represent just over 2% of the total number of scans taken on the RVH site.
- (iii) The Royal Group of Hospitals has recruited two additional consultant neuro-radiologists. The first will take up post in June and the latter in October 2011. This will bring the total to five. In the interim the Trust has recruited a part-time locum consultant radiologist to assist in clearing the existing backlog.

Abortions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of abortions which have been carried out in each Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last five years; and the reasons for each abortion.

(AQW 203/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of abortions carried out, in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years is shown below.

HSC Trust	Number of Abortions				
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Belfast	22	26	22	*	11
Northern	23	15	23	16	*
South Eastern	23	23	20	22	21
Southern	*	*	16	16	23
Western	*	*	10	*	*
Northern Ireland Total	80	79	91	77	67

Source: Hospital Inpatient System (HIS)

* In line with the Office of National Statistics (ONS) guidance, appropriate cells have been masked to protect patient confidentiality.

Information on the reason for abortion is not collected centrally.

Ulster Hospital, Dundonald

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an assurance that the refurbishment works due to be carried out in the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald over the summer period will not have a detrimental effect on paediatric services.

(AQW 224/11-15)

Mr Poots: The provision of a safe and effective environment for patients and staff is important. The Trust has advised that from 1 July to 26 September 2011 it will operate with one Children's Inpatient Ward. The Children's Outpatients Department and the Rapid Response Unit will function as normal. During this period the Trust expects to provide a full medical and surgical service and to return to normal working configuration at the end of September 2011.

Ulster Hospital: Craig Ward

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an assurance that no staff from the Ulster Hospital's Craig Ward will be required to take unpaid leave during the impending refurbishment of the ward; and to detail any proposed changes to the staffing arrangements during the refurbishment period.

(AQW 225/11-15)

Mr Poots: Staffing and employment matters within the Ulster Hospital are the responsibility of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. The Trust has advised that staff have been offered the opportunity to take additional leave over the summer months in light of the fact that one ward will be closed. Staff have been fully involved in the process, which is voluntary; unpaid leave is only one of several options and many staff have responded in a positive way.

The enhanced provision of a safe and effective environment for patients and staff is important. The Trust expects to return to normal working configuration at the end of September 2011.

Electroencephalography (EEG) Machines

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Electroencephalography (EEG) machines are in use across the Western Health and Social Care Trust; and whether his Department has any plans to increase this number.

(AQW 262/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are no Electroencephalography (EEG) machines currently in use across the Western Health and Social Care Trust. The Western Trust does, however, have plans to establish an EEG service in its area and is currently in negotiations with their local commissioner.

MRI Scans

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many MRI scans were performed in (i) 2008; (ii) 2009; and (iii) 2010.

(AQW 279/11-15)

Mr Poots:

	Year		
	2008	2009	2010
No. MRI Scans performed ^{1,2}	43,208	49,128	50,442

Source: HSC Trusts

- 1 Figures provided by the Southern HSC Trust relate to the financial years 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11.
- 2 Data provided by the Western HSC Trust include activity undertaken by independent sector providers.

CT Scans

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many CT scans were carried out at the (i) Causeway Hospital; and (ii) Antrim Area Hospital in (a) 2008; (b) 2009; and (c) 2010.

(AQW 280/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below shows the number of CT scans carried out at the Causeway and Antrim Area Hospitals in 2008, 2009 and 2010.

Hospital	Year		
	2008	2009	2010
Causeway	5,537	5,929	5,947
Antrim Area	10,180	10,150	9,267

Source: Northern HSC Trust

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority Registration Fee

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will consider reviewing the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority registration fee that dental practices must pay given that the fee is the same for large and small dental practices.

(AQW 285/11-15)

Mr Poots: From 1 April 2011 legislation provides for the regulation of all dental establishments delivering private dental care, including orthodontics. This legislation will provide assurance to the public, through regular inspection and monitoring by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority that private dental treatment is delivered to a minimum standard.

The legislation provides for a fee for registration and thereafter an annual renewal fee.

I have no plans to review the registration fee, which is a one-off fee of £952. The registration process is broadly the same for a small practice as for a large practice. Thereafter the annual fee is £46 per practice chair.

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority Legislation

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will consider a review of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority legislation, which came into force on 1 April 2011, which regulates every dental practice as an independent hospital.

(AQW 286/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have no plans to review legislation, which from 1 April 2011 provides for the regulation of all dental establishments delivering private dental care, including orthodontics.

The registration of private dental practices within the classification of “independent hospital” is a legislative mechanism to facilitate regulation of the sector, but does not mean that they are treated, in terms of regulation and inspection, as hospitals. They are regulated and inspected with respect to the minimum standards for dental services set by the Department.

This legislation will provide assurance to the public, through regular inspection and monitoring by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, that private dental treatment is delivered to a minimum standard.

S2 Certificate Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 46/11-15, (i) whether the Northern Ireland Health Service bears the cost of S2 certificate treatments that are provided in Northern Ireland and that the local budget is not recompensed if and when payment is received by the Department of Work and Pensions; (ii) if so, for his assessment of the acceptability of this arrangement; and (iii) to detail the cost of S2 certificate treatments for the last three financial years.

(AQW 290/11-15)

Mr Poots: The S2 certificate is designed to cover patients for non-emergency elective treatments and is generally used for specialist treatments not provided for in a person's member state of origin. Such treatments are usually provided at large specialist centres and therefore Northern Ireland will rarely be the chosen destination within the UK. S2 reimbursement operates at member state i.e. UK, level – this operates in both directions therefore while the health service in Northern Ireland does not get reimbursed for those patients they treat under an S2 certificate, it is also the case that the health service here is not charged for any Northern Ireland resident treated in another EEA country under an S2 certificate. This system applies to all parts of the UK.

In response to part (iii) of your question; as indicated in my response to AQW 46/11/15, this information is held at UK level and is not broken down by individual country.

Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will review the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 to ensure an unnecessary regulatory burden is not placed on the dental profession.

(AQW 304/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have no plans to review the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

I do not consider that the Regulations made under the Order to provide for the regulation of private dental practices, including orthodontics, from 1 April 2011 place an unnecessary burden on the dental profession. A practice, once registered, will be inspected by RQIA once per year, subject to there being no concerns about delivery of care and treatment.

Whilst private dental practices are being regulated within the classification of “independent hospital”, this is a legislative mechanism to facilitate regulation of the sector, but does not mean that they are treated, in terms of regulation and inspection, as hospitals. They are regulated and inspected with respect to the minimum standards for dental services set by the Department.

This legislation will provide assurance to the public, through regular inspection and monitoring by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) that private dental treatment is delivered to a minimum standard.

Pupils with Medication Needs

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether the “Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs” guidance, which was published in 2008, is fit for purpose; and whether it takes into account the latest treatment regimes for chronic conditions in school-aged children.

(AQW 306/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education are content that the “Supporting Children with Medication Needs” guidance is fit for purpose.

The guidance, which was a joint collaboration between the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education, was developed to provide schools with assistance in drawing up policies on managing medication in schools and educational settings where teachers and staff are willing to assist in the administration of medication.

The onus is on parents to make the school aware that a child requires medication and for providing the principal with written medical evidence about the child’s treatment or condition or special care needed at school. The booklet contains basic information on medical conditions that most commonly cause concern in schools e.g. asthma, diabetes, anaphylaxis and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The guidance does not, however, aim to provide detailed medical advice as it is important that the needs of children are assessed on an individual basis.

In February 2010, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in partnership with the Department of Education developed further guidance entitled “The Management of Anaphylaxis in Educational Establishments”. This guidance augments the information contained in the “Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs” by outlining the specific roles and responsibilities of the school, the school meals service, parents and carers, pupils and the school health team.

Causeway Hospital, Coleraine: Renal Unit

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the provision of a renal unit at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine.

(AQW 320/11-15)

Mr Poots: The commissioning of health and social care services to meet the needs of the population of Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) working in close partnership with the Public Health Agency.

The HSCB has advised that work is currently underway to consider the regional demand for all forms of dialysis and its implications for future capacity planning. Such an approach will take into account the improved survival rates which occur when patients receive live kidney transplants.

North Antrim: Multiple Sclerosis Services

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's plans for the continued provision of Multiple Sclerosis services in North Antrim.

(AQW 321/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust is committed to sustaining the continued provision of Multiple Sclerosis services in North Antrim. As part of the Trust's needs assessment, focus groups have been set up together with the MS Society to ascertain the views of service users and their carers on respite provision. A paper is being prepared to present to the Commissioner to reflect these views and will be available in the near future.

Staff Sick Leave

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of staff taking two or more periods of sick leave in a year.

(AQW 338/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department monitors sickness absence rates very closely in order to meet Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) targets in this area. This includes regular reviews of sickness absence records to identify multiple or frequent absences. These are then dealt with on a case by case basis and inefficiency action - including written warnings and ultimately dismissal - may be initiated at that stage if necessary.

Fire and Rescue Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why cars which are used in emergency situations by the Fire and Rescue Service and which operate at a high speed do not have recognised high visibility markings as is the case with other emergency vehicles.

(AQW 341/11-15)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) cars are white with distinctive (removable) blue flashing beacons and highly audible siren systems; new vehicles are also equipped with flashing headlights and blue flashing grill lights. However, these vehicles are also used for a wide range of other non-emergency purposes and NIFRS does not consider that permanent high visibility markings are necessary.

Community engagement by the NIFRS has indicated that people tend to identify such vehicles with the Fire and Rescue Service.

Mid-Ulster Hospital: Minor Injuries Clinic

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have presented at the Minor Injuries Clinic at the Mid Ulster Hospital since it was established in May 2010; and how many of these patients were able to receive the necessary treatment at the clinic.

(AQW 378/11-15)

Mr Poots: Between the 24th May 2010 (the date on which Mid-Ulster emergency care department was reconfigured from a consultant-led treatment service to a minor injury unit) and 31st April 2011, there were a total of 5,579 new and unplanned review attendances at Mid-Ulster Minor Injuries Unit, of which 4,940 patients 'received necessary treatment'. For the purpose of this question, 'received necessary treatment' has been defined as those patients who were not transferred to an alternative emergency care department.

Music Therapy Services

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will review the withdrawal of funding for Music Therapy.

(AQW 379/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the honourable member to the answers I gave to recent Assembly Questions; AQW 26/11-15 and AQW 76/11-15.

Southern Cross Nursing Homes

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department has taken to ensure that effective protection is in place for residents of Southern Cross Nursing Homes in the event that the company fails to survive.

(AQW 441/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is monitoring developments carefully as Southern Cross works with its landlords and those with a stake in the business to put the company on a firm footing. My officials are in contact with counterparts in the Department of Health in England, Scotland and Wales to ascertain the latest position across the UK and are working closely with the Health and Social Care Board to determine any potential impact in NI and plan accordingly to ensure that the welfare of residents in Southern Cross homes is protected.

E. Coli

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures his Department has put in place to deal with the continuing spread of the mutant strain of E. coli which has caused the deaths of at least eighteen people across the world so far.

(AQW 453/11-15)

Mr Poots: The four UK countries already have well established arrangements in place to ensure early detection and prompt management of outbreaks of infectious disease. In Northern Ireland the Public Health Agency fulfils this function. These arrangements include close liaison with health protection authorities throughout the UK, Ireland, Europe and beyond.

In Northern Ireland the Chief Medical Officer wrote to the Health and Social Care bodies and all GPs and GP locums on 26 May to alert them to the outbreak of E. coli in Germany and the possibility of cases in people returning from Germany.

There have been no cases to date in Northern Ireland, and every case in Great Britain has been directly linked to Germany. There is no indication that affected food has been distributed in the UK, however the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is monitoring the situation closely.

The Public Health Agency has taken steps to raise public awareness and understanding and to address people's concerns.

The Public Health Agency, the FSA and the Health Protection Agency continue to work closely with the European Centre for Disease Control, the European Commission, other Government agencies and industry bodies to monitor the outbreak.

Music Therapy Services

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is his Department's position on funding for music therapy services for children with special needs.

(AQW 454/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the Honourable Member to the answers I gave to recent Assembly Questions; AQW 26/11-15, AQW 76/11-15 and AQW 379/11-15.

Community Health Village, Banbridge

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when work will commence on the proposed community treatment and care centre and day care facility at the Community Health Village, Banbridge; and when the work will be completed.

(AQW 457/11-15)

Mr Poots: The business case for Banbridge Community Treatment and Care Centre and Day Care facility has not yet been approved. Until approval has been given, I cannot provide timescales for commencement and completion of this project.

Department of Justice

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of the Prisoner Assessment Unit since it opened.

(AQW 97/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) opened in 1994. It is not possible to distinguish accurate costs relating to the unit until 1 April 2004.

The annual costs of the unit from this date are as follows;

2004/05	£727,352
2005/06	£830,952
2006/07	£869,858
2007/08	£907,627
2008/09	£851,860
2009/10	£887,592
2010/11	£885,018

Historical Enquires Team

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice what steps he intends to take to ensure that the business between his Department and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is not compromised during any investigation by the Historical Enquires Team.

(AQW 134/11-15)

Mr Ford: I fully support the work of the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) which plays an important role in dealing with the legacy of the past and providing a measure of resolution for families.

HET is entirely independent and there is no political influence over decisions to investigate and prosecute individuals in any cases examined by HET. If there is evidence that implicates anyone, these matters are investigated and where sufficient evidence exists, people will be prosecuted. These matters are for the Public Prosecution Service and Chief Constable.

My Department will continue to work closely with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister as with all other Departments on a wide range of issues.

Queen's Counsels

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total annual amount paid to Queen's Counsels in each of the last five years; and, where available, a breakdown of the amount paid to individual Queen's Counsels.

(AQW 158/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission paid the following sums, inclusive of VAT, directly to Queen's Counsel between 2006/07 and 2010/11:

2006/07	£11,965,192
2007/08	£9,290,325
2008/09	£11,101,224
2009/10	£15,568,813
2010/11	£7,752,523
Total	£55,678,077

LEGAL AID DIRECT PAYMENTS TO QUEEN'S COUNSEL BY YEAR

TABLE 1: FINANCIAL YEARS 2006-07 TO 2009-10

Queen's Counsel	2006-07 £	2007-08 £	2008-09 £	2009-10 £	Grand Total £
1	531,448	706,099	1,235,222	972,410	3,445,179
2	786,919	516,233	410,144	1,196,867	2,910,163
3	684,250	331,052	887,633	923,411	2,826,346
4	497,876	295,646	465,439	1,461,399	2,720,360
5	861,404	252,425	649,647	707,713	2,471,189
6	565,910	762,101	547,942	386,124	2,262,077
7	452,531	538,424	511,741	699,700	2,202,396
8	647,559	252,905	431,747	862,709	2,194,920
9	222,133	131,265	834,145	771,930	1,959,473
10	582,143	842,387	382,259	36,800	1,843,589
11	136,549	315,928	464,479	702,755	1,619,711
12	283,211	764,650	333,176	139,226	1,520,263
13	647,524	196,783	283,473	326,890	1,454,670
14	362,500	400,402	141,572	547,647	1,452,121
15	219,639	178,570	365,415	665,438	1,429,062
16	470,420	148,914	433,896	87,806	1,141,036
17	0	440,625	281,265	391,949	1,113,839
18	245,447	187,186	352,595	237,171	1,022,399
19	234,888	123,537	112,913	539,347	1,010,685

Queen's Counsel	2006-07 £	2007-08 £	2008-09 £	2009-10 £	Grand Total £
20	73,643	97,223	272,159	550,895	993,920
21	372,106	80,437	237,991	258,227	948,761
22	441,216	416,169	27,593	37,256	922,234
23	491,743	316,733	9,088	42,550	860,114
24	156,043	342,500	133,706	227,801	860,050
25	344,034	60,295	59,517	109,325	573,171
26	47,944	0	0	503,420	551,364
27	263,032	81,515	80,941	96,637	522,125
28	17,674	30,911	19,523	392,169	460,277
29	0	30,170	41,019	363,318	434,507
30	368,553	6,874	11,132	0	386,559
31	362,314	0	940	0	363,254
32	13,899	60,728	128,153	89,447	292,227
33	103,707	16,256	134,963	32,883	287,809
34	43,105	14,620	36,221	147,254	241,200
35	64,674	14,895	72,633	75,103	227,305
36	67,454	0	158,691	0	226,145
37	16,981	35,062	44,238	87,456	183,737
38	18,849	100,169	20,670	28,585	168,273
39	0	0	0	166,302	166,302
40	0	35,361	101,907	25,408	162,676
41	5,405	23,853	50,639	70,626	150,523
42	0	0	0	147,331	147,331
43	0	0	0	147,238	147,238
44	50,296	41,016	31,267	0	122,579
45	0	7,784	70,398	40,191	118,373
46	0	11,677	99,875	0	111,552
47	74,879	22,558	0	2,185	99,622
48	0	0	0	92,000	92,000
49	0	0	0	74,750	74,750
50	8,476	33,835	20,527	5,261	68,099
51	13,504	0	35,278	16,800	65,582
52	61,496	0	0	0	61,496

Queen's Counsel	2006-07 £	2007-08 £	2008-09 £	2009-10 £	Grand Total £
53	13,219	0	3,688	18,792	35,699
54	8,446	7,202	15,079	0	30,727
55	5,810	1,762	3,599	16,193	27,364
56	0	0	0	26,315	26,315
57	19,308	1,057	2,938	2,875	26,178
58	0	326	10,581	10,603	21,510
59	0	0	20,814	0	20,814
60	0	0	11,869	0	11,869
61	0	9,500	0	0	9,500
62	0	0	0	6,325	6,325
63	0	0	6,286	0	6,286
64	5,031	0	0	0	5,031
65	0	4,705	0	0	4,705
66	0	0	2,598	0	2,598
Total Direct Payments by NILSC to QCs during Financial Year	11,965,192	9,290,325	11,101,224	15,568,813	47,925,554

TABLE 2: FINANCIAL YEAR 2010-11

Queen's Counsel	2010-11 £
1	897,657
2	704,056
3	691,912
4	577,723
5	465,675
6	399,697
7	362,572
8	362,065
9	308,220
10	305,711
11	282,000
12	209,886
13	190,324
14	186,362

Queen's Counsel	2010-11 £
15	164,991
16	163,510
17	140,866
18	117,500
19	112,483
20	90,873
21	86,744
22	85,086
23	66,400
24	63,793
25	58,750
26	56,230
27	53,890
28	52,241
29	50,371
30	48,244
31	48,008
32	47,221
33	47,000
34	45,162
35	44,889
36	34,207
37	17,932
38	17,867
39	16,331
40	15,936
41	11,874
42	11,690
43	10,728
44	7,986
45	7,068
46	3,960
47	3,874

Queen's Counsel	2010-11 £
48	2,977
49	1,575
50	338
51	68
Total Direct Payments by NILSC to QCs during 2010-11	7,752,523

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how the services that had been provided by the Prisoner Assessment Unit are currently being delivered.

(AQW 159/11-15)

Mr Ford: All staff from the Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) have been redeployed to Maghaberry from where they continue to perform checks and monitor PAU prisoner's progress.

Prisoners in the PAU participate in a three stage testing in the community. Prisoners on phase one are full time residents in the unit and are taught basic life skills. These prisoners have been returned to the prison regime and are not currently being tested in the community. In phase two prisoners reside within the unit and attend work placements Monday to Friday with permission to reside in a hostel or approved home address at the weekends. Prisoners currently on phase two continue to attend work placements from Maghaberry and avail of weekend parole. In phase three of the scheme prisoners are permitted to reside and work full time in the community. Prisoners currently on phase three are continuing to live and work in the community and are still subject to curfew and work placement checks. Phase three prisoners are also required to return to Maghaberry for drug and alcohol testing.

Dangers of Entering Quarries

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the level of funding provided by (a) the District Policing Partnerships; and (b) the PSNI to community groups to facilitate awareness raising programmes on the dangers of entering quarries; and (ii) where any such awareness programmes are delivered.

(AQW 160/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following consultation with the NIPB and PSNI, I can advise that neither the DPPs nor the PSNI provide funding for this purpose and that neither is aware of any such programmes being delivered.

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether the Prisoner Assessment Unit will be re-opened following the outcome of the investigation into it; and (ii) given that it is a non-essential unit, to detail what savings could be made if it is not re-opened.

(AQW 162/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) A decision on the future operation of the Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) will be taken once the findings of the current investigation have been thoroughly considered.
- (ii) It is not possible to accurately determine the long term savings which could be made by not re-opening the PAU. These will depend on what, if any provision is put in its place.

Keeping a Prisoner in Jail: Cost

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the average cost of keeping a prisoner in jail in each of the last five years; and (ii) how this figure compares with the rest of the UK.

(AQW 174/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not calculate the cost per prisoner but rather the average cost per prisoner place, which is published in its Annual Report and Accounts. The cost per prisoner place, in each of the last five years, for Northern Ireland and the other UK prison services is detailed in the table A below:

TABLE A

Year	Northern Ireland	England & Wales (Note 1)	Scotland (Note 2)
2006-07	£90,298	£28,734	£40,449
2007-08	£81,254	£29,561	£41,470
2008-09	£81,340	£30,370	£41,724
2009-10	£77,831	£44,006	£36,661
2010-11	£73,835 (Provisional)	Not yet available	Not yet available

Comparisons with other services are not entirely valid because a number of costs that NIPS meets internally are funded by other organisations in England & Wales, eg. Education.

The same range of headquarters services must be provided within NIPS as that provided by England & Wales and Scotland which have higher prison populations. Economies of scale dictate that costs in Northern Ireland will be higher.

Illegal Republican Parades

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total number of people who have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted in relation to illegal republican parades in each of the last two years, broken down by each parade.

(AQW 208/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prosecutions are the responsibility of the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and convictions are a matter for the courts. With regard to your request, the available information is set out in the table below:

Location	Date	Current Position
Stoneyford	11/7/2009	Proceedings have been initiated against three individuals.
Ormeau Avenue	22/10/0 22/10/2009	Proceedings have been initiated against one individual and a prosecutorial decision is pending against another.
Lurgan	25/7/2010	Summonses have been issued against four individuals.
Galbally	10/10/2010	Proceedings have been initiated against two individuals and the case has been listed for hearing.

Location	Date	Current Position
Lurgan	23/1/2011	Eighteen individuals have been reported to the PPS and these cases are under consideration.

None of the cases listed have reached the stage of conviction.

Legal Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to introduce legislation to prevent a similar case to that at Lisburn Magistrates Court, where the carer of an elderly person had charges of neglect against them dropped due to an error, and as a consequence, the case was left open to a defence challenge.

(AQW 215/11-15)

Mr Ford: I understand that the Public Prosecution Service identified an administrative oversight relating to the consent for prosecution of this case but the Acting Director rectified the position by moving promptly to issue the required consent. It would not be necessary, or appropriate, to introduce legislation with a view to preventing a reoccurrence.

Convicted Sex Offenders

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convicted sex offenders currently residing in the Limavady Borough Council area.

(AQW 235/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department is not responsible for recording information on convicted sex offenders who are subject to notification requirements under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Information in relation to sex offenders subject to notification may be obtained by contacting the PSNI directly.

Legal Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice if he intends to introduce legislation to ensure that legal cases are not subjected to unreasonable delay which could lead to cases being dismissed, particularly in relation to serious charges, such as, murder.

(AQW 245/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have no plans at the moment to introduce additional time limits for the criminal justice system. A multi-agency programme of work is in place to speed up justice, through which the criminal justice agencies have delivered a number of initiatives, and the average time for progressing cases through the system has improved.

I believe, however, that more fundamental procedural and legislative reform is needed if we are to make significant reduction in delays in the processing of criminal cases, and I intend to bring proposals for reform to the Assembly later in the year. This will include options to address the issue of late guilty pleas, proposals for the reform of committals and options to tackle poor conduct that leads to delay in court.

Orders Prohibiting Publicity on the Granting of Injunctive Relief

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many applications to the High Court of Justice have been (i) sought; and (ii) granted for orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief in each year since 2007.

(AQW 257/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) Information on the exact nature of the injunctive relief sought is held on the originating application and cannot be provided without an extensive manual trawl.
- (ii) Since 2007 four orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief have been made.

Policing Board: Independent Membership

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many applications were received in the recent trawl for independent membership of the Policing Board.

(AQW 268/11-15)

Mr Ford: There were 193 applications received in the recent competition for independent membership of the Policing Board.

Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve: GC Gratuity Payment

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice what steps his Department has taken to ensure that the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve GC gratuity payment will be treated as a special payment by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. [R]

(AQW 270/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials from my Department have been in contact with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) since the devolution of policing and justice in April, when I accepted responsibility for administering the police Part-Time Reserve Gratuity Scheme as set out by the Northern Ireland Office.

The Department has provided HMRC with all of the information required by them to inform us on how the payments should be treated. HMRC advice has consistently been that since these payments relate to an individual's employment and do not fall within any of the existing exemptions, they would be liable to tax and national insurance. The liability will depend on the status of the individual.

The DOJ has always understood that HMRC are able only to operate within the parameters of existing tax law and they have been very clear that no exemption has been found for these payments.

My Department has not had any discussions with the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister in relation to the tax status of the Gratuity payments.

Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve: GC Gratuity Payment

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice what steps he will take to ensure that people entitled to a payment from the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve GC gratuity payment will receive the amount in full and free from tax and National Insurance contributions. [R]

(AQW 271/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials from my Department have been in contact with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) since the devolution of policing and justice in April, when I accepted responsibility for administering the police Part-Time Reserve Gratuity Scheme as set out by the Northern Ireland Office.

The Department has provided HMRC with all of the information required by them to inform us on how the payments should be treated. HMRC advice has consistently been that since these payments relate to an individual's employment and do not fall within any of the existing exemptions, they would be liable to tax and national insurance. The liability will depend on the status of the individual.

The DOJ has always understood that HMRC are able only to operate within the parameters of existing tax law and they have been very clear that no exemption has been found for these payments.

My Department has not had any discussions with the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister in relation to the tax status of the Gratuity payments.

Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve: GC Gratuity Payment

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has had any discussions with (i) Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs; or (ii) the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in relation to the tax status of the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve GC Gratuity Payment Scheme pay-outs. [R]

(AQW 272/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials from my Department have been in contact with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) since the devolution of policing and justice in April, when I accepted responsibility for administering the police Part-Time Reserve Gratuity Scheme as set out by the Northern Ireland Office.

The Department has provided HMRC with all of the information required by them to inform us on how the payments should be treated. HMRC advice has consistently been that since these payments relate to an individual's employment and do not fall within any of the existing exemptions, they would be liable to tax and national insurance. The liability will depend on the status of the individual.

The DOJ has always understood that HMRC are able only to operate within the parameters of existing tax law and they have been very clear that no exemption has been found for these payments.

My Department has not had any discussions with the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister in relation to the tax status of the Gratuity payments.

Firearm Certificate

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of appeals against a decision to (i) revoke; or (ii) not renew a firearm certificate in each of the last five years; and, of these, how many were successful.

(AQW 297/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Minister of Justice became responsible for decisions on firearm appeals on 12 April 2010.

The information requested from that date is set out below:

Period	Appeals following revocation		Appeals following non renewal *	
	Received	Successful	Received	Successful
12/4/10 – 31/12/10	31	3	27	3
1/1/11 – 31/5/11	17	0 **	14	0 ***

* Includes non renewals on variations of existing certificates

** of the cases processed following revocation

*** of the cases processed following non renewal

Serving Police Officers: Security Provision

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Justice to detail the additional resources he has provided to the Chief Constable to enhance security provision for serving police officers.

(AQW 324/11-15)

Mr Ford: The allocation of the resources provided within the police grant is an operational matter for the Chief Constable. Earlier this year the Coalition Government agreed to guarantee an additional £199.5m required by the PSNI to tackle the threat from terrorism over the next four years. This was on top of £45m from the Executive over the same time span. Some of this funding will be used to enhance security for officers. It would not be appropriate to comment on the precise allocation or the specific steps taken by the Chief Constable.

Prisoner: Devidas Paliutis

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18/11-15, whether he intends to seek the extradition of Devidas Paliutis from the Republic of Ireland so that he can face the charges from which he absconded and be charged with escaping from lawful custody.

(AQW 363/11-15)

Mr Ford: The extradition of a prisoner is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Compensation Payments

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Justice when the findings of the review of the discount rate which is used to calculate compensation payments for people who have sustained personal injuries will be released.

(AQW 417/11-15)

Mr Ford: Review of the discount rate is ongoing. My Department has sought views from the Government Actuary's Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel as required by the Damages Act 1996 and has received representations from stakeholders. In light of the views the Lord Chancellor has received in reviewing the discount rate in England and Wales, he has recently decided to take forward public consultation on the methodology to be used in setting the rate. Given this development and the read across to Northern Ireland, where similar views have been received in our review, consideration is being given to carrying out consultation on this issue covering Northern Ireland.

Department for Regional Development

Road Gritting

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to review the policy and guidelines on winter road gritting, to ensure that all rural school bus routes are salted.

(AQW 109/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The Member may be aware that, following the severe wintry conditions experienced during December 2008, the then Minister for the Department for Regional Development asked the Department's Roads Service to carry out an examination of its operational response to areas around rural schools. This examination resulted in Roads Service introducing enhanced communication arrangements and priority secondary salting to the 46 rural schools most affected by weather conditions throughout the winter of 2008/09.

The list of schools benefiting from these enhanced actions is subject to change over time to include more schools, to take account of the way that adverse weather can affect different rural schools throughout the winter. As a result of the wintry weather during 2009/10 and its impact on road conditions leading to rural schools, six additional schools were added to the list in the 2010/11 season, increasing the number of rural schools on the list to 50.

At the time of the examination of Roads Service's operational response, the criteria for the provision of grit/salt piles and salt bins was also amended, so that these can be provided to affected schools, if requested.

As there have not been significant changes since the previous examination was carried out, I have no plans to carry out a further review of the winter service policy and guidelines on winter road salting on roads leading to rural schools.

Taxi Fares for Bus and Train Drivers

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development how much Translink has spent on taxi fares for bus and train drivers in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 113/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised that they are unable to produce the information at the level of detail requested without a detailed review of all individual taxi costs. The total costs incurred in respect of taxis for all Translink staff in each of the last three financial years is as follows:

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Staff taxi costs	£52,848	£53,312	£69,597

Roads Maintenance Budget

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the proportion of the roads maintenance budget that is currently spent on reactive maintenance and whether this is sustainable over (i) the next four years; and (ii) the next decade.

(AQW 127/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that based on expenditure over recent financial years, in the region of 25% of the total structural maintenance expenditure has been spent on reactive maintenance (patching) of roads and footways.

Roads Service officials acknowledge that unplanned reactive patching work of road surfaces does not provide good value for money. Nonetheless, in the short term, such work is essential to maintain the serviceability of roads and footways, where localised failures occur.

It is widely recognised that a sustainable level of expenditure on reactive patching would be in the region of 10% of the structural maintenance budget. The current level of expenditure on reactive maintenance would not, therefore be considered to be sustainable, as the cost of relatively expensive patching to avoid public liability claims and maintain road safety, is drawing scarce funds away from better value for money resurfacing and surface dressing activities.

Roads Service

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how much Roads Service has spent on (a) reactive patching of roads; and (b) public liability claims, in each of the last five years; and (ii) to provide an estimate of the cost of (a) the maintenance backlog; and (b) the annual cost of road maintenance to maintain the roads in their present state.

(AQW 129/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of expenditure by my Department's Roads Service on carriageway patching in each of the last five financial years, for which information is available, is provided in the table below. These figures include the cost of repairing a range of surface defect types including potholes, cracking, depressions and edge deterioration.

Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Patching	£15,860,000	£16,329,000	£17,379,000	£19,035,000	£18,012,000

The table below details expenditure by Roads Service on public liability claims in each of the last five financial years.

	Personal Injury	Property Damage	Vehicle Damage	Total
2010/2011	£3,950,525.13	£149,984.22	£348,366.18	£4,448,875.53

	Personal Injury	Property Damage	Vehicle Damage	Total
2009/2010	£3,979,695.28	£104,179.41	£245,667.62	£4,329,542.31
2008/2009	£3,939,117.16	£68,300.81	£188,882.87	£4,196,300.84
2007/2008	£3,985,284.80	£54,883.08	£162,147.59	£4,202,315.47
2006/2007	£3,126,333.44	£59,832.70	£172,298.21	£3,358,464.35

Roads Service has advised that the measured structural maintenance backlog was estimated at approximately £755 million in 2009. This is the latest figure available.

I am advised the annual cost of maintaining the road network in its present state, is currently estimated at approximately £116.5 million.

Glens Estate, Limavady: Traffic-calming Measures

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration his Department has given to the provision of traffic calming measures in the Glens Estate, Limavady.
(AQW 131/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that assessments for a traffic calming scheme were carried out for the Glens Estate, Limavady on Glengiven Avenue and Glenview Drive in 2006 and in 2008. At the time of the assessments, the Glens Estate did not score as highly as other locations within the traffic calming programme and, therefore, no traffic calming measures were implemented.

However, I can inform you that Roads Service will arrange for a new traffic calming assessment to be carried out which will include traffic volume and speed surveys on Glengiven Avenue and Glenview Drive. Other factors, including the previous three-year collision history at this location, will be taken into account.

Any resulting proposals will have to compete for priority with other similar requests for traffic calming schemes and I have asked the Divisional Roads Manager, Roads Service Northern Division, to contact you once the results of the assessment has been completed.

Car Parking Charges in Town Centres

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development when he intends to make a decision on the issue of car parking charges in town centres.
(AQW 144/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In response to the potential impact on retail trade, I have initiated a review of the policy of introducing new on-street parking charges in towns throughout Northern Ireland.

I intend to announce my decision in the very near future.

Extreme Weather Conditions

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the preparedness of Roads Service to deal with any extreme weather conditions in winter 2011/12, to ensure that the difficulties that were experienced in the winter of 2010/11 are not repeated.
(AQW 147/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service has in place sufficient finance, labour and materials to satisfactorily carry out the Winter Service programme for the incoming winter season of 2011/12.

Although Roads Service has no statutory obligation to salt roads, it does earmark funds to provide a salting service with the aim of helping main road traffic to move safely and freely in wintry conditions through the removal of snow and the gritting of the salted network across Northern Ireland.

Prior to the start of each winter service season, Roads Service undertakes a significant amount of pre planning to ensure a state of readiness for the coming winter. As well as a number of routine pre-season checks, planning includes ensuring that adequate staffing arrangements are in place including training for new staff where required, that there is an adequate supply of salt, and that winter service equipment is in working order.

It is Roads Service's policy to salt main through routes carrying more than 1,500 vehicles per day and other busy through routes, where there are difficult circumstances such as steep hills, carrying more than 1,000 vehicles per day. In applying the criteria, buses get a high weighting. For example, a 40 seater bus is counted as 40 vehicles. This policy results in the provision of a salted network of approximately 7,000 km (4,300 miles) covering 28% of roads in Northern Ireland, targeting Roads Service's resources to the busier routes carrying most traffic.

Efforts are also made to ensure that small settlements of more than 100 dwellings have a treated link to the salted network and consideration is given to placing grit piles or salt bins at hills, bends or junctions on roads that are not salted.

In addition, Roads Service has introduced improvements to its operational response around rural schools regularly affected by adverse weather conditions. These improvements have ensured better communications between Roads Service and schools which experience difficulties and has allowed Roads Service to provide a more flexible and timely response as and when road conditions necessitate.

Whilst it is never possible to completely counteract the full forces of nature, based on the information currently available, it is my assessment that Roads Service is well prepared to deal with the incoming winter season.

Holywood Area: Road-Calming Measures

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what road calming measures are planned for the Holywood area in this financial year.

(AQW 151/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, subject to the successful completion of the legislative processes, it plans to construct traffic calming measures in the following areas of Holywood during this financial year:

- Abbey Ring area (incorporating Abbey Ring, Abbot's Wood, East Link, West Link, West Green and Oakley Avenue); and
- Church View area (incorporating Church View, Spencer Street and Ean Hill).

Priors Lea, Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to improve the parking facilities for the residents of Priors Lea, Holywood, particularly the elderly.

(AQW 176/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has an agreed policy with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to deal with requests, for the provision of additional car parking in former Housing Executive estates. Under this policy, Roads Service does not provide parking for amenity reasons, however, it recognises that there may be locations where additional parking provision may help to address road safety or traffic progression concerns.

Roads Service officials have advised that recent surveys at Priors Lea did not identify any road safety or traffic progression concerns, and a scheme to provide additional car parking facilities in this area would attract a lower priority when compared against other potential improvement schemes. Given

these circumstances, Roads Service has no current plans to provide additional parking facilities at Priors Lea.

Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee: Traffic-Calming Measures

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if he plans to introduce the traffic calming measures that have been requested by the local community in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee. **(AQW 178/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service receives many requests for traffic calming schemes and, as demand greatly exceeds the capacity to supply these measures, priorities must be established.

Roads Service assesses scores and prioritises all requests for traffic calming schemes within each Council area. There are currently 90 schemes identified for the Ards Council area and Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee is ranked at 66 on this list. In these circumstances, I regret to advise you that a traffic calming scheme in the Beechfield Estate would not be promoted in the foreseeable future, under current funding levels.

Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee: Footpaths and Roads

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to resurface the footpaths and roads in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee. **(AQW 179/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that while it plans to commence footway improvements in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, during this financial year, it has no plans to carry out any resurfacing on the roads.

A2 Road Widening Scheme

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any plans he has to progress the A2 Road Widening Scheme between Silverstream Banks and Seapark in Carrickfergus. **(AQW 181/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: As Minister for Regional Development, I am determined to ensure that there are improvements across the Strategic Road Network which will enhance safety, reduce journey times and provide value for money.

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

Blue Badges

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to applications for, or renewal of, Blue Badges, how much is paid to a GP who supplies a medical report at the request of his Department. **(AQW 214/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the fee payable to a GP who supplies a medical report for a Blue Badge application is £22.85.

Housing Developments: Roads

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he intends to take to ensure that the Planning Service do not allow roads in housing developments to be designated as private roads. **(AQW 230/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: The Department of the Environment's Planning Division consults with my Department's Roads Service, who 'determine' the layout and construction of roads, footways, drainage and street lighting within new housing developments.

The Private Streets (NI) Order 1980 requires developers to enter into an agreement with Roads Service, before construction, to provide the road infrastructure for the development. This agreement is secured by a bond, which allows Roads Service to complete the works, should the developer default.

The Private Streets Order also makes provision for a street to remain private, should the developer requests it and the Department is in agreement. Such an arrangement may be acceptable and appropriate in certain circumstances, for example, shared driveways, small culs-de-sac, gated developments, service roads etc. I have no plans to remove this option, but Roads Service will continue to ensure that the facility is only exercised where appropriate.

Incomplete Housing Developments

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to ensure that administrators of incomplete housing developments are aware of the urgent need to complete private roads.

(AQW 233/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, where an administrator is appointed, it will liaise with them as the person responsible for completion of housing development roads that have been determined for adoption. If a housing development road (a private street) is not properly constructed within a reasonable time, the Department may initiate enforcement action under Article 11 of the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980, requiring the responsible person to complete the works within a specified time.

However, my Department can only take action to secure completion of those streets that have been determined for adoption under the Private Streets Order. This does not include private roads or driveways.

Unadopted Street Lights

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of unadopted street lights, broken down by Roads Service division.

(AQW 236/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is unable to provide details of the number of unadopted street lights, as it only records these assets once they have been adopted. Roads Service currently operates and maintains some 271,000 street lights.

NI Water

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the announcement by NI Water on 18th May 2011 in relation to customers being billed incorrectly, what measures his Department is taking to ensure that businesses are not further negatively affected.

(AQW 239/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 73/11-15 enclosed.

AQW 73/11-15

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

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

Street Lighting Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any street lighting schemes planned for (i) the Hollywood area; (ii) the Bangor West area; and (iii) the Abbey area of Bangor, in each of the next three years.

(AQW 243/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the following street lighting schemes are currently programmed for the North Down Council area during the 20011/12 financial year:

- Seahill Road, Hollywood;
- Carolsteen, Helens Bay;
- Downshire Road, Mews and Place, Bangor; and
- Moira Drive and Avenue, Bangor.

The programme of street lighting schemes in future years is not yet developed and will depend on budget allocations and other priorities at that time.

Unadopted Roads

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total number of unadopted roads in each Roads Service Division area in (i) January 2005; (ii) January 2008; and (iii) January 2011.

(AQW 246/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is not responsible for unadopted roads and as such, it does not keep a record of the number of such roads.

I am further advised however, that a study is underway to establish information about unadopted roads in Northern Ireland, which will help inform future decisions. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be available in the Autumn.

20 mph Speed Limit

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the pilot scheme to enforce a 20mph speed limit in the areas around Hazlett Primary School in Coleraine and Kilmoyle Primary School in Ballymoney during school times; and whether there are any plans to roll out this scheme to other areas.

(AQW 249/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, following the introduction of the pilot schemes at Hezlett Primary School, Coleraine and Kilmoyle Primary School, Ballymoney, assessments were carried out to evaluate their effectiveness. These studies indicated that the introduction of the 20 mph part-time speed limits were effective at reducing vehicle speeds when the speed limit signs are illuminated.

Prior to the introduction of the 20 mph part-time speed limits, the mean speed of traffic was approximately 46 mph at Hezlett Primary School and 47 mph at Kilmoyle Primary School. Assessments carried out following the introduction of the part-time speed limit showed there were marked reductions in the mean speed noted at both schools. At Hezlett Primary School, the reduction was between 19 and 22 mph, and at Kilmoyle Primary School, the reduction was between 18 and 25 mph.

The costs involved in introducing these pilot schemes were significant and Roads Service is currently evaluating practical issues that would help to provide a more economical implementation programme. At present, there is no funding available to roll out a programme for the introduction of variable speed limit schemes at primary schools. However, every effort will be made to bring about such a programme and to prioritise delivery when funding becomes available.

Street Lighting Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are planned for the (i) Ballyholme; (ii) Groomsport; (iii) Donaghadee; and (iv) Millisle areas over the next three years. **(AQW 252/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it currently has no plans for new street lighting schemes in either the North Down Council area, which includes Ballyholme and Groomsport, or in the Donaghadee and Millisle areas over the next three years.

However, a street lighting replacement programme is being implemented for the North Down Council area during the current financial year at the following locations:

- Seahill Road, Holywood;
- Carolsteen, Helens Bay;
- Downshire Road Mews and Place, Bangor; and
- Moira Drive and Avenue, Bangor.

The programme for future years has not been developed at this stage, however, such a programme will be dependent on budget allocations and other priorities at that time.

IKEA Store: Railway Halt

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans there are to provide a railway halt at the IKEA store between Holywood and Knocknagoney. **(AQW 253/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: Translink do not have provision within their current Capital Plan for a rail halt at the Ikea store between Holywood and Knocknagoney. There are no current plans for such a halt to be developed within existing budgets as agreed at Executive level.

Traffic-Calming Measures

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what traffic calming measures are planned for (i) Bangor; and (ii) Donaghadee in (a) 2011/12; and (b) 2012/13. **(AQW 254/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service receives many requests for traffic calming schemes and as demand greatly exceeds the capacity to supply these measures, all proposals are assessed, scored and prioritised. Works programmes are then drawn up on an annual basis, which are published each year in the Spring Roads Service Report to Councils. These programmes may be subject to change, depending on the assessed priority of new requests for traffic calming.

In relation to the 2011/12 financial year, I can advise that Roads Service proposes to provide the following traffic calming schemes in Bangor:

TRAFFIC-CALMING SCHEMES PLANNED IN BANGOR IN 2011/12

Name of Scheme	Streets included in scheme
Ballymacconnell Road South	Ballymacconnell Road South and Ashford Drive

Name of Scheme	Streets included in scheme
Bryansburn Road	Bryansburn Road
Brunswick Road	Brunswick Road
Groomsport Road	Groomsport Road, Windmill Road and Bellevue
Old Belfast Road	Old Belfast Road, Killeen Avenue and Killeen Drive

Progression of these schemes is subject to the successful conclusion of the public consultation and legislative processes, with the exception of the Ballymacconnell Road South scheme, for which the legislative process has already been completed.

There are currently 90 schemes identified for the Ards Borough Council area, however, the next scheme planned for Donaghadee is Cypress Park, which is unlikely to be included in the 2011/12 or 2012/13 Traffic Calming programmes on the basis of its prioritised position on the list.

I can advise that the detailed 2012/13 budget for this work area has not yet been finalised and it is therefore not possible to provide details of the works programme at this time.

Roads

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money is scheduled to be spent on roads in each constituency over the next twelve months.

(AQW 275/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not maintain an analysis of budget / spend on a constituency basis.

In distributing the resources available for road maintenance, allocations are made to the four Roads Service Divisions on the basis of need using a range of weighted indicators tailored to each maintenance activity, such as, resurfacing, patching, gully emptying, grass cutting etc. Divisions use these indicators when apportioning budgets across Council areas to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of available funds across the whole of Northern Ireland.

The Capital funds, used to implement various local transport and safety measures, minor works schemes and bridge strengthening programme are allocated to each of the Divisions which then apportion amounts to the various disciplines on a priority basis.

Door-to-Door Transport Services

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he supports a reduction in the Door-to-Door transport services for people with disabilities, as outlined in the invitation to tender that was issued by his Department during the previous Assembly mandate.

(AQW 307/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The invitation to tender, referred to, asked bidders to submit proposals for a "core hours" Door-to-Door service between 9:00am and 5:00pm, Monday to Friday. Additionally bidders were asked to provide costs for service delivery in the "non-core hours" of 7:30am to 9:00am and 5:00pm to 11:30pm Monday to Friday and between 7:30am and 11:30 pm on Saturdays and Sundays.

The intention of the new tender specification is to protect service delivery during the busy core hours but also allows for services in "non-core hours", with the number of trips to be determined by the available budget.

You are aware that the majority of "Door-to-Door" services are currently subject to a procurement exercise which is subject to an ongoing legal challenge. We hope that this can be resolved as quickly as possible. This will secure the provision of services on a long term basis. In the interim I have ensured existing services are maintained.

A2 Upgrade

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will visit Carrickfergus Borough Council to outline his Department's stance on the A2 upgrade.

(AQW 372/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that a number of MLAs, who are also members of Carrickfergus Borough Council, were in attendance during the Adjournment debate held on 31 May 2011 in the Assembly Chamber on the Upgrade of the A2 in East Antrim.

Having made my statement during Adjournment Debate to outline my Department's position on the scheme, I do not feel there would be any benefit in reiterating this in the Council Chamber.

A Hansard record of the Adjournment Debate is available to view on the Northern Ireland Assembly website.

I have asked my Department's Roads Service officials to make themselves available should you, or any member of Carrickfergus Council, wish to discuss any aspect or detail of the proposed scheme for the Upgrade of the A2 Shore Road, Greenisland.

Department for Social Development

Bloomfield Area of Bangor: Renovating Properties

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what plans his Department has for renovating properties in the Bloomfield area of Bangor.

(AQW 201/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The pensioners' bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate had initially been programmed for a Multi Element Improvement scheme that would have seen significant work undertaken to upgrade homes in the area. However due to pressures across the housing budget, this scheme, along with all other Multi Element Improvement schemes, are now being reviewed.

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

Housing Renovation Schemes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the housing renovation schemes his Department has planned for the North Down area over the next four years.

(AQW 202/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the Housing Executive's programme of housing schemes for the North Down area during the next four years. These schemes are subject to the availability of funding.

Year	Project	Type of Work	Number of Dwellings	Estimated Cost
2011/12	Bangor Local Area Priorities which mainly covers:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Kilcooley ■ Bloomfield ■ Rathgill ■ Loughview 	External Cyclical Maintenance / Windows	284	£450k
	Bangor Medium Rise Flats:- Spencer Street/ Church Green, Hollywood	Fire doors	36	£120k
	Crawfordsburn/ Groomsport	Heating	80	£462k
	Hollywood	Heating	101	£515k
	Churchill/Redburn	Kitchens	97	£456k (Reserve scheme)
2012/13	No programme as yet			
2013/14	Groomsport	Heating	9	£40k
	Rathgill Phase 3	Kitchens	36	£186k
2014/15	Kilcooley/ Groomsport	Kitchens	120	£619k
	Kilcooley Phase 2	Kitchens	106	£520k
	Kilcooley Phase 3	Kitchens	101	£515k

Due to pressures across the housing budget all Multi Element Improvement schemes are now being reviewed.

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

Housing Associations

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration is being given to increasing the regulation of Housing Associations.

(AQW 256/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department established Housing Division as the regulatory authority under the Housing (NI) Order 1992. There are a number of measures undertaken by the Department to regulate Registered Housing Associations. The key areas are:

Inspection – a rolling programme of inspections which are carried out to determine individual Housing Associations compliance of the Housing Associations Guide.

Monitoring – which includes:

- The review of each Registered Housing Association's board minutes.
- The collection and review of relevant financial information on a quarterly basis.
- The collection and review of information concerning each Registered Housing Association's stock on a yearly basis via the Annual Regulatory Return.

The regulatory function has been enhanced recently as follows:

The number of Inspectors within the Inspection Team is to be doubled from June 2011. This measure was a consequence of my predecessor's desire to ensure the continuation of inspection and monitoring of housing associations by the allocation of additional resources for this function.

The action taken is dictated by what is found during the inspection or monitoring process:

Inspection – if the Registered Housing Association fails its inspection the Department imposes a series of tiered sanctions which, ultimately, could lead to de-registration. In the past year, 2 Registered Housing Associations have merged with another Association as a result of receiving failed inspections and there are currently a number of Registered Housing Associations in the process of entering into Group Structure with a stronger parent association retaining ultimate control of the weaker association.

Monitoring – queries identified are followed up with the appropriate Housing Association and answers deemed unacceptable can result in an inspection visit.

Coleraine Town Centre: Retail and Car-Parking Projects

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development if he will examine the two proposed significant retail and car parking projects in Coleraine town centre so that an early commencement date can be achieved.

(AQW 281/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I hope to visit Coleraine in the near future to see at first hand the work my Department is doing to help deprived communities and to promote the regeneration of the town centre. As part of my visit I hope to see the sites of both the Lanes and Ramparts development schemes and meet the developers to hear about their plans. In particular, I will discuss with them any actions that my Department can take to assist them and ensure that both schemes commence as soon as they are economically viable.

Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding has been allocated to the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 305/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At the beginning of each of the three years, the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings (SPED) scheme was assumed to be self financing with the estimated receipts from sales set at the same level as projected acquisitions. However, due to the nature of the scheme and the necessary discount on the sales price of SPED properties, combined with the downturn in the housing market, the scheme has required additional funding to be allocated, either through monitoring rounds or from existing housing budget allocations. The table below contains the relevant information.

Year	Expenditure	Receipts Generated	Net Funding required from Annual Deficit Grant
2008/09	£9,543,000	£1,940,000	£7,603,000
2009/10	£6,141,000	£5,244,000	£897,000
2010/11	£4,587,000	£3,382,000	£1,205,000

West Green, Hollywood: Housing

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the proposals for the new social housing scheme to replace the demolished flats at West Green, Hollywood.

(AQW 308/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Our initial plans for a new housing scheme on the site of the old flats at West Green in Hollywood indicated that up to 55 new family homes could be delivered. However this will be subject to final agreement with Planning Service and whilst those discussions are now underway, it is still too early to confirm what may eventually be possible on this site.

Once a detailed scheme that could attract support from Planning Service has been developed, I will be happy to share that detail not just with the member who has had a long interest in this issue, but will ensure it is shared with the local community so their views can also be taken into account.

Alcohol: Minimum Pricing

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what plans he has to discuss the legislation on the minimum pricing of alcohol with his Scottish counterpart and to consider what lessons can be learned in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 314/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A joint DSD/DHSSPS consultation on the introduction of minimum pricing of alcohol ends on 26 June and I intend to discuss this issue with the Minister for Health shortly. Following the end of the consultation we will agree the way forward. In the interim, my officials are continuing to monitor developments in Scotland on this matter and continue to meet with Scottish officials regularly.

51 Burren Road, Warrenpoint: Adjacent Lands

Ms Ruane asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the procurement procedures used by the South Ulster Housing Association in relation to planning application 2009/0357/F for lands adjacent to 51 Burren Road, Warrenpoint; and whether these procurement procedures are applied in line with the relevant EU directives.

(AQW 315/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am unable to make any assessment given that there has been no work commissioned by South Ulster or any other Housing Association in relation to this site which would have necessitated a procurement exercise.

This site is privately owned and the planning permission was granted to Kelly Brothers, a local private developer. I understand there is a condition in the planning consent requiring the provision of social housing and that provision should be managed and maintained by either South Ulster or any other Housing Association registered with my Department. However unless the owner is prepared to sell the land for development by a Housing Association, it will not be possible to meet that planning requirement and as a result, no Housing Associations are currently involved in developing social housing on that site.

Disability Living Allowance Appeals

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total cost of Disability Living Allowance appeals in the last financial year.

(AQW 316/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Appeals Service does not distinguish administration costs between individual benefits, so it is not possible to provide the total cost of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) appeals in 2010-11. However, total Appeals Service costs in 2010-11 were £5.33m, with the average cost of all hearings in the year being approximately £256.

There were 8278 DLA hearings in 2010-11 and the Social Security Agency also incurred costs of £1.02m in the appeals section of the benefit branch during the last year.

Severe Winter Weather

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there is a plan in place to mitigate the effects of any future severe winter weather on Housing Executive properties.

(AQW 317/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Following the previous period of severe adverse weather, the Housing Executive carried out a review of performance and, in light of the lessons learned, the Housing Executive has revised its Emergency and Business Continuity Plans, as well as those prepared by its maintenance contractors. The plans address the response required to increased telephony requirements and the contractors' response to increased workload both within and outside of working hours during periods of high service demand. In addition the plans consider other types of emergency which may occur and the nature of responses required. The Housing Executive has also completed a review of lessons learned which highlighted a number of areas where additional physical works, including insulation and heating related matters, could be undertaken to mitigate the risk of reoccurrence in the event of further bouts of adverse weather. Over the next few months they will conduct a formal test of the emergency plans and response procedures to refine and assist in preparations for future emergency events such as adverse weather conditions.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in North Down are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

(AQW 318/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are 5,250 people in North Down who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance at May 2011.

Rasharkin: Social Housing Proposals

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what social housing proposals are being considered for Rasharkin.

(AQW 319/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am still considering the Social Housing Development Programme and will advise the member of the proposals for Rasharkin within the coming weeks.

Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many properties in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee are owned by the Housing Executive.

(AQW 339/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive owns properties in the Beechfield Estate at the following locations:-

Location	Number of Properties
Ashfield Court	35
Ashfield Drive	42
Beechfield Drive	70
Cannyreagh Road	13

Location	Number of Properties
Elmfield Park	29
Elmfield Walk	11
Oakfield Walk	10
Pine Park	6
Total	216

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding his Department has allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal in each council area in each year since May 2007.

(AQW 340/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details funding allocated by the Department for Social Development to Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in each council area from April 2007 to March 2011. Figures relate to contracts awarded which may span multiple years.

Council Area (number of Neighbourhood Renewal Areas)	Allocation 2007/08	Allocation 2008/09	Allocation 2009/10	Allocation 2010/11
Armagh (1)	£1,099,577	£304,460	£325,759	£342,261
Ballymena (1)	£940,264	£537,076	£424,136	£447,840
Belfast (13)	£14,142,936	£6,025,815	£12,626,377	£13,975,697
Castlereagh (1)	£375,029	£678,609	£214,329	£182,495
Coleraine (2)	£815,959	£2,268,272	£296,289	£461,297
Craigavon (3)	£1,572,283	£3,935,586	£1,666,513	£951,684
Londonderry (4)	£3,320,865	£2,887,720	£4,535,902	£2,829,213
Down (1)	£1,981,354	£418,499	-	£515,878
Dungannon (1)	£305,501	£889,683	£764,459	£887,149
Fermanagh (1)	£150,411	£260,522	£453,733	£428,099
Limavady (1)	£115,842	£56,725	£375,495	£313,740
Lisburn (1)	£1,149,288	£1,312,452	£985,777	£2,067,139
Newry & Mourne (1)	£1,013,389	£1,530,814	£906,243	£588,361
Newtownabbey (2)	£217,995	£89,971	£192,595	£103,011
North Down (1)	£524,595	£589,174	£151,758	£182,138
Omagh (1)	£406,575	£741,528	£744,797	£796,423
Strabane (1)	£238,111	£984,933	£671,311	£501,358

Notes:

- 1 A range of factors will influence allocation including, notably capital projects. The history of investment in an area from other initiatives or mainstream sources, the size (population) of an area the geographical location and proximity to existing services and the 'lead-in' period required to establish structures and produce Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans will also impact on ability to utilise funds.

Ballaghmore Heights, Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the refurbishment of the ten existing homes at Ballaghmore Heights, Enniskillen.

(AQW 364/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The ten existing properties at Ballaghmore Heights, Enniskillen were previously in use as family accommodation for military personnel and Clanmil acquired these properties at the end of March 2011.

The refurbishment works include the use of renewable technologies in the form of photovoltaic panels, shower heat recovery exchangers and wood burning stoves helping achieve an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) B rating. The performance of the building fabric is also being increased to achieve an improvement of 23% over current Building Control standards.

Lowry Bros have been appointed as the main contractors for the refurbishment scheme and took possession of the site on 31 March 2011. The work progressing under the direction of the main contractor includes site set up, erection of security fencing/hoarding, provision of site compound and welfare facilities and initial striping out works. Clanmil advises that it expects the work on the refurbished family homes to be completed by Autumn 2011.

Child Support Agency

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development what action he is taking to ensure that all details held by the Child Support Agency in relation to clients and cases will be transferred to its new IT system.

(AQW 382/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is planning for the introduction of a new system of statutory child maintenance. It will be a simpler scheme, which will use latest available tax year information from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), to calculate child maintenance assessments.

When launched the new scheme will be available only to new clients. Only after a successful period of live running will the new scheme be extended to existing clients. Existing clients will then be able to apply to the new scheme or make their own maintenance arrangements. Existing cases will be closed with no details transferred to the new IT system. However, any outstanding arrears will still be payable.

The Green Paper, "Strengthening families, promoting parental responsibility: the future of child maintenance, was issued in January 2011. I will be considering the longer term position for child maintenance in Northern Ireland over the coming months.

Social Security Benefits

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development for an estimate of how much will be spent on Social Security Benefits in this financial year; and how much has been spent in each of the last five financial years.

(AQW 403/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Expenditure on Social Security benefits by the Department for Social Development for the last five years is detailed in the table below.

Year	Amount (£000s)
2006-07	3,938,282
2007-08	4,099,185
2008-09	4,366,618
2009-10	4,722,659

Year	Amount (£000s)
2010-11	4,888,579*

* The figure for 2010-11 is draft and is subject to an audit review by the NI Audit Office.

The latest estimate of Social Security benefit expenditure for the current 2011-12 financial year was that provided within the Chancellors Spring 2011 Budget. The amount was £5,227,701k. The amount will be subject to review as the year progresses and as information on actual benefit expenditure becomes available.

Social Security Benefits

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how much money has gone unclaimed in Social Security Benefits in each of the last three financial years, broken down by type of benefit.

(AQW 404/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not held by my Department as there is no available data source that can be used to accurately quantify the monetary value of unclaimed Social Security benefits.

Pension Credit

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently in receipt of Pension Credit.

(AQW 448/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At May 2011 there were 97,095 people in receipt of State Pension Credit in Northern Ireland.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding his Department has allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal in the North Antrim area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 464/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details funding allocated by the Department for Social Development to Neighbourhood Renewal in the North Antrim area in each of the last three years. Ballymena is the only Neighbourhood Renewal Area situated within the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency Figures relate to contracts awarded which may span multiple years.

Parliamentary Constituency	Allocation 2008/09	Allocation 2009/10	Allocation 2010/11
North Antrim	£537,076	£424,136	£447,840

Notes: A range of factors will influence allocation including, notably capital projects. The history of investment in an area from other initiatives or mainstream sources, the size (population) of an area the geographical location and proximity to existing services and the 'lead-in' period required to establish structures and produce Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans will also impact on ability to utilise funds.

Social Housing Proposals

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the social housing proposals which are currently being considered for each council area.

(AQW 555/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am currently considering the draft Social Housing Development Programme that has recently been presented to me. I hope to be in a position to publish details of those schemes included in the 2011/12 financial year in the coming weeks.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 17 June 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Devolution of Policing and Justice: Radio Advertisement

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the cost to their Department of purchasing air time and making the radio advertisement on the devolution of policing and justice which OFCOM recently ruled was in breach of the Communications Act 2003; and how they intend to reimburse the public purse for this expenditure.

(AQW 204/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The total cost of purchasing air time and making the radio advertisement on devolution of policing and justice was £3,539.20.

The OFCOM ruling did not require OFMDFM to reimburse the public purse for this expenditure.

The radio advertisement was part of a community consultation process and our decision to publicise the availability of the Hillsborough Castle Agreement was vindicated by the fact that almost 16,000 people sought copies.

Ethnic Minority Projects

Ms Lo asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the funding for this financial year for ethnic minority projects.

(AQW 211/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A formal announcement on the Minority Ethnic Development Fund will be made shortly and successful applicants will receive letters of offer for the first six months of the 2011/12 funding scheme as soon as the necessary formalities have been completed.

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Frew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action their Department can take to assist with the restoration of Arthur Cottage, Ballymena which was recently damaged by fire.

(AQW 327/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It was with great sadness that we heard of the fire damage to Arthur Cottage, near Cullybackey. OFMDFM does not have any funding streams that would be able to support the restoration of the cottage. We have, however, asked Executive colleagues to keep us informed of developments.

Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland

Dr McDonnell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the notifications which have been given to the staff at the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI) since February

2011, including staff who transferred to the organisation in 2004, in relation to (i) the organisation's closure; (ii) the redundancy packages on offer; and (iii) the arrangements in place to deal with any post-closure redundancy matters; and to outline their Department's current position on the closure of ERINI. **(AQW 405/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since February 2011, the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland staff have been informed of progress in relation to the closure of the organisation by letters from the ERINI board. The Director has also communicated verbally or in writing during that time, with individual staff on related queries.

All staff received a letter from the Board on 30 March 2011 outlining the respective redundancy packages it had recommended to the Department. In addition, this letter confirmed that the period of notice for staff had been extended for a further three months until 22 June 2011 and explained the reasons for the decision. The letter also informed staff that they would be advised of the practical arrangements for the closure of the organisation by management as soon as possible.

The Board sent a further letter on 26 May 2011 to staff who were formerly employed by the Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre (NIERC), one of the two bodies involved in the merger which created ERINI. This letter confirmed to staff that the Department, having taken legal advice, had drafted a business case which proposed calculating their compensation packages under the terms of the redundancy schemes applying in the Queen's University of Belfast.

ERINI is a registered company and it will be closed on terms compliant with the prescribed protocols of company law. The Department will work closely with the Board to address any post-closure issues which arise.

The Department is at present awaiting formal approval of its Business Case for the payment of the recommended staff redundancy packages.

Procurement

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to procurement by their Department, (i) on how many occasions, since May 2007, a supplier has been secured before authorisation by the Accounting Officer and why; and (ii) the level of expenditure in each case. **(AQW 477/11-15)**

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In relation to procurement, Accounting Officer authorisation is only specifically required for Single Tender Actions.

Since May 2007, OFMDFM secured eight suppliers through single tender action before authorisation by the Accounting Officer was secured. These assignments had a combined value of £373,716. The table below details the level of expenditure in each case.

SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS SINCE MAY 2007 WITH NO PRIOR ACCOUNTING OFFICER APPROVAL

Financial Year	Single Tender Action	Expenditure £
2008-09	Safeguarding Policy	13,510
2008-09	Consultation of Parents	4,500
2008-09	Public Appointment Survey	6,965
2008-09	Review of Capital Asset Realisation Taskforce	51,750
2009-10	Play and Leisure Policy	270,000
2010-11	NI Water Investigation	24,500
2010-11	Software Licence and telephone support	2,150

Financial Year	Single Tender Action	Expenditure £
2010-11	Software Maintenance	341
	Total Expenditure	£373,716

In conjunction with the Minister for Finance and Personnel, we asked Ed Vernon to lead the Capital Assets Realisations Taskforce. The Northern Ireland Water Investigation was taken by us on behalf of the Executive due to the specialist nature of the assignments.

Failure to obtain prior Accounting Officer approval in the remaining cases was an oversight. Retrospective Departmental Accounting Officer approval has been obtained in each case.

Guidelines on the use of single tender actions have been re-issued to all staff in the Department and its Arms Length Bodies. Staff have been reminded that any proposal to procure through Single Tender Action must be supported by a case to the Departmental Accounting Officer, setting out the rationale and justification for doing so. In considering each case, the Accounting Officer takes account of the professional advice of Central Procurement Directorate and the Departmental Solicitors Office of the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Departmental Accounting Officer approval is required before awarding any contract through a single tender action.

Legal Advice

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether the legal advice which was sought by the First Minister in December 2009 in relation to the allegations made against him in the BBC Spotlight programme was seen by both Ministers; (ii) whether they will waive the legal professional privilege and publish this advice; and (iii) what expense was incurred in seeking and obtaining this advice and any resulting actions.

(AQW 512/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No legal advice was sought by the First Minister in relation to the BBC Spotlight Programme.

Corporation Tax

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for (i) an update on discussions their Department has had with Her Majesty's Treasury in relation to Corporation Tax; and (ii) any assessment, that they are aware of, carried out by Treasury on the effect of a reduction in the rate of Corporation Tax for Northern Ireland.

(AQW 546/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We, along with Minister Foster and Minister Wilson, met with David Gauke, Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, and Secretary of State Owen Paterson at the start of this year to give them our thoughts on rebalancing our economy. Following our discussions, HM Treasury published its consultation document "Rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy" on 24 March 2011. As part of the process, we attended a consultation event in London on 8 June to discuss with key representatives of UK business the impact of reducing the Corporation Tax rate. Minister Wilson, Minister Foster, the Secretary of State and Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury were also in attendance. This was a positive meeting with the general view that this would increase the attractiveness of the local economy as a location for investment. Another event is planned for Belfast at the end of June.

The consultation period for this report runs to 24 June 2011. The paper considers the impact of lowering the Corporation Tax rate here but also includes consideration of other fiscal measures for example, extension of the National Insurance holiday, enhanced R&D tax credits and increased capital allowances. The HMT report in particular considers the impact on investment locally of lowering the rate.

Community Relations Council

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to explain the delay in the allocation of funding to the Community Relations Council for victims' groups.

(AQW 559/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The budget was agreed by the Assembly on 9 March 2011. Discussions took place with the CRC to agree and allocate funding. A letter of offer was issued to CRC in April 2011 and all funding for the first quarter has been released.

Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the actual, or estimated, costs of the legal fees from the challenge initiated, and later withdrawn, by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland to the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill.

(AQW 585/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are advised by the Office of the Attorney General that the estimated legal fees his Office will bear from the Reference initiated and later withdrawn are £4,400.

Investment: Government Funding

Ms S Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps have been taken to resolve the dispute in relation to the British Government's £18 billion investment funding pledge.

(AQO 13/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Following the Spending Review announcement on 20 October 2010, we wrote to the Prime Minister on behalf of the Executive expressing our disappointment at the outcome of the Review and highlighted, in particular, our concern with the Coalition Government's failure to honour the £18 billion capital investment guarantee made by Gordon Brown as Chancellor of the Exchequer on 8 May 2007.

Following the response by the Coalition Government to this and other representations, we instigated, on 10 March, a formal disagreement which has subsequently been taken forward through the procedures set out in the dispute resolution protocol to the Memorandum of Understanding between the devolved administrations and the UK Government. Considerable work has been carried out by the Department of Finance and Personnel and OFMDFM to substantiate in detail this administration's case and to challenge the interpretations which the Coalition Government has placed on the financial data and its assertions regarding the fulfilment of the guarantee.

Detailed discussions have taken place at official level, most recently on 24 May, following which an analysis will be prepared setting out the areas where there is a common understanding and those where disagreement remain. Subject to any further discussions which may be necessary, a report will subsequently be made to Ministers.

Archived Departmental Documentation

Mrs Cochrane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much their Department has spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years.

(AQW 636/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM has not incurred any expenditure in relation to the rental of storage space for archived departmental documentation.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Brucellosis

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farms have been affected, directly or indirectly, by last year's deliberate infection of cattle with brucellosis in County Armagh; and for an estimate of the number of cattle involved.

(AQW 415/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Approximately 380 farms have been directly involved. These comprise of herds that were immediately adjacent to the breakdown herds in Keady and Lislea and those within the larger Temporary Control Areas. It is estimated that in the region of 14000 cattle have been directly involved.

Indirectly, every farm in the north of Ireland has been affected by the breakdowns in these areas as previously significant progress had been made towards reducing brucellosis to such low levels that an eradication timeline had been envisaged. The breakdowns in 2010 have set that timeline back by 1-2 years.

Brucellosis

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the total cost to date of testing cattle because of deliberate infection with brucellosis in South Armagh.

(AQW 416/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As previously detailed in the reply to AQW 146/11-15, the total cost to date of testing cattle in the area of South Armagh, because of deliberate infection has been in the region of £150,000 to £200,000.

Fish Stocks

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with her ministerial counterparts in Westminster in advance of the annual negotiations in Brussels for the new levels of Total Allowable Catch for fish stocks.

(AQW 461/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There has been no discussion yet on this matter because the scientific advice from ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea) will not be published until 29 June. When that is analysed and considered in conjunction with the Commission's policy statement on fishing opportunities we will be in a position to make judgements about what the Commission is likely to propose by way of TACs for 2012. As always the Nephrops TAC for Area VII is key to the prosperity of the local industry and I will impress the importance of this on my fellow Fisheries Ministers during our preparations for the autumn Council negotiations, and I will also discuss this with my Ministerial counterpart in the south.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans are in place to communicate to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs the importance of the involvement of the devolved regions of the UK, and in particular Northern Ireland, in any negotiations on the Common Agricultural Policy.

(AQW 500/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The forthcoming reform of the Common Agricultural Policy is hugely important to the agri-food industry and rural economy in the north of Ireland and I will use all channels at my disposal to ensure that our interests are robustly represented. I have already written to the Defra Secretary of State seeking an early meeting and CAP reform will certainly be on the agenda for that discussion.

The devolved administrations and I believe strongly in the need for a well financed CAP and we will be seeking to ensure this message is heard in Europe. I have already had a telephone discussion with the Scottish Minister, Mr. Richard Lochhead MSP and am committed to meeting with the devolved Ministers in the near future.

I have met my opposite number in Dublin, Mr Simon Coveney TD, and I will continue to discuss CAP reform issues at the North South Ministerial Council meetings.

I intend to visit Brussels in the near future and will take the opportunity to meet with the Commission Services and others.

My officials too are in frequent contact and discussion with their counterparts in both Defra, the other Devolved Administrations and DAFF colleagues in Dublin. I can assure you that Defra is in no doubt as to importance of involving the Devolved Administrations in the on-going CAP reform process.

Less-favoured Area Payments

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the European Commission's policy review of Less Favoured Area payments and the potential impact of changes to these payments.

(AQW 597/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Latest indications are that the European Commission will bring forward a formal legislative proposal on an objective classification system for areas with natural handicaps later this year. Map simulation work for the north of Ireland based on the Commission's initial proposed biophysical criteria suggested that the re-designated areas would be broadly in line with the current Severely Disadvantaged Areas. I will be seeking an approach to designation that is suitable for local conditions and which provides a fair, objective and robust basis for the delineation of areas with natural handicap in the north of Ireland.

The future of LFA support beyond 2013 will depend on the outcomes of both this re-designation exercise and the EU CAP reform process. I am clear in my own mind as to the need for a robust support framework in areas of natural handicap - areas which encompass many of our most valuable landscapes and habitats - and the benefits this support can deliver in terms of environmental outcomes. Therefore, I will certainly be working hard to ensure that the EU framework allows me to address this need.

Archived Departmental Documentation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years.

(AQW 623/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department currently leases two storage units for archived documentation, one on a fixed term lease of £6,200 per annum and the other on a fixed term lease of £6,500 per annum. The total amount paid in rent for the last three years was £38,100 or £12,700 each year.

Freedom Foods Market

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what financial support is available to farmers who wish to enter into the freedom foods market.

(AQW 628/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The decision to enter any market is a commercial one for the producer. Freedom Foods is one of a number of farm quality assurance schemes, which in this case is dedicated entirely to animal welfare. Farmers interested in this market should approach supply chain partners to enquire about potential outlets and returns for animals produced to this specification.

Assistance is available within the Rural Development Programme to support farmers seeking to work together to develop their supply chain. The Supply Chain Development Programme includes dedicated facilitation from an agri-business professional along with other elements of support such as training, specialist mentoring and funding for visits to examine existing businesses in this area of interest. The programme could, for example, be used to explore the marketing of products under a brand such as Freedom Food or incorporating Freedom Food as part of a product package.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Broadway Roundabout, Belfast: Display

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much it cost to commission an artist to create the art display at the Broadway Roundabout, Belfast.

(AQW 407/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The total commissioning costs in respect of the Rise project are £27,587.53. This covered the costs of artist fees, travel and expenses, site costs for interviews, brief development, maquette replacement, advertisement, consultant fees, development design fees for planning pre-contract to winning artist Wolfgang Buttress. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) contributed £20,000 to those costs.

The Department of Social Development is the lead funder in respect of the construction costs of the project although ACNI have also made a contribution to those costs.

Queen Elizabeth: Diamond Jubilee

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether and how her Department plans to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth's ascension to the throne.

(AQW 456/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Two exhibitions are planned at the Ulster Museum to coincide with the Diamond Jubilee.

They are, "The Queen: Art and Image" on the 14 October 2011 to 15 Jan 2012 and "Ten Drawings by Leonardo da Vinci: A Diamond Jubilee Celebration" from 15 June – 27 August 2012.

Gilford Library

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will reverse the proposal to close Gilford Library, Co. Down.

(AQW 514/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Following the recent public consultation Libraries NI has agreed to postpone any library closure decisions until September 2011. No final decision has been taken on the location or number of libraries that may be closed.

The possible closure of any public library, whether in a rural or urban environment is of great concern to me. I am acutely aware of the potential impact that such an action can have on the whole community that it serves.

It is therefore essential that the Board and Senior Management Team of Libraries NI take careful consideration of their own initial 'fit for purpose' assessment of individual libraries, and also the information provided to them during the public consultation process, before they come to any final decision.

The ongoing review of the public library estate is fundamentally an operational issue for Libraries NI. Consequently, it would not be appropriate for me to intervene in a closure decision unless there was (1) a clearly definable fault in the decision making process which would result in the removal of a library

from a community or (2) the remaining library services did not meet Libraries NI's statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient public library service'.

Nevertheless, I expect to be kept fully informed on the assessment process (as will the CAL Committee). This will help to ensure that the best decisions are taken in this very challenging financial environment.

Gilford Library

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what assessment has been made by her Department of the contribution Gilford Library makes to the town's community life.

(AQW 515/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The public library service makes a valuable contribution to our local communities and I am fully committed to the provision of a comprehensive and efficient library service.

I am pleased therefore that the date for announcing the results of the review of library services outside the Greater Belfast area has been extended to the autumn 2011. This will probably follow the Libraries NI September Board meeting.

This time extension will allow the considerable amount of relevant information obtained during the consultation process to be carefully considered. At present the consultation responses are being collated and analysed. This information normally covers, amongst other things, the contribution libraries (such as Gilford) make to their community and the potential effect of the service being withdrawn.

At this time no final decisions have been taken. Before this happens I will be briefed by Libraries NI officials on the Board's proposals.

I can assure you that both the CAL Committee and I wish to ensure that the best decisions are made in these difficult financial circumstances.

Gilford Library

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her Department's assessment of the impact the closure of Gilford Library would have on the town's community life.

(AQW 517/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Libraries NI Board and Senior Management Team see the public consultation process as being an essential element in the process of taking decisions that may, positively or negatively, impact communities for years ahead.

The views of those who attended the consultation meetings have been carefully noted and this will greatly assist the Libraries NI Board in their deliberations.

I understand that Libraries NI during the consultation process have collected a considerable amount of relevant information on the impact the closure of a library (such as Gilford) would have on local community life.

Currently the information collected during the Review is being collated and analysed prior to being put to the Board later this year. I would stress that no decision has yet been taken on any of the proposals in the Review.

As Minister I recognise the valuable contribution that the public library service makes to our local (both rural and urban) communities and I am fully committed to the provision of a comprehensive and efficient library service.

Craigavon House, Belfast: Regeneration

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the regeneration of Craigavon House, Belfast is a priority for her Department.

(AQW 551/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The regeneration of Craigavon House, Belfast is the responsibility of the Somme Association who own the property.

Events Marking Historical Occasions

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the events marking historical occasions that her Department is planning for 2012.

(AQW 552/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: A table detailing events planned by my Department's associated Arms Length Bodies to mark historic events in 2012 is attached at Annex 1.

ANNEX 1

Name of Organisation	Event	Events planned for commemorations	Date/s of organisation's event
Arts Council NI	Titanic Festival of Creative Arts	<p>Titanic Festival will be comprised of the following:</p> <p>A newly commissioned one-man play from James Wilson, a leading Titanic expert.</p> <p>Newly commissioned play involving the Lyric Theatre, which offers an outreach project for schools in Belfast.</p> <p>Requiem for the Lost Souls of the Titanic, a new composition by Philip Hammond</p> <p>A newly commissioned song cycle by composer David Byers, in partnership with Moving on Music.</p> <p>A special art exhibition curated by Peter Richards at the Golden Thread Gallery</p>	9 – 15 April 2012
Libraries NI	Ulster Covenant	Talk by Roger Dixon	2012
	Ulster Covenant	Talk by John Killen	2012
	Ulster Covenant	Exhibition Central Library	2012

Name of Organisation	Event	Events planned for commemorations	Date/s of organisation's event
	Titanic	Exhibition Belfast, Ulster and Irish Section, Central Library	2012
National Museums NI	Titanic	TITANICa: the exhibition TITANICa: the People's Story (and additional public programming at Ulster Folk and Transport Museum)	31st May 2011 onwards
		Art of the Liner: works by Kenneth Shoesmith, exhibition at Ulster Museum	Opens Sept 2012
		Titanic – A Window on Emigration, exhibition at Ulster American Folk Park	Opens March 2012
		Age of Titanic, exhibition at the Ulster Museum (an exploration of the political, economic, social context in the Titanic)	Opens Oct 2012
Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) - Name of Local Museum			
Ballymoney Museum		Events around K.K. Mc Arthur (from Dervock and won the marathon at the 1912 Olympics in Sweden) 2012 ties in with the Olympics), commemorate Ulster Day in 2012	2012
Down County Museum	Titanic	Titanic exhibition in Spring 2012.	2012
Fermanagh Museum	Establishment of Enniskillen	400th anniversary of the establishment of the town of Enniskillen in 2012, there will be an exhibition in 2012	2012
Naughton Gallery	Titanic	Planning events around the Titanic	2012

Name of Organisation	Event	Events planned for commemorations	Date/s of organisation's event
Linen Hall Library			
	Titanic Centenary	Exhibition Talks Tours	2012
PRONI			
	Titanic (1911-1912): Belfast Blitz (April-May 1941)	A century of change, conflict and transformation, 1911-2011 exhibition at PRONI, exploring themes such as economy, society, leisure and governance. Also marks the centenary of the launch and early history of Titanic and the 70th anniversary of the Belfast Blitz.	May 2011 onwards
	Ulster Covenant Centenary Sept 1912	Hosting book launch for Dr Alan Parkinson's publication Friends in High Places – Ulster Resistance to Irish Home Rule, 1912-1914	September 2012
Ulster-Scots Agency			
	Plantation	Proposed drama project on plantation to tour schools	2012. (To be confirmed)
NI Screen Funded Events (see below)			
George Herron – Individual	Titanic	Titanic 3D digital animation tool	2012
Hole in the Wall Gang	Titanic	Save the Titanic script being developed	2012
Awakin Ltd	Titanic	Mobile Phone app	2012
Anderson Spratt Group/WhizzKid	Titanic	Titanic live television event – BBC	14/04/12
Doubleband Films	Ulster Covenant	Documentary for BBC NI	2012

Archived Departmental Documentation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much her Department spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years.
(AQW 624/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In each of the last three years my Department has spent the following on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation.

2008 - 09	2009 - 10	2010 - 11
£81,518	£111,282	£95,307

Libraries NI

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the annual budget for Libraries NI for the last three financial years.

(AQW 657/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI was established on 1 April 2009. The table below provides the figures for the final budget allocations for 2009/10, 2010/11 and the initial budget for 2011/12.

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Libraries NI	£000s	£000s	£000s
Recurrent - DEL	33,194	32,566	31,555
Capital - DEL	4,844	5,617	2,304
AME (non-cash)	6,635	6,144	6,208
Total	44,673	44,327	40,067

Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what grants administered by her Department are available for groups seeking to work in partnership to lay third generation pitches.

(AQW 666/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for the development of sport in the North of Ireland including the distribution of funding. Last year, Sport NI launched its Sport Matters: Community Capital Programme aimed at providing funding towards schemes demonstrating facility need within rural, semi rural and urban settings that will increase participation in sport. This included assistance to groups seeking to work in partnership to lay third generation pitches. The Community Capital Programme closed for applications on 1 December 2010 and Sport NI will be working with preferred bidders over the next two years to develop these facilities. There are no other suitable funding programmes open at this time.

Capital Investment

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the capital investment made by her Department and its agencies in (i) facilities to improve participation in sport; and (ii) improvements to spectator facilities at sports venues, over the last four years.

(AQW 702/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for the development of sport in the North of Ireland including the distribution of funding. Over the last four financial years, Sport NI has provided funding towards the development of facilities to improve participation in sport and to assist with improvements to spectator facilities at sports venues as follows:

Year	Facilities to improve participation	Improvements to spectator facilities
2007/08	£12,684,011	£3,246,466
2008/09	£16,887,564	£2,439,133
2009/10	£27,499,089	£6,904,004

Year	Facilities to improve participation	Improvements to spectator facilities
2010/11	£4,569,952	£2,803,945
Totals	£61,640,616	£15,393,548

Film Industry

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the recent comments by (i) Richard Williams of NI Screen; and (ii) Rick Hill of NI Screen on the waste of resources by her Department in delivering support to the film industry.

(AQW 723/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am committed to ensuring good governance and delivering value for money on behalf of the public.

In 2010 Northern Ireland Screen raised a number of concerns with the Department about governance arrangements and their effect on the organisation's ability to carry out its business. Since then, the Department has worked with Northern Ireland Screen in order to achieve the optimum balance between providing relevant assurances that taxpayers' money is properly used, and enabling Northern Ireland Screen to operate efficiently.

I met the Chief Executive and Chair of Northern Ireland Screen on 1 June as part of a series of meetings with my Department's arms length bodies. I heard a presentation about the activities which the organisation funds on behalf of DCAL and about Invest NI funded film production. I am very supportive of the work which Northern Ireland Screen has been doing in this area.

Film Industry

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what her Department has done to ensure that the appropriate structures are in place between her Department and the film industry to allow the industry to deliver to its maximum potential.

(AQW 724/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Support for the film industry is primarily provided by funding from Invest NI to Northern Ireland Screen. However, as sponsor Department for Northern Ireland Screen, DCAL has worked with the organisation in order to achieve the optimum balance between providing relevant assurances that taxpayers' money is properly used, and enabling Northern Ireland Screen to operate efficiently in support of the screen industries.

I am very supportive of the work which Northern Ireland Screen has been doing in this area and my Department will continue to support the organisation to meet its business objectives across all of its activities.

Department of Education

Nursery School Places

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of applicants for nursery school places, broken down by Education and Library Board area, in each year between 2000 and 2009; and (ii) of these, how many were (a) offered their first choice; (b) offered their second choice; and (c) not offered a place.

(AQW 63/11-15)

Educational Underachievement

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what action he intends to take to address the educational underachievement of pupils who attend (i) inner city schools; and (ii) schools which cater for pupils who live in large housing estates in towns outside Belfast to which people who were formerly resident in Belfast have been rehoused.

(AQW 186/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to working with our stakeholders to address educational underachievement wherever it exists and to deliver improvements for all our young people, regardless of where they live. I especially want to see improved outcomes for young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, whether they live in our inner cities, urban housing estates or our rural communities.

I will be continuing to implement Every School a GoodSchool – a policy for school improvement, which sets out our over-arching approach to raising standards and tackling underachievement in all our schools. It is supported by a range of policies and programmes aimed at raising standards and supporting young people in overcoming barriers to learning they may face, such as socio-economic disadvantage or challenging family circumstances. These policies include the new literacy and numeracy strategy, Count, read: succeed, the revised curriculum, the ending of academic selection and the publication of Transfer 2011, the Extended Schools Programme, the Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, provision for pastoral care and counselling support, and the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry-Bright Futures programmes.

Education Among Families and Communities: Value

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what action he is taking to promote a greater understanding of the value of education among families and communities, and in particular, families from deprived areas.

(AQW 187/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The value of education to individuals, their families and communities and to the development of our economy can not be over-emphasised. I will actively reinforce and promote the value of education in my role as Minister and I hope that others in leadership positions will do the same.

International research shows that top performing education systems serve societies that place a high value on education; research also shows the powerful influence parents can have on their child's achievement. That is why both the school improvement policy and the new literacy and numeracy strategy promote high expectations for all our young people, along with effective engagement between schools, families and communities, especially those from the most deprived backgrounds.

With particular emphasis on deprived areas, the Department is continuing to fund the Extended Schools and Full Service programmes which aim to tackle underachievement and raise standards by fostering a culture where education is valued and schools work in partnership with parents and communities to encourage and support children to realise their full potential.

The Department also has a number of other provisions available to support learning and ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential. These include the provision of free school meals and the clothing allowance scheme (school uniform grant). Free school meals are provided to ensure pupils of nonworking and low income families have access to a nutritionally balanced meal suitable as the main meal of the day whilst the clothing scheme provides these families with assistance towards the cost of school uniforms and clothing for physical education. My predecessor extended the clothing scheme to primary schools in 2009, the first time that such a measure had been taken here. In addition, the eligibility criteria for these provisions were extended last year to ensure that more children will be able to avail of them.

Shared Education

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to detail any plans he has to promote shared education among different communities.

(AQW 188/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Our education system is enriched by the diversity of school types within it, which is a reflection of parental and learner choice. Greater co-operation and sharing between schools and across sectors is the key to ensuring access to the curriculum for all on the basis of equality. This need not be at the expense of diversity or choice. The Lisanelly site at Omagh will also provide us with a unique opportunity of developing a shared educational campus where controlled and maintained, grammar and non-grammar schools are co-located and can collaborate together while still protecting their chosen ethos. This project offers possibilities for new ways of sharing teaching and learning and sharing facilities amongst schools and with the local community.

I intend to promote sharing and co-operation through the establishment of an Education and Skills Authority which will be responsible for the strategic planning of education provision across all sectors.

In addition, the new Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education Policy (CRED) will enable children and young people to explore issues around diversity both in the classroom and through practical activities and experiences. Key issues and actions within the policy include promoting, sharing and collaboration and encouraging meaningful interaction between children and young people.

The International Fund for Ireland's Sharing in Education Programme provides support for projects that enable young people to participate in shared educational experiences. As managing agent for the Programme, my Department is well placed to evaluate the benefits of shared education at first hand and to take account of identified benefits for future policy development.

Portadown College and Lurgan College: Newbuilds

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education for an update on the plans for new builds for (i) Portadown College; and (ii) Lurgan College.

(AQW 205/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Planning for potential new builds for Portadown College and Lurgan College has been suspended pending agreement on a strategic plan for the schools in the Craigavon Two Tier System.

The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) has advised that it held a number of meetings with stakeholders on this matter. It has indicated that the meetings have revealed a high level of agreement on the way forward in Portadown and Tandragee but a lack of agreement between schools in the Lurgan area. Given the contrasting levels of agreement and differences in the school populations and demography of the two areas, the Board agreed that the two areas of Portadown/Tandragee and Lurgan should be progressed concurrently but with different approaches.

The SELB has indicated that it is their intention that any proposals for changes in the controlled sector provision in the wider Craigavon area will be published at the same time.

Board of Governors

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what steps he is taking to review the legal position under which a Board of Governors of a school is held legally responsible for the running of a school, regardless of whether the Education and Library Board has made only one option available to it.

(AQW 229/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans to undertake a review of the Local Management of Schools policy and legislation which makes a Board of Governors responsible for taking decisions in relation to the school for which it is appointed.

The role of an Education and Library Board (ELB) is to provide advice to the Board of Governors to assist the Governors to take decisions which are in the best interests of the school and which will withstand legal challenge. I am not contemplating any change to these arrangements.

Nursery School Places

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) short-term; and (ii) long-term action he intends to take to address the shortage of nursery school places in South Antrim.

(AQW 231/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department, through its Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, aims to provide a year of funded pre-school education for every child in their final pre-school year whose parents wish it.

Funded places are available in statutory nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools and in voluntary/private settings.

A Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG) in each Education and Library Board area manages the planning and provision of pre-school places on behalf of the Department.

The North Eastern Education Library Board PEAG has advised that in the South Antrim area, which crosses the boundaries of Antrim and parts of Newtownabbey District Council areas, there is considered to be an over-provision of funded pre-school places.

External Suppliers: Telephone Contracts

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education (i) what advice or guidance his Department gives to schools who are entering into telephone contracts with external suppliers; (ii) what is the average length of the contracts currently in force, broken down by Education and Library Board area; and (iii) whether there are any schools who are continuing to pay charges to now greatly reduced or non-existent service suppliers which are continuing to levy charges lawfully.

(AQW 265/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) The Department does not provide advice or guidance to schools entering into telephone contracts with external suppliers. Advice in this regard is provided by the relevant Education Library Board.

Education and Library Boards have confirmed that schools are advised to purchase telephone systems rather than rent, as the purchase option is normally the most cost effective. All Boards have contracts in place under the OGC Framework which covers call and line rental costs. Schools can opt out of this arrangement but the majority of schools within the Board Areas are part of this contract.

- (ii) The average length of the contracts currently in force, broken down by Education and Library Board area has been listed on the table below; and
- (iii) The Boards are not aware of any schools continuing to pay charges to now greatly reduced or nonexistent service suppliers which are continuing to levy charges lawfully.

Education and Library Board	(ii) Average length of contract	(iii) Schools paying charges to reduced or non existent service suppliers
BELB	2 years	None known
SEELB	2 years	Non known
WELB	Quarterly to Annual	None known
NEELB	1 year	None known
SELB	2 years	None known

External Companies: Grounds Maintenance in Schools

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education (i) how much was spent in each Education and Library Board grounds maintenance in schools by external companies in each of the last five years; (ii) who provided these services and at what cost; and (iii) whether individual schools are permitted to carry out such work by sourcing services themselves.

(AQW 266/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In each of the Education and Library Boards in the last five years the following amounts were spent on grounds maintenance in schools by external companies:-

BOARD	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
BELB	148,000	353,000	364,000	339,000	395,000
WELB	36,694	46,434	42,281	50,468	49,003
NEELB	66,159	84,159	87,867	100,591	95,391
SEELB	74,056	154,756	149,562	184,945	30,975
SELB	72,793	88,398	91,002	99,689	103,282

The table below provides details of who provided these services and the associated costs.

Board	External Company Name	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
BELB	The Landscape Centre	148,000	353,000	364,000	339,000	395,000
WELB	Pellipar Tree Services	11,348	8,765	13,205	11,689	7,674
WELB	RoeValley Tree Services	7,906	11,506	8,153	11,455	13,609
WELB	Northern Tree Surgery	11,725	19,600	16,125	20,331	9,745
WELB	MW Landscape Services	0	0	0	1,979	16,920
WELB	Clive Richardson Limited	5,715	6,563	4,798	5,014	1,055
NEELB	DensHillGarden Services	65,369	80,074	84,862	91,361	89,834
NEELB	PGMGarden Services	790	4,085	3,005	9,230	5,557
SEELB	Clarke Cunningham Sawmill	10,193	192	0	0	0
SEELB	M Large Tree Services	15,049	53,663	17,456	13,899	11,790
SEELB	Northern Tree Services	1,392	0	0	0	0

Board	External Company Name	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
SEELB	Tony Patterson Sportsgrounds LTD	41,899	85,885	109,862	91,021	11,727
SEELB	Horta-soils LTD	940	940	1,028	483	1,028
SEELB	Hortus Tuus	4,289	3,513	3,518	19,083	1,350
SEELB	Broadleaf & Garden Services	294	0	0	1,495	0
SEELB	Tristan Kinnear	0	10,563	15,054	17,927	5,080
SEELB	Abraham Tree Maintenance	0	0	2,644	0	0
SEELB	Clive Richardson Limited	0	0	0	41,037	0
SELB	Bryan Hynds	13,950	19,420	12,545	13,555	12,255
SELB	C 2 IT	58,843	68,978	78,457	86,134	91,027

- (iii) Individual schools are permitted to carry out such work by sourcing services themselves provided they follow Board tendering procedures and use Board approved contractors in compliance with current procurement legislation.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how much funding his Department allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 301/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Neighbourhood Renewal (NR) is the responsibility of the Department for Social Development (DSD).

Applications for education related projects are decided on and approved by DSD after consultation with the Department of Education (DE), Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and other stakeholders in education.

DSD approved education projects are then managed by DE through a transfer of funds from DSD to DE. The operational responsibility is undertaken by the ELBs on behalf of DE for the projects.

My Department has managed the following funding on behalf of DSD to NR projects over the last three financial years:

2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
£277k	£532k	£701k

Statutory Youth Service Provision

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Education (i) for his assessment of the impact in the last five years that the statutory youth service provision has had on voluntary groups which were already providing youth services in the Ballymote area, Downpatrick; and (ii) whether the statutory youth service provision has been evaluated to ensure value for money.

(AQW 312/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) The South Eastern Education and Library Board is responsible for the delivery of youth services in the Ballymote Area. The Chief Executive of the Board has advised that statutory provision is provided in response to identified need.

The Chief Executive has also advised that in order to secure value for money the SEELB Youth Service have reviewed the need and cost of statutory youth workers hiring alternative premises to the Board owned Ballymote Centre. As a result of this review Ballymote may be used more by the SEELB Youth Service, with the possibility that some voluntary clubs may not be able to use the centre to the same extent as they currently do. SEELB Youth Service will review the support requirements of voluntary clubs affected by this. Voluntary groups providing youth services in the Ballymote area will continue to be supported by the SEELB Youth Service.

- (ii) The Chief Executive of the Board has advised that the SEELB statutory youth service provision was formally evaluated (Best Value) in 2004

National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail his Department's response to the findings of the research project carried out by the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, 'Teachers' Mental Health: A study exploring the experiences of teachers with work-related stress and mental health problems'.

(AQW 332/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is very aware of the health and wellbeing issues facing teachers today, and of the importance of addressing them if we are to retain a committed, motivated and healthy teaching workforce.

The Department, the employing authorities and the teacher unions have recently agreed a Strategy for Teacher Health and Wellbeing through the Teacher Negotiating Committee (TNC). I understand that the Strategy has been issued to schools and that the TNC has established a working group to oversee its implementation and delivery.

The Strategy was developed through a process of consultation and the examination of available evidence. The research report on Teachers' Mental Health published by the NASUWT in 2010 was not presented as evidence during the development of the Strategy, nor did NASUWT draw the Department's attention to its publication.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of staff currently employed by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA); and (ii) its annual budget in each of the last five years.

(AQW 333/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) the number of staff currently employed by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA)

CCEA employs 356 permanent, fixed-term contract and seconded staff. CCEA also has 178 Administrative Assistants (summer temps) working on the summer examinations processing.

- (ii) its annual budget in each of the last five years

	Resource (see notes)	Capital	Total
Year	£000s	£000s	£000s
2006/07	21527	525	22052

Year	Resource (see notes)	Capital	Total
	£000s	£000s	£000s
2007/08	21825	495	22320
2008/09	22602	385	22987
2009/10	21422	215	21637
2010/11	20770	86	20856

Notes:

1. Resource budget reflects net position (ie gross budget less income)
2. Figures include Non cash element in respect of depreciation

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education how much funding his Department has allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal in each year since May 2007, broken down by council area.

(AQW 349/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department for Social Development (DSD) has the lead responsibility for the Executive's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy People and Place.

Applications for education related projects are evaluated and approved by DSD after consultation with the Department of Education (DE), Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and other stakeholders in education. DSD approved education projects are then managed by DE through a transfer of funds from DSD to DE.

Given that DSD has responsibility for Neighbourhood Renewal and you tabled the same question to the Minister for Social Development, the detailed information regarding allocations that you have requested will be provided in a composite response from DSD.

GL Assessment Tests

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what investigations his Department is undertaking in relation to the claims that parents had access to GL assessment tests prior to their children sitting the tests.

(AQW 365/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools using entrance tests, in contravention of DE guidance, were advised by the Department of their responsibility to make all reasonable efforts to avoid a breach in test security and to have contingency arrangements in place should such a breach occur.

Further to a statement issued by the Catholic Principals Association my Department received information that has prompted an investigation involving the Catholic Principals Association, the Post-primary Transfer Consortium and also the company that owns the copyright of the test papers used by these schools.

I will inform the Assembly of the outcome of this investigation in due course.

School Transport

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education if he plans to review the three-mile criterion used to assess whether a child is eligible for school transport to a post-primary school, particularly in relation to the safety implications for children who fall marginally short of the three-mile limit.

(AQW 366/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There is no need to review the three mile distance criteria for safety implications.

Parents of a pupil who is not eligible because of the application of the distance criterion, whether marginally short or otherwise, may ask an Education & Library Board to consider the safety implications of the route that the pupil travels to school. Routes are assessed by application of a standard set of criteria referred to as the LARSOA (Local Authorities Road Safety Officers' Association) Guidelines. The guidelines assess a number of aspects of safety on the route, for example, volume of traffic. A pupil who would not otherwise be eligible may receive assistance should the route exceed the limits set out in the guidelines.

Free School Meals

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the application forms for free school meals, if he will consider (i) simplifying the forms; and (ii) allowing the forms to be completed by a third party.

(AQW 371/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) are responsible for administering the award of free school meals in all grantaided schools and the payment of clothing grants which use similar eligibility criteria.

In relation to the matter of simplifying the forms I have been advised that all Boards have agreed on the use of a joint application for Free School Meals and Clothing Allowances for the 2011/12 year.

The use of a joint form means that a common simplified application process is used across all Boards and parents who are eligible to apply for free school meals and clothing allowances are now able to complete one form instead of two separate application forms. Furthermore, the use of a joint form means that parents who previously only applied for one type of benefit e.g. clothing allowance and did not make a claim for free school meals can now be considered for both forms of support. This leads to increased awareness and uptake of the support available and provides additional assistance to families from low income backgrounds.

The application asks for all the relevant facts which ELBs require in order to make a decision on eligibility. It would not, therefore, be possible to simplify the application without leaving out relevant information.

You have also asked about allowing the form to be completed by a third party. There is not a problem with this. However, the applicant is the parent or guardian who has legal custody of the child/children and is currently in receipt of one or more of the qualifying benefits. As such, the applicant has to sign the form.

Protestant Teachers

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what guidance his Department is intending to issue on additional certificates for Protestant teachers who wish to gain employment in Roman Catholic Maintained Schools.

(AQW 374/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Certificate in Religious Education is a mandatory requirement for all those seeking appointment to a permanent teaching position in a Catholic Maintained nursery or primary school in the North of Ireland.

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) provides general information on their website relating to the Certificate including information on routes to obtaining a certificate. In terms of the teacher training colleges, St Mary's students are advised by the college about the requirement and can opt to take the certificate there. Stranmillis students are also advised about the requirement and the college has a partnership with the University of Glasgow which enables students to acquire, through part-time, distance learning, a Certificate in Religious Education, offered by the Glasgow

Faculty's Religious Studies Department. University of Ulster students are advised by the university, of the requirement and their course includes integrated study for the religious certificate which they then receive upon graduating from the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course.

Music Therapy Services

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education whether his Department received any representations from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety or the Health and Social Care Board before the decision to cut funding for music therapy services for children with severe learning disabilities was announced.

(AQW 375/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I understand that music therapy is a recognised Allied Health Profession and is the responsibility of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSS&PS). The Department of Education has not been contacted by the DHSS&PS regarding funding for music therapy in schools at any time.

I have also sought information from the chief executives of the education and library boards and I understand that they have not received any representations from DHSS&PS regarding music therapy funding.

Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what action he is taking to ensure that the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register is kept up to date.

(AQW 377/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Belfast Education and Library Board administer the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR) on behalf of employers.

As a means of ensuring that information on NISTR is kept up to date, the NISTR Administrators regularly remind teachers on an annual basis to ensure contact details and availability are updated and to contact the NISTR immediately if they are no longer available to undertake substitute teaching. Schools are also reminded on an annual basis that the NISTR system works best when bookings are recorded on the system as soon as possible when a teacher has been engaged for substitute teaching.

NISTR Administrators have recently carried out a number of data cleansing exercises and will continue to carry out such exercises on a quarterly basis.

Administration of Medication in School

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the policy within schools on the administration of medication; and (ii) any proposed changes being considered.

(AQW 387/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's policy on the administration of medication in schools is contained within the document "Supporting pupils with medication needs". I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Assembly Library.

There are no current changes proposed to this policy, however, new guidance will be provided should procedures need to be revised. In such circumstances, my Department will work closely with colleagues in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and other key stakeholders who contributed to the development of the guidance.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education whether he is considering taking disciplinary action against any officer employed by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment.

(AQW 391/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Decisions relating to disciplinary action within CCEA, and within other education non-departmental public bodies, are a matter for the individual organisation in the first instance as the direct employer of its officers. Such decisions are of course taken in the context of employment law and also within the context of the organisation's disciplinary and other, relevant, staff-related policies.

Where there is evidence that any officer has engaged in actions that breach those policies, I certainly expect the employing organisation to take appropriate action.

Location of Conferences

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to outline the policy on the location of conferences for his Department or its arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 393/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The arrangements for conferences and similar events should reflect the need to ensure value for money in the use of public funds. This is reflected in the Department of Finance and Personnel guidance document Managing Public Money, which my Department and its arm's-length bodies are required to observe. Further guidance, issued by my Department in August 2010, emphasises the need to consider accessibility (in terms of location and access for disabled people) and equality/geographical spread. The guidance requires the costs of hospitality to be limited by optimising the use of facilities within the educational and wider public estate and stipulates that any use of hotels must be based on rigorous processes to prove value for money.

Organisations are also required through their Quarterly Assurance Statements (introduced from April 2010) to provide assurance to the Department on the use of public funds for hospitality. In particular, assurance is sought that there is no extravagance in the use of public funds. The issue is also raised by the Department at the quarterly Governance and Accountability meetings that are held with the Chairpersons and Chief Executives of the Department's arm's-length bodies as part of the formal monitoring of performance and of compliance with governance and financial management requirements.

Maintenance for Schools

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the estimated cost of maintenance for schools in the North Down area in the (a) 2011/12; and (b) 2012/13 academic years; and (ii) the current level of maintenance backlog in these schools.

(AQW 394/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) Based upon the anticipated budget, the estimated cost of maintenance for schools in the North Down area in (a) 2011/12 financial year is £240,000 and (b) the corresponding figure for the 2012/13 financial year cannot be assessed at this stage, as budgets are normally determined on an annual basis.
- (ii) Education and Library Board (ELB) budgets and resource planning are predicted on the basis of financial year rather than academic year; the information provided is based upon financial year.
- (iii) The current level of maintenance backlog in the schools in the North Down area is £9.4 million. I should point out that the new Bangor Grammar School is now under construction and a maintenance backlog figure of £4.8 million for this school is included in the total.

Expenses: Regulations that Govern

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last five years, the changes to procedures or regulations which govern expenses, including hospitality, for his Department or its arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 398/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The arrangements and rules on expenses (including hospitality) that apply to Executive Departments are set out in the documents Managing Public Money; the Human Resources (HR) Handbook; and guidance on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality; which are issued by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). A copy of the DE Guidance on Gifts and Hospitality has been placed in the Assembly Library. There have been no significant changes to these arrangements in the last five years.

A letter from the Permanent Secretary to all Chief Executives issued on 25 August 2010 advising that the costs of hospitality must be limited by optimising the use of facilities within the educational and wider public estate and that any use of hotels, etc must be based on rigorous processes to prove value for money. Similar guidance was issued to Departmental staff.

The Youth Council has advised that it follows the Civil Service arrangements and rules on expenses issued by DFP. I have arranged to have placed in the Assembly Library copies of the procedures for the Department's other arm's-length bodies. There have been no substantive changes to these arrangements in the last five years.

Emergency Life Support Skills

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education what action his Department has taken in the last year to promote the teaching of emergency life support skills in schools; and what plans he has to encourage this in the future.

(AQW 401/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Revised Curriculum, now being taught to all pupils of compulsory school age in grant-aided schools, provides considerable flexibility for schools to introduce emergency life support skills. The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge of these skills through the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding in Primary Schools and Learning for Life and Work areas of learning in Post-Primary Schools.

Schools have been provided with guidance material on the development of these vital skills and resources such as the British Heart Foundation's Heartstart Pack have been made available to all teachers. Opportunities for training children, parents and teachers in emergency life support skills may also be provided through the Extended Schools Programme and to young people in youth settings, in response to identified need.

Bangor Central Integrated Primary School

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the planned capital works for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School in the (i) 2011/12; and (ii) 2012/13 financial years.

(AQW 418/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's capital budget covers both minor works of less than £500,000 as well as major works for the construction of new schools. The South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) has confirmed that during 2011/12, subject to the availability of finance, it plans to provide new temporary accommodation at Bangor Central IPS to serve as a dining hall, at an estimated cost of £185,000 (including fees). As the minor works budget is allocated on an annual basis, information regarding the 2012/13 year is not available

A potential major capital works scheme for a replacement school for BangorCentralIntegratedPrimary School is one of a large number of schemes at an early stage of planning and it is currently at Economic

Appraisal (EA) stage and the recommended option is to build a new school on an extended site. However the Department has not agreed to fund the project.

The Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years and this will impact on the Department's ability to deliver new school building projects. I will wish to consider carefully how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs across the schools estate. This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

Unfortunately therefore I cannot provide you with any indication as to if or when a new build for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School might be possible.

Budgetary Deficit

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to list the (i) primary schools; and (ii) secondary schools in the East Antrim constituency which were in budgetary deficit in each of the last three financial years; and how much the deficit was in each instance.

(AQW 427/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The latest full financial year for which this data is currently available is 2009/10. The Primary and Post-primary schools in the East Antrim constituency with a cumulative delegated budget deficit for each of the three financial years 2007/08 to 2009/10, together with the value of these deficits, are shown in the tables below:

2007/08

DE Reference Number	School Name	Budget deficit carried forward at year-end £
Primary Schools		
301-0817	Greenisland PS	-35,659
301-6038	Hollybank PS	-1,214
301-0880	King's Park PS	-20,076
303-6093	Lourdes PS	-1,186
301-6257	Oakfield PS	-7,734
303-0900	St Anthony's PS, Larne	-35,463
301-0850	Upper Ballyboley PS	-5,422

2008/09

DE Reference Number	School Name	Budget deficit carried forward at year-end £
Primary Schools		
301-0817	Greenisland PS	-39,831
301-6257	Oakfield PS	-49,205
301-0850	Upper Ballyboley PS	-6,969

2009/10

DE Reference Number	School Name	Budget deficit carried forward at year-end £
Primary Schools		
301-0817	Greenisland PS	-39,353
301-0760	Mullaghdubh PS	-1,466
301-6257	Oakfield PS	-52,810
301-0860	Sunnylands PS	-20,501
301-3330	Victoria PS	-5,689
Post-primary Schools		
321-0232	DownshireSchool	-50,124

Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education for an update on the new build for Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus.

(AQW 428/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The proposed major capital scheme for Woodburn Primary School is one of a large number of schemes at an early stage of planning and which have not been announced for capital investment. Therefore the Department has not agreed to fund the project.

The Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years and this will impact on the Department's ability to deliver new school building projects.

I will wish to consider carefully how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs across the schools estate. This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

Unfortunately therefore I cannot provide you with any indication as to if or when a new build for Woodburn Primary School might be possible.

Educational Underachievement

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education how he intends to tackle the educational underachievement of young people in Protestant working-class communities.

(AQW 443/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to working with our stakeholders to address educational underachievement and deliver improvements for all our young people. I especially want to see improved outcomes for young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

I will be continuing to implement Every School a Good School – a policy for school improvement, which sets out our over-arching approach to raising standards and tackling underachievement wherever it exists. It is supported by a range of policies aimed at raising standards and supporting young people in overcoming barriers to learning they may face, including socio-economic disadvantage. These policies include the new literacy and numeracy strategy, Count, read: succeed, the ending of academic selection, the revised curriculum, the Extended Schools Programme, the developing early years' strategy, the Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, and the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry-Bright Futures programmes.

In taking forward these policies, I am keen to engage with a wide range of stakeholders and have recently written to Dawn Purvis to discuss her 'Call to Action' report into educational disadvantage and the Protestant working class.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether any disciplinary action has been taken against the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment following its breach of procurement regulations.

(AQW 452/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department's Internal Audit Team carried out a review of public expenditure incurred by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in the area of external events and associated corporate hospitality. The review concluded that, in a number of cases, this expenditure had not represented best practice in relation to procurement processes and had not been carried out in accordance with CCEA's existing procedures and policies.

CCEA is currently subject to an increased level of scrutiny from my Department which includes the attendance of DE officials, in an observer capacity, at meetings of the Council and its Audit Committee as well as regular governance and accountability meetings with the Department. I take the view that this level of scrutiny will need to continue in the months ahead so that I can be assured that the organisation is meeting the high standards of governance that I require and that the public expects. In addition, my Department will conduct a follow-up review of how CCEA has implemented the recommendations in the recent Internal Audit report to ensure that appropriate action has been taken in response to the findings of that report.

Nursery School Places

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) short-term; (ii) medium-term; and (iii) long-term action he intends to take to address the shortage of nursery school places in the South Down area.

(AQW 459/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department, through its Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, aims to provide a year of funded pre-school education for every child in their final pre-school year whose parents wish it.

Funded places are available in statutory nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools and in voluntary/private settings.

A Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG) in each Education and Library Board area manages the planning and provision of pre-school places on behalf of the Department.

This year the ELBs ran a two-stage admissions process whereby children in their final pre-school year, who were unplaced in the settings of their initial choice, were given the opportunity to nominate further preferences for available funded places before any underage applications were considered.

The South Down area crosses the boundaries of both the Southern (SELB) and South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) areas.

The SELB PEAG has advised that the SELB area does not extend to the South Down Parliamentary constituency but in geographical terms does cover those parts of County Down that fall within Newry & Mourne Council Area. They

are continuing to address a relatively small residual need in the area by allocating additional funded places to existing playgroups, where registration numbers permit.

The SEELB PEAG consider that there are sufficient places available to meet demand in the Down Council area for which they are responsible.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how much funding his Department has allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal in the North Antrim area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 462/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department for Social Development (DSD) has the lead responsibility for the Executive's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy People and Place.

Applications for education related projects are evaluated and approved by DSD after consultation with the Department of Education (DE), Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and other stakeholders in education. DSD approved education projects are then managed by DE through a transfer of funds from DSD to DE.

Given that DSD has responsibility for Neighbourhood Renewal and you tabled the same question to the Minister for Social Development, the detailed information regarding allocations that you have requested will be provided in a composite response from DSD.

Schools: Newbuilds

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 14/11-15, given that limited capital funds are deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people, to detail the specific criteria his Department will use in relation to new builds for schools.

(AQW 467/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As stated in my answer to AQW 14/11-15, the work to consider how the available capital funds should be deployed will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

This work will include establishing the priorities for capital investment.

Omagh Integrated Primary School

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposal for a new build for Omagh Integrated Primary School.

(AQW 468/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The proposed major capital scheme for Omagh Integrated Primary School is one of the 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan and which has been announced for capital investment. The project is for a new replacement school on a new school site and the Economic Appraisal will require the necessary approval before purchase of the site can be considered.

The Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years and this will impact on the Department's ability to deliver new school building projects.

I will wish to consider carefully how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs across the schools estate. This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

Unfortunately therefore I cannot provide you with any indication as to if or when a new build for Omagh Integrated Primary School might be possible.

St Columbkille's Primary School, Carrickmore, Omagh

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposal for a new build for St Columbkille's Primary School, Carrickmore, Omagh.

(AQW 469/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: St Columbkille's Primary School, Carrickmore, Omagh is a maintained co-educational school and is one of the 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. The project is for a new build on an extended site.

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

I wish to consider carefully how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs across the schools estate. This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

Unfortunately therefore I cannot provide you with any indication as to if or when a new build for St Columbkille's Primary School might be possible.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what changes have been made to the catering policies of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in each of the last five years.

(AQW 507/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: CCEA's interim chief executive has advised me that CCEA's Catering Policy was last reviewed in May 2008. The revised policy strengthened controls over expenditure by increasing the level of approval required to order catering and introduced caveats on certain types of catering during various periods of the year.

The revised guidelines which came into force with effect from 19 May 2008 are to be adhered to by all staff unless specific approval is otherwise given by a member of CCEA's Top Management Team.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) the total amount paid to teachers for attending meetings held or organised by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; (ii) the average amount of these payments; and (iii) whether these payments are in addition to a teacher's salary.

(AQW 508/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The interim Chief Executive of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has advised the Department that CCEA does not pay teachers for attending meetings unless they relate to examinations and assessment activity.

When teaching staff attend curriculum and assessment training events run by CCEA during school hours, the practice is that schools will be reimbursed where appropriate for the cost of teacher substitution.

In relation to examinations and assessment activity, CCEA does pay individuals including serving teachers, to undertake a range of duties, for example in relation to setting or marking examinations. Payments are based on agreed rates set out in the CCEA fees booklet and are additional to any other source of income which individuals might have.

Currently the payroll and other systems in place do not allow CCEA to differentiate payments between serving teachers in grant aided schools and other staff so the information is not available in the format requested. However, CCEA has been able to provide information on total payments and the number of individuals paid and this is set out in the table on next page.

Activity	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Awarding Fees	£378,009.42	£399,490.52	£428,113.47	£464,267.31	£493,297.29
Centre Inspectors Fees					£3,041.85
Coursework Moderators Fees	£475,200.63	£537,351.87	£563,269.92	£585,361.56	£593,365.72
Examiner Team Training Fees	£45,827.40	£66,451.61	£58,335.42	£66,723.71	£67,301.45
Examiners Setting Fees	£404,852.02	£368,835.16	£424,026.95	£628,434.60	£645,799.54
Marking Fees	£1,931,564.68	£1,925,703.35	£1,955,804.83	£2,017,829.69	£2,076,919.02
Revisers Fees	£350,406.97	£409,235.40	£339,922.40	£583,386.90	£468,409.75
Standardising Fees	£268,617.96	£295,603.05	£300,699.50	£311,181.11	£309,482.80
Superintendents / Invigilators Fees	£423,819.81	£445,587.18	£434,814.57	£462,444.35	£522,508.66
Expenses (primarily mileage, but also includes travel, postage etc)	£593,066.24	£606,982.39	£590,914.87	£580,273.01	£504,794.32
Other Miscellaneous Fees	£428,655.56	£283,305.24	£368,589.45	£265,381.09	£190,991.67
Translators Fees	£1,014.00	£1,450.00			£49,521.74
Writers Fees	£456,915.78	£648,465.25	£673,034.80	£492,566.04	£325,863.86
Grand Total	£5,757,950.47	£5,988,461.02	£6,137,526.18	£6,457,849.37	£6,251,297.67
Count of individuals paid	7050	7694	7911	6661	6926

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education (i) how much the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment has spent on catering in each of the last five years; and (ii) whether there are any restrictions on the venues or companies it can use for catering purposes.

(AQW 511/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) I have been advised by CCEA's interim chief executive that the catering expenditure figures, internal and external, for the period 2007 -2011 are as follows:

Financial Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Internal Catering Costs	£156,743	£151,058	£132,256	£158,699	£145,842	£744,598
External Catering Costs	£178,753	£214,655	£263,318	£223,938	£124,011	£1,004,675
Total	£335,496	£365,713	£395,574	£382,637	£269,853	£1,749,273

(ii) By the nature of its business, CCEA holds a significant number of meetings, internally and externally, in support of the achievement of its operational plan. CCEA has informed me that its Catering Policy was last reviewed in May 2008. The policy strengthened controls over expenditure by increasing the level of approval required to order catering and introduced caveats on certain types of catering during various periods of the year.

CCEA has informed me that all catering at the CCEA premises is provided under contract by the facilities management contractor at an agreed price per item or service level. When an external venue is necessary and a suitable one on the Education and Library Boards' Approved Venues List is not available, CCEA may source an alternative venue with comparable costs. This requires Director level sign off.

I will also ensure that a review takes place to assess how CCEA has implemented the recommendations in the recent report on external events and hospitality expenditure by my Department's Internal Audit Team, to assure me that appropriate action has been taken and that expenditure on hospitality is in line with guidance and at the minimum level possible.

Cullybackey High School

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new build for Cullybackey High School.

(AQW 541/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The proposed project for Cullybackey High School is one of a large number of schemes at an early stage of planning and which have not been announced for capital investment.

The Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years and this will impact on the Department's ability to deliver new school building projects.

I will wish to consider carefully how the available capital funds should be best utilised to address the most pressing needs across the estate and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people.

This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months. I cannot therefore provide you with any indication as to if or when a new build for Cullybackey High School might be possible.

Investment Delivery Plan

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 11/11-15, what is the current position of each of the 53 schemes remaining on his Department's Investment Delivery Plan.

(AQW 560/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The current planning stage as detailed in the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Outline Plan of Work (copy attached at Annex A) for the 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan is set out in the three tables below for Primary Schools, Post-primary Schools and Special Schools.

With so many schools seeking capital investment I will wish to consider carefully how to most effectively utilise available capital funds on a strategic basis going forward. This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

Until this work is completed it would be uneconomical to expend further funds on the continued design or planning of schools which could not be progressed within a reasonable timeframe. Hence, projects are being progressed only to completion of their current stage.

It will be necessary to ensure that those schemes ultimately identified as priorities to proceed in planning are supported by an up to date, approved Economic Appraisal.

Primary School Scheme 1	Current RIBA Stage
Artigarvan Primary School, Strabane	At Stage D.
Ballykelly Primary School, Limavady	At Stage D.
Dromore Central Primary School	At Stage D.
Ebrington Controlled PS, Derry	Stage C completed.
Edendork Primary School, Dungannon	At Stage C.
Eglinton Primary School	At Stage D.
Enniskillen Model Primary School	At Stage D.
Glenwood Primary School, Edenderry Nursery School	At Stage A/B.
Holy Family Primary School, Magherafelt	At Stage C.
Hollywood Primary School, Redburn Primary School, Hollywood Nursery School, Priory College	At Stage C.
Newbuildings Primary School, Derry	At Stage D.
Omagh Integrated Primary School	At Stage A/B.
Springhill Primary School, Belfast	At Stage C.
St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor	At Stage C.
St Clare's Convent Primary School St Colman's Abbey Primary School, Newry	At Stage C.
St Columba's Primary School, Straw	At Stage H.
St Columbkille's PS, Carrickmore	At Stage E/F.
St Conor's Primary School, Omagh	At Stage C.

Primary School Scheme 1	Current RIBA Stage
St Joseph's Convent PS, Newry	At Stage D.
St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge	At Stage C.
St Paul's Primary School, Irvinestown	At Stage A/B.
St Teresa's Primary School, Lurgan	At Stage D.
Strandtown Primary School, Belfast	At Stage A/B.
Tannaghmore Primary School, Lurgan	At Stage D.
Victoria Park Primary School, Belfast	At Stage A/B.

Post-Primary School Scheme	Current RIBA Stage
Ballymoney High School	At Stage A/B.
Colaiste Feirste, Belfast	At Stage D.
Dean Maguirc College, Carrickmore	At Stage A/B.
Devenish College, Enniskillen	At Stage A/B.
Foyle & Londonderry College	Stage C completed.
Glastry College, Ballyhalbert	At Stage C.
Holy Trinity College, Cookstown	At Stage A/B.
Knockbreda High School, Belfast	At Stage E/F.
Little Flower Girls' School, Belfast	At Stage C.
Loreto Grammar School, Omagh	At Stage A/B.
Lurgan College	Planning suspended. Scheme under review.
Methodist College, Belfast	At Stage A/B.
Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim	At Stage F/G.
Portadown College	At Stage A/B.
Rainey Endowed School, Magherafelt	At Stage A/B.
St Columbanus' College, Bangor	At Stage F/G.
St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel	At Stage E/F.
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	At Stage D.
St Patrick's College, Banbridge	At Stage D.
St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh	At Stage A/B.
The High School Ballynahinch	At Stage A/B.
Victoria College, Belfast	At Stage D.

Special School Scheme	Stage
Arvalee School & Resource Centre, Omagh	At Stage A/B.
Belmont House Special School, Derry	At Stage A/B.

Special School Scheme	Stage
Greenwood House Assessment Centre, Belfast	At Stage A/B.
Knockevin Special School, Downpatrick	At Stage C.
Mitchell House Special School, Belfast	At Stage A/B.
Rossmar Special School, Limavady	At Stage A/B.

ANNEX A

RIBA Work Stages			Description of key tasks
Preparation	A	Appraisal	<p>Identification of client's needs and objectives, business case and possible constraints on development.</p> <p>Preparation of feasibility studies and assessment of options to enable the client to decide whether to proceed.</p>
	B	Design Brief	<p>Development of initial statement of requirements into the Design Brief by or on behalf of the client confirming key requirements and constraints. Identification of procurement method, procedures, organisational structure and range of consultants and others to be engaged for the project.</p>
Design	C	Concept	<p>Implementation of Design Brief and preparation of additional data.</p> <p>Preparation of Concept Design including outline proposals for structural and building services systems, outline specifications and preliminary cost plan.</p> <p>Review of procurement route.</p>
	D	Design Development	<p>Development of concept design to include structural and building services systems, updated outline specifications and cost plan.</p> <p>Completion of Project Brief.</p> <p>Application for detailed planning permission.</p>
	E	Technical Design	<p>Preparation of technical design(s) and specifications, sufficient to co-ordinate components and elements of the project and information for statutory standards and construction safety.</p>
PreConstruction	F	Production Information	<p>Preparation of production information in sufficient detail to enable a tender or tenders to be obtained.</p> <p>Application for statutory approvals.</p>
			<p>Preparation of further information for construction required under the building contract.</p>
	G	Tender Documentation	<p>Preparation and/or collation of tender documentation in sufficient detail to enable a tender or tenders to be obtained for the project.</p>
	H	Tender Action	<p>Identification and evaluation of potential contractors and/or specialists for the project.</p> <p>Obtaining and appraising tenders; submission of recommendations to the client.</p>

RIBA Work Stages			Description of key tasks
Construction	J	Mobilisation	Letting the building contract, appointing the contractor. Issuing of information to the contractor. Arranging site hand over to the contractor.
	K	Construction to Practical Completion	Administration of the building contract to Practical Completion. Provision to the contractor of further Information as and when reasonably required. Review of information provided by contractors and specialists.
Use	L	Post Practical Completion	Administration of the building contract after Practical Completion and making final inspections.
			Assisting building user during initial occupation period.
			Review of project performance in use.

The activities in italics may be moved to suit project requirements, ie:

D	<i>Application for detailed planning approval;</i>
E	<i>Statutory standards and construction safety;</i>
F1	<i>Application for statutory approvals; and</i>
F2	<i>Further information for construction.</i>
G+H	<i>Invitation and appraisal of tenders</i>

Schools: Newbuilds

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education to provide a list of the proposed new builds for schools which are currently at the feasibility and economic appraisal stage, including how long each new build has been at this stage.

(AQW 564/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has currently 114 proposals seeking funding for new capital builds which have not been announced for such funding. A list of these schemes is below.

Progress of an FS and an EA is dependent on a significant number of variables for example, the volume of revisions required to ensure compliance with all appropriate guidance. As Feasibility Studies (FS) and Economic Appraisals (EA) for major capital schemes come to the Department through different routes, at differing stages of development and may have been through a number of revisions, the Department cannot provide a meaningful comparator for how long each has been at its current stage.

List of proposals seeking funding for new capital builds.

Board area	School Name	Sector	School Ref
BELB	Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	Irish-medium	104-6596
BELB	Edmund Rice CB Primary School and Star of the Sea Primary School	Maintained Maintained	103-0329 103-6464

Board area	School Name	Sector	School Ref
BELB	Holy Cross Boys' Primary School Holy Cross Girls Primary School Mercy Primary School	Maintained Maintained Maintained	103-0194 103-0331 103-6041
BELB	Holy Trinity Primary School	Maintained	103-6623
BELB	Holy Family Primary School	Maintained	103-6566
BELB	Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School	Maintained	103-0313
BELB	St Aidans CB Primary School St Bernadette's Primary School Vere Foster Primary School	Maintained Maintained Controlled	103-0316 103-0317 101-0321
BELB	St Anne's Primary School	Maintained	103-0868
BELB	St Gerard's Education Resource Centre	Special	133-6548
BELB	St John the Baptist Primary School	Maintained	103-6688
BELB	Hazelwood College	Integrated	126-0269
BELB	Malone College	Integrated	126-0294
BELB	St Joseph's College	Maintained	123-0275
BELB	St Louise's College	Maintained	123-0053
BELB	Belfast Royal Academy	Voluntary Grammar	142-0028
BELB	St Malachy's College	Voluntary Grammar	142-0030
BELB	St Mary's CB GS (2 separate schemes)	Voluntary Grammar	142-0021
NEELB	Anahorish Primary School, Toomebridge	Maintained	303-2257
NEELB	Antrim Primary School	Controlled	301-0829
NEELB	Ballyclare Primary School	Controlled	301-0631
NEELB	Ballymena Primary School	Controlled	301-0875
NEELB	Braidside Integrated PS, Ballymena	Integrated	306-6551
NEELB	Castle Tower Special School	Special	331-6676
NEELB	Corran Integrated Primary School, Larne	Integrated	306-6561
NEELB	Crossroads Primary School St Columba's Primary School, Kilrea	Maintained Maintained	303-2218 303-6147
NEELB	Glenravel PS, Martinstown St Mary's PS, Cargan	Maintained Maintained	303-3311 303-0625
NEELB	Kilcoan Primary School Mullaghdubh Primary School	Other Maintained Controlled	304-0451 301-0760
NEELB	Kilmoyle Primary School, Ballymoney	Controlled	301-0878
NEELB	Millstrand Primary School, Portrush	Integrated	306-6544

Board area	School Name	Sector	School Ref
NEELB	Millquarter Primary School,	Maintained	303-0438
NEELB	New Row Primary School, Castledawson	Maintained	303-2109
NEELB	St Joseph's Primary School, Crumlin	Maintained	303-6026
NEELB	St Mary's on the Hill Primary School	Maintained	303-6046
NEELB	St Mary's Primary School, Glenview	Maintained	303-6039
NEELB	St Patrick's Primary School, Portrush	Maintained	303-0547
NEELB	Straid Primary School, Ballyclare	Controlled	301-0570
NEELB	The Thompson Primary School, Ballyclare	Controlled	301-0779
NEELB	Whiteabbey Primary School	Controlled	301-0846
NEELB	Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus	Controlled	301-0696
NEELB	Ballyclare High School	Controlled	341-0008
NEELB	Ballymena, Academy	Voluntary Grammar	342-0011
NEELB	Belfast High School	Voluntary Grammar	342-0077
NEELB	Cambridge House	Controlled	341-0297
NEELB	Carrickfergus Grammar Carrickfergus College	Controlled Controlled	341-0098 321-0091
NEELB	Coleraine College	Controlled	321-0300
NEELB	Coleraine Academical Inst Coleraine HS	Voluntary Grammar Controlled	342-0032 341-0033
NEELB	Dalriada	Voluntary Grammar	342-0012
NEELB	Dominican College, Portstewart	Voluntary Grammar	342-0068
NEELB	St Louis, Ballymena	Voluntary Grammar	342-0010
NEELB	St Mary's, Magherafelt	Voluntary Grammar	342-0080
NEELB	St Killian's College	Maintained	323-0310
NEELB	Ballycastle High School	Controlled	321-0124
NEELB	Cross and Passion College	Maintained	323-0227
NEELB	Crumlin Integrated School	Integrated	325-0149
NEELB	Cullybackey High School	Controlled	321-0172
NEELB	Larne High School	Controlled	321-0038
NEELB	Slemish College	Integrated	326-0289
NEELB	St Benedict's College	Maintained	323-0308
NEELB	St Colm's, Draperstown	Maintained	323-0132

Board area	School Name	Sector	School Ref
SEELB	Ballynahinch Primary School	Controlled	401-1567
SEELB	Ballywalter Primary School	Controlled	401-1566
SEELB	Bangor Central Primary School	Integrated	405-1680
SEELB	Convent of Mercy Primary School St Patrick's Boys' Primary School	Maintained Maintained	403-1384 403-1644
SEELB	Downpatrick Primary School	Controlled	401-6235
SEELB	Killinchy Primary School	Controlled	401-6396
SEELB	St Joseph's Primary School, Crossgar	Maintained	403-1550
SEELB	St Luke's Primary School St Mark's Primary School	Maintained Maintained	403-6081 403-6134
SEELB	Down High	Controlled	441-0085
SEELB	Friend's School	Voluntary Grammar	442-0050
SEELB	Wallace High School	Voluntary Grammar	442-0051
SEELB	Saintfield High School	Controlled	421-0063
SEELB	St Colm's High School, Twinbrook	Maintained	423-0223
SELB	Abercorn Primary School	Controlled	501-1594
SELB	Bunscoil an Luir, Newry	Irish-medium	504-6597
SELB	Christian Brothers Primary School Mount St Catherine Primary School St Malachy's Primary School	Maintained Maintained Maintained	503-1110 503-1126 503-1133
SELB	Gaelscoil Uí Neill, Coalisland	Irish-medium	504-6637
SELB	Hart Memorial Primary School	Controlled	501-1129
SELB	Iveagh Primary School	Controlled	501-1611
SELB	King's Park Primary School	Controlled	501-1124
SELB	Moneydarragh Primary School, St Joseph's Primary School St Mary's Primary School	Maintained Maintained Maintained	503-1516 503-1325 503-6001
SELB	Portadown Integrated Primary School	Integrated	506-6553
SELB	St Joseph's and St James' Primary School	Maintained	503-6675
SELB	St Mary's Primary School St John's Primary School	Maintained Maintained	503-1695 503-1658
SELB	St Mary's Primary School, St Michael's Primary School Foley Primary School	Maintained Maintained Controlled	503-1172 503-1167 501-0909
SELB	St Patrick's Primary School	Maintained	503-1183
SELB	St Peter's Primary School, Moy	Maintained	503-6595
SELB	St Joseph's GS, Donaghmore	Voluntary Grammar	542-0073

Board area	School Name	Sector	School Ref
SELB	DromoreHigh School	Controlled	521-0064
SELB	KilkeelHigh School	Controlled	521-0016
SELB	Lismore Comprehensive School	Maintained	523-0213
SELB	MarkethillHigh School	Controlled	521-0083
SELB	Newbridge Integrated College	Integrated	526-0285
SELB	St Catherine's College, Armagh	Maintained	523-0218
SELB	St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen	Maintained	523-0167
WELB	Broadbridge Primary School, Derry	Maintained	203-2278
WELB	Bunscoil Cholmcille	Maintained	203-6574
WELB	Craigback Primary School Listress Primary School Mullabuoy Primary School (Faughanvale Parish)	Maintained Maintained Maintained	203-2277 203-2300 203-3707
WELB	Donemana Primary School	Controlled	201-2711
WELB	Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir, Derry	Irish-medium	204-6646
WELB	Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh, Strabane	Irish-medium	204-6638
WELB	Holy Trinity Primary School, Enniskillen	Maintained	203-6632
WELB	McClintock Primary School, Seskinore	Controlled	201-2344
WELB	Omagh County Primary School	Controlled	201-2691
WELB	Recarson Primary School, Omagh	Maintained	203-2704
WELB	Rosemount Primary School, St Anne's Primary School StEugene's Primary School	Maintained Maintained Maintained	203-0364 203-6069 203-6555
WELB	St Mary's Primary School, Newtownbutler	Maintained	203-1869
WELB	St Paul's Primary School, Irvinestown	Maintained	203-1898
WELB	Christian Brothers Grammar School	Voluntary Grammar	242-0064
WELB	Omagh Academy	Controlled	241-0066
WELB	Omagh High School	Controlled	221-0125
WELB	Sacred HeartCollege	Maintained	223-0298
WELB	Portora Royal	Voluntary Grammar	242-0042
WELB	Strabane Grammar Strabane High	Controlled Controlled	241-0096 221-0164

Investment Delivery Plan

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education how projects in the Investment Delivery Plan are prioritised by his Department.

(AQW 565/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As stated in my answer to AQW 210/11-15, the work to consider how the available capital funds should be deployed will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

This work will include establishing the priorities for capital investment based on the most pressing need and maximising educational benefits for young people.

Schools: Newbuilds

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 210/11-15, in relation to proposed new builds for schools, how his Department identifies 'the most pressing needs' when considering how limited capital funds should be deployed.

(AQW 566/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As stated in my answer to AQW 210/11-15, the work to consider how the available capital funds should be deployed will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

This work will include establishing the priorities for capital investment based on the most pressing need and maximising educational benefits for young people.

Braidside Integrated Primary School, Ballymena

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the new build for Braidside Integrated Primary School, Ballymena.

(AQW 579/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The proposed major capital scheme for Braidside Integrated Primary School is one of a large number of schemes at an early stage of planning and which have not been announced for capital investment.

The Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years and this will impact on the Department's ability to deliver new school building projects.

I will wish to consider carefully how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs across the schools estate. This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

Unfortunately therefore I cannot provide you with any indication as to if or when a new build for Braidside Integrated Primary School might be possible.

Education: Spend for each Pupil

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education how much is currently spent per pupil on education compared to the rest of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 601/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not hold data on comparative funding levels for other regions.

It is difficult to make meaningful comparisons of per pupil funding across different regions because the other jurisdictions calculate these figures using different categories and different elements within those categories. Differences in levels of delegation and in arrangements for distribution of central funding add a further layer of complexity. Some funding streams do not have equivalents across the countries and differences in spend must be considered in the context of different levels of relative need.

History of the Northern Ireland State

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education whether it is mandatory for all schools to teach the history of the Northern Ireland state in post-primary schools.

(AQW 604/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: History is a statutory requirement at Key Stage 3 and a qualification choice at Key Stage 4.

Under the statutory minimum content all post-primary schools are required to provide pupils at Key Stage 3 with the opportunities to investigate Irish and British historical periods including the long and short term causes and consequences of the partition of Ireland and how it has influenced this State today, including key events and turning points.

Integrated Schools

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education how many schools in the controlled sector could be classed as 'integrated' due to an equal balance of children from the Catholic and Protestant communities attending.

(AQW 605/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Integrated education is defined in legislation as 'the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils'. The Department classifies an Integrated school as one which attracts at least 30% of its pupils from the relevant minority community.

Using this classification, in 2010/11 7 Controlled primary schools and 2 Controlled post-primary schools had more than 30% of their pupils from the minority community. Additionally, 6 Controlled Integrated primary schools and 2 Controlled Integrated post-primary schools had more than 30% of their pupils from the minority community.

Religion is recorded as specified by the pupil, or parent of the pupil. Approximately 17% of pupils in Controlled primary schools and 11% of pupils in Controlled post-primary schools have their religion recorded as 'not known/not stated/no religion'. Similarly, 19% of pupils in Controlled Integrated primary schools and 13% of pupils in Controlled Integrated post-primary schools have their religion recorded as 'not known/not stated/no religion'.

Emergency Life Support Skills

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education (i) what plans there are to ensure that emergency life support skills are taught in all schools; and (ii) how many schools currently teach emergency life support skills.

(AQW 612/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The revised curriculum is now in place in grant aided schools and is designed to provide schools with considerable flexibility (within the broad framework set out in legislation) to introduce topics, make connections and draw on a wide range of resources from a range of sources to meet the needs of their pupils.

The revised curriculum provides opportunities for schools to introduce the teaching of life support skills through Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at primary level and through Learning for Life and Work at post-primary level. Guidance and resources are available to support schools which wish to teach these important skills and I would encourage schools to avail of this. However, I am conscious that schools are working hard to embed all aspects of the revised curriculum and to ensure a particular focus in raising standards in literacy and numeracy, and I do not intend to make changes that would place additional demands on teachers at this time.

The Department does not require or record information on the number of schools teaching emergency life support skills.

GL and AQE Transfer Tests

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education how many grades were upgraded, as a result of the existence of exceptional circumstances, in the GL and AQE transfer tests in the Belfast Education and Library Board area in the 2010/11 academic year.

(AQW 614/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In accordance with my Department's policy on post-primary transfer, which is not supportive of unregulated testing, no information is collected about any aspect of tests conducted in contravention of that policy. This information is only available from those involved in unregulated testing.

Business Education Unit

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to provide a breakdown of the budget allocated to the Business Education Unit for the 2011-15 period.

(AQW 618/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not have a specific Business Education Unit. Business education is now an integral part of the revised curriculum delivered through the areas of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) at primary level and Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at post-primary.

Schools receive delegated budgets to enable them to deliver all aspects of the curriculum, including the PDMU and LLW areas of learning. Additional funding has also been set aside for programmes designed to promote enterprise and entrepreneurship and to introduce young people to the world of work.

Funding for these areas is confirmed and allocated on an annual basis. In 2011/12 the Department expects to allocate in the region of £1.050m supporting activities relating to enterprise and entrepreneurship and £500,000 supporting activities relating to work experience and career-related activities.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education (i) to provide details of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment's plans to move jobs from the Western Education and Library Board offices in Derry and Omagh, to offices in Belfast; and (ii) for his assessment of this decision.

(AQW 629/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: CCEA's interim Chief Executive has informed me that CCEA has office space in the North West Teachers' Centre, the Omagh Library Complex and Newry Teachers' Centre. However, in light of business need and budget constraints, CCEA has made the decision not to renew the arrangements for the rental of the three off-site spaces beyond 30 June 2011.

CCEA anticipates that the 3 staff concerned will continue to work within the organisation and consultation about the new working arrangements is continuing.

Archived Departmental Documentation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education how much his Department spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years.

(AQW 644/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has not paid rent for storage space for archived departmental documentation in the last three years.

Schools: Newbuilds

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education to detail the new builds for schools which are (i) currently underway; or (ii) due to start in the next 12 months.

(AQW 661/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are currently 17 major capital school building projects where construction work is underway. These are detailed below.

School Name	Project	Capital Cost £M
Controlled Schools		
Banbridge Academy	Extension & Refurbishment	17.9
Magherafelt H.S.	New school on existing site	10.5
Whitehouse P.S. Newtownabbey	New school on existing site	3.6
Magherafelt P.S. & Nursery School	New schools on new site	4.67
Taughmonagh P.S. Belfast	New school on existing site	3.1
Torbank Special School	New schools on new site	10.5
Sub-total		50.27
Maintained Schools		
St Joseph's P.S. Madden	New school on existing site	1.3
St Colman's P.S. Lambeg	New school on extended site	2.6
Coranny & Cornagague P.S.	Amalgamation to form a new school on a new site	1.58
St Mary's P.S. Newcastle	New school on extended site	3.1
Carrick P.S. Warrenpoint	New school on extended site	2.9
Dromintee P.S. Killeavey	New school on extended site	2.1
St Oliver Plunkett P.S. Forkhill	New school on new site	1.5
Sub-total		15.08
Voluntary Grammar		
Bangor G.S.	New school on new site	13.98
Strathearn G.S.	New school on extended site	13.4
Sub-total		27.38
Irish Medium		
Scoil na Fuisseoige	New school on existing site	1.67
Sub-total		1.67
Integrated Schools		
Lagan College Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment	24.9
Sub-total		24.9

In addition to these 17 projects it is anticipated that one further project for St Columba's Primary School, Straw, which was included in the capital announcement of August 2010, will commence construction work shortly, subject to a satisfactory outcome to a flood risk assessment currently being carried out.

At this point in time there are no further new builds scheduled to start in the next twelve months.

Given the current financial position I wish to consider how the limited capital funds available should be deployed in the coming years to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people.

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 163/11-15, to detail (i) the subject matters on which the consultants were engaged; (ii) the consultants engaged; and (iii) the costs incurred on each project.

(AQW 699/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of the project title, the consultants engaged and the costs incurred in each financial year from 2007-08 to 2010-11 are provided in the tables below.

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

Figures for 2010-11 are provisional and subject to the audit of year end accounts.

Project Title	Name of consultancy firm	Expenditure 2007/08 £
Governor Handbook	B Burnison A Rainey S McCall J Beattie	21,900
DE Catering Advisor	Mrs Patricia McCusker	9,374
Preparation and production of a revised Literacy and Numeracy Strategy	Dan McCall	12,294
Evaluation of FullServiceSchool Project	Bearing Point	47,475
SpecialistSchool Assessment Panel	M Murray B Salisbury G McCafferty R Fitzpatrick G Tigchelaar D Thompson R Downey S McElwee M Cowan	28,000
liP re-accreditation	Kenny Consultancy	900
Independent Validation of the Operational Requirement for the Teachers' Pensions Replacement System	Software Quality Systems Ltd	8,750
Support to assist with the implementation of RPA	PA Consulting	10,090

Project Title	Name of consultancy firm	Expenditure 2007/08 £
Development of RPA Outline Business Case	Deloitte	39,761
Review of Irish Medium Education	Deloitte MCS Ltd	13,704
ICT Audit	PWC	32,250
Communications Support	PA Consulting	9,350
HR Support	Deloitte	26,000
Communications Research	Central Survey Unit	10,000
Independent Strategic Review of Education	Bain Review Team	20,820
Post-primary Facilitation Exercise	Mr A McVeigh	1,368
Network Health Check	Echelon Consulting Ltd	2,590
Preparation of Outline Business Cases for 2004 Announced Schools Sector PPP Projects	PriceWaterhouseCoopers	24,245
To facilitate the Department of Education with Public Consultation Meetings on, English as an Additional Language (EAL) - Draft Policy	Flex Language Services, University of Ulster	16,673
Chartermark Re-Assessment	EMQC	825
Dev of ETI Communication Styles	Mind Associates Ltd	5,871
Independent Evaluation of the Inspection Process	PriceWaterhouse Coopers	29,929
Frameworks Project	EC Harris LLP	210,283
Frameworks Project	Addleshaw Goddard LLP	80,872
Frameworks Project - Court Proceedings	Addleshaw Goddard/Chandler KBS	356,162
Revision of DE Circular 99/10: Pastoral Care in Schools - Child Protection	Betty Robinson	6,596
Audit of the Youth Estate	Grant Thornton	40,922
Consultation with children, parents and staff in early years settings	NIPPA	700

Project Title	Name Of Consultancy Firm	Expenditure 2008-09 £
Consultation with Children and Young People on draft Education (Pupil Records and Reporting) Regulations	Barnardo's	6,000
Consultation with Parents on draft Education (Pupil Records and Reporting) Regulations	Parenting Forum/Parents' Advice Centre	7,400

Project Title	Name Of Consultancy Firm	Expenditure 2008-09 £
Children and Young People Consultation: Literacy & Numeracy Strategy	Barnardo's	10,000
Consultation with Parents: Literacy & Numeracy Strategy	Parent Advice Centre	7,400
Effective Use of Data	PriceWaterhouseCoopers	43,400
Audit of ESAIT accommodation	Deloitte	23,728
Organisational Design	PA Consulting	49,450
Independent evaluation of the inspection process	PWC	54,952
Revision of DE Circular 99/10: Pastoral Care in Schools - Child Protection	Betty Robinson	3,121
Independent Advisor to Consider Discretionary Cases relating to the Unsuitable person's (to work with children) List	Richard Black	9,747
Developing Policy Codes for use by the proposed Education and Skills Authority	Jackie Simpson	1,968
Design and establishment of nominal ledger for MCA	PriceWaterhouse Coopers	1,122
Provision of staff training on payroll fundamentals and training on the maintenance of the payroll system	PriceWaterhouse Coopers	1,122
Installation of Servers	DELL	14,039
Legal assistance for Frameworks	Addleshaw Goddard	48,191
Legal assistance for legislation	Addleshaw Goddard	6,079
Procurement assistance Modernising Schools Programme	EC Harris	258,329
Legal assistance for legal challenge	Addleshaw Goddard	38,982
Technical assistance for legal challenge	RowSELL Wright	15,239
Technical assistance for legal challenge	EC Harris	24,623
BalmoralHigh School - options for future use	KPMG and A&L Goodbody	50,137
Examination of the Review of Irish Medium Education's TOR vi: A Study of the outcomes of Government's financial investment in Irish-Medium Education over the last 5 years	Deloitte MCS Ltd	3,397
DE School Meals Adviser	Patricia McCusker	9,197

Project Title	Name Of Consultancy Firm	Expenditure 2008-09 £
Review of North South Co-operation on Educational Exchanges and Supporting Mechanisms	Matt Murray & Pauline Gildea	17,906
Audit of the Youth Estate	Grant Thornton	34,827
FullServiceSchool Evaluation	FGS McClure Watters (formally Bearing Point)	47,475
Audit of Teacher Training for CR Review	Bearing Point	8,716
CR Review	FGS McClure Watters	36,785
Provision of HR expertise for the RPA Programme in Education	Vivienne Walker	11,496
Scoping Study of the Financial Management Processes within DE	Deloitte	6,052

Project Title	Name of consultancy firm	Expenditure 2009-10 £
Readiness change	Milward Brown	2,015
Implementation of RPA Programme	QBM	7,400
Chartermark Re-assessment	EMQC	800
PEHAW Homework diary inserts	Papermouse Design Work	2,275
Child Protection Training	Marcella Leonard	2,300
Schools Modernisation Programme	Addleshaw Goddard	8,698
Security validation of new systems	CLASS Consultancy	4,163
Diversity training needs in early years sector, schools and youth	FGS McClure Watters	3,678
ESAIT delivery models and location options	Deloitte	44,088
ESA Corporate identity and education brand	Hamill Bosket	2,750
ESA Corporate identity and education brand	Tandem Design	3,755
ESA Corporate identity and education brand	Frank Design and Communication Ltd	3,750
ESA Corporate identity and education brand	McCadden Design	3,960
Provision of an assessment centre ESA	PriceWaterhouse Coopers	60,854
Child Protection Training	Marcella Leonard	672
Parenting Forum	Parents Advice Centre	1,250
Strategic HR/Workforce issues	Vivienne Walker	10,113
Determination of terms and conditions of ESA directors	Hays Group	12,315

Project Title	Name of consultancy firm	Expenditure 2009-10 £
Discretionary cases relating to working with children	Richard Black	5,645

Project Title	Name of consultancy firm	Expenditure 2010-11 £
CRED Public Consultation	Participation Network	6,704
Revisions to Homework Diary Inserts	Papermouse Design	1,860
Mandatory CLAS Consultancy - required to validate security of new systems	Goldblatt McGuigan	2,812
Governance and Accountability Training Seminars	Brian Whalley	11,742
Customer Service Excellence Model (2010-2013)	EMQC Ltd	2,014
Lisanelly Shared Educational Campus Project	Arthur Cox	8,260
Lisanelly Shared Educational Campus Project	KPMG	22,658
Turbaries	Jacqui Simpson	3,500
Controlled Schools Sectoral Body Work Group	Chambre of Public Affairs	2,806

School Attendance

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 970/10, to detail the rate per thousand of primary school pupils who have less than eighty-five percent attendance, broken down by (i) each local council area; and (ii) electoral ward within each local council area; and what actions are being taken to reduce levels of absenteeism. [R]

(AQW 705/11-15)

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

The Department now has three years detailed information which will facilitate more in-depth analysis of patterns, levels of absence, type of absence, reason for absence by Education & Library Board and school management type as well as pupil characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnicity and free school meal entitlement. This will inform how current approaches to tackling poor attendance might be more effectively tailored and targeted on types of absence or particular areas or schools and when there is a need to be more innovative.

The Education Welfare Service (EWS) receives referrals from schools when pupils' attendance is a cause for concern or when attendance drops below 85%. The EWS supports schools, advises on attendance policy and strategies and offers interventions such as the Primary Attendance Matters (PAM) programme where the school is helped to analyse its attendance data, identify issues and explore ways of tackling them within their own resources. It also offers the programme, "The Big Move", to prepare Year 7 pupils for transition to post-primary school.

My Department regards non-attendance at school as a symptom of an underlying problem and additional steps are being taken to address the issues which are faced by vulnerable groups such as Traveller pupils and looked after children.

School Attendance

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 971/10, to detail the rate per thousand of 15 to 17 year old pupils who have less than eighty five percent attendance, broken down by (i) local council area; and (ii) electoral ward within each local council area; and what action is being taken to reduce levels of absenteeism.

(AQW 706/11-15)

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

The Department now has three years detailed information which facilitates in-depth analysis of patterns, levels of absence, type of absence, reason for absence by Education & Library Board, school management type as well as pupil characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnicity and free school meal entitlement. This informs how current approaches to tackling poor attendance might be more effectively tailored and targeted on types of absence or particular areas or schools and when we need to be more innovative.

Young people who see their time at school as relevant are more likely to stay engaged with education and more likely to succeed and do well. This in turn contributes to raising standards and impacts positively on the economy. The post 14 curriculum is designed to offer pupils access to a broad and balanced curriculum which meets their needs, interests and aspirations with clear progression pathways.

My Department regards non-attendance as a symptom of an underlying problem and additional programmes are in place to address the issues which are faced by vulnerable groups such as Traveller pupils, looked after children and school age mothers. Research commissioned by the Department on attendance at post-primary school by looked after children has recently been completed which will inform future guidance to schools.

The Education Welfare Service (EWS) receives referrals from schools when pupils' attendance is a cause for concern or when attendance drops below 85%. The EWS also supports schools through proactive work on attendance strategies and advising on attendance policy.

School Attendance

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 972/10, to detail the rate per thousand of post primary school pupils who have less than eighty five percent school attendance, broken down by (i) local council area; and (ii) electoral ward within each local council area; and what action is being taken to reduce levels of absenteeism.

(AQW 707/11-15)

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

The Department now has three years detailed information which will facilitate more in-depth analysis of patterns, levels of absence, type of absence, reason for absence by Education & Library Board, school management type as well as pupil characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnicity and free school meal entitlement. This will inform how current approaches to tackling poor attendance might be more effectively tailored and targeted on types of absence or particular areas or schools and when there is a need to be more innovative.

The Education Welfare Service (EWS) receives referrals from schools when pupils' attendance is a cause for concern or when attendance drops below 85%. The EWS also supports schools through proactive work on attendance strategies and advising on attendance policy.

My Department regards non-attendance as a symptom of an underlying problem and additional programmes are in place to address the issues which are faced by vulnerable groups such as Traveller pupils, looked after children and school age mothers.

Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education to detail the areas from which pupils come to attend Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim.

(AQW 716/11-15)

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

WARDS AND DISTRICT COUNCILS RESIDED IN BY PUPILS ENROLLED IN PARKHALLINTEGRATEDCOLLEGE – 2010/11

District Council	Ward	Total enrolment
Postcode not provided/unknown/not recognised		15
Antrim	Aldergrove	26
Antrim	Balloo	31
Antrim	Ballycraigy	79
Antrim	Clady	14
Antrim	Cranfield	9
Antrim	Drumanaway	8
Antrim	Farranshane	39
Antrim	Fountain Hill	72
Antrim	Greystone (Antrim)	40
Antrim	Massereene	78
Antrim	Parkgate	6
Antrim	Randalstown	9
Antrim	Shilvodan	13
Antrim	Springfarm	71
Antrim	Steeple	72
Antrim	Stiles	60
Antrim	Templepatrick	*
Ballymena	Broughshane	*
Ballymena	Glenwhirry	*
Ballymena	Harryville	*
Ballymena	Kells	21
Belfast	Crumlin (Belfast)	*
Belfast	Legoniel	*
Lisburn	Glenavy	5
Newtownabbey	Ballyclare North	*
Newtownabbey	Hightown	*
Newtownabbey	Mallusk	*

District Council	Ward	Total enrolment
Total		682

Source: School census

* denotes fewer than 5 pupils

Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of the community background of the pupils attending Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim in each of the last three years.

(AQW 717/11-15)

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

RELIGION OF PUPILS ATTENDING PARKHALL INTEGRATED COLLEGE 2008/09 – 2010/11

Religion1	2008/ 09	2009/ 10	2010/ 11
Protestant	568	547	555
Catholic	20	15	18
Other Christian/Non-Christian/ No religion/religion not known	119	115	109
Total	707	677	682

Source: School census.

Note:

1. Based on information provided by pupils' parents.

Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education how much the new school build at Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim will cost.

(AQW 719/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The current estimated cost of a new build school for Parkhall Integrated College, as included in the Economic Appraisal, is £21.1m.

The Economic Appraisal is, however, subject to ongoing review until a contract is awarded. This is to ensure that it is up to date and that the project continues to represent value for money. Hence the cost for the project may vary until then.

Gaelscoil na mBeann, Kilkeel

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) pupils; and (ii) teachers at Gaelscoil na mBeann, Kilkeel.

(AQW 749/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There were 5 pupils and 1 full-time teacher at Gaelscoil na mBeann at the time of the 2010/11 school Census conducted in October 2010.

South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when he plans to reconstitute the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

(AQW 751/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans at present to reconstitute the South Eastern Education and Library Board. I will keep the position under review taking account of the likely timescale for the establishment of a new Education and Skills Authority.

Irish Language School in Killeel

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Education what is the average annual cost of educating a pupil at the Irish language school in Killeel.

(AQW 761/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Gaelscoil na mBeann is the only Irish Medium School in Killeel and the status of the school is currently Independent. As such the school does not qualify for any grant-aided funding from my Department.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education, in light of the delay in the implementation of the reforms under the Review of Public Administration, what level of funding has been agreed for each Education and Library Board.

(AQW 865/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The funding that has been provided for each Education and Library Board for the 2011-12 financial year is detailed on the table below:

	Block Grant	Earmarked	Total £000's
BELB	61,515	30,088	91,603
NEELB	85,460	14,757	100,217
SEELB	75,781	29,000	104,781
SELB	88,159	18,008	106,167
WELB	74,166	60,824	134,990
Total	385,081	152,677	537,758

Note: There are still some funds in respect of earmarked initiatives to be allocated in the current year, with an approximate value of £20 million.

Department for Employment and Learning

Further Education Colleges

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether Further Education Colleges are subject to the same quality inspection checks as schools offering GCSE's and A-Levels.

(AQW 274/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Further Education Colleges are subject to the same inspection framework used by the Education and Training Inspectorate, as is applied in schools offering GCSEs and A-Levels.

I should add that the primary focus of Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland is to offer a wide range of economically focused professional & technical qualifications, tailored to meet local needs.

As a result, Colleges in the main do not focus on providing GCSEs or A-Levels. However, a significant number of young people from schools attend college in the evening to top up the provision in A-Level teaching.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much funding his Department has allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal in each year since May 2007, broken down by council area.

(AQW 350/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning does not fund any services, either fully or partly, under Neighbourhood Renewal. It does, however, deliver a range of programmes related to employment and skills which aim to address disadvantage and are targeted at the needs of individuals, many of whom live in Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Further and Higher Education

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the future of private finance initiatives in relation to further and higher education.

(AQW 370/11-15)

Dr Farry: Further Education colleges must, as part of Treasury Guidance, consider all procurement options including Public Private Partnerships.

Decisions on procurement methods are based on value for money considerations and funding from my Department is subject to full economic appraisals.

As autonomous bodies, Higher Education Institutions are also able to enter into contracts with private sector providers to form Public Private Partnerships. These too are subject to full economic appraisals and value for money consideration. Decisions about future private finance initiatives in both further and higher education will therefore be considered on a case by case basis.

Stranmillis University College

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he intends to maintain the Christian ethos of Stranmillis University College.

(AQW 390/11-15)

Dr Farry: I will assume that the question refers to the position should the proposed merger with Queen's University Belfast proceed.

This issue was discussed in some detail with Stranmillis, Queen's and the Transferor Representatives' Council prior to the launch of the public consultation. In addition, legal advice was also sought on the matter. The resulting proposal, as outlined in the consultation document, is to provide for relevant key stakeholders to have a direct advisory role in the proposed Stranmillis School of Education at Queen's. This would mean the establishment of a Stakeholder Forum on which interested parties, including the Transferors, will have appropriate guaranteed representation. The Stakeholder Forum would have an advisory and consultative role in the governance of the new School of Education. Moreover, Queen's has also given an assurance that there will be no change to the teaching of the agreed Religious Education curriculum should the proposed merger take place and a sufficient number of teachers will be trained to deliver the agreed curriculum in any school in Northern Ireland.

Emergency Life Support Skills

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department has taken in the last year to promote the teaching of emergency life support skills in all further and higher educational facilities; and what plans he has to encourage this in the future.

(AQW 400/11-15)

Dr Farry: While my Department sets the strategic direction for the Further Education Sector, each College is responsible for its own curriculum offer including the teaching of emergency life support skills. However, I can advise that all Further Education Colleges offer courses in emergency life support skills in a wide range of locations, including College campuses, community venues, family centres and businesses. Such provision is included in a portfolio of Emergency First Aid Courses ranging from short courses such as Public First Aid, to accredited qualifications such as emergency first aid at work.

Further Education Colleges have promoted the teaching of emergency life support skills by using initiatives from organisations such as the British Heart Foundation using the programme 'HeartStartSchool'. Colleges select specific staff as trainers in basic life support (Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation, Heart Attack Signs and Symptoms, dealing with bleeding and choking). Colleges are planning to develop further the number of trained staff in this area, and to include Emergency Life Skills training in the majority of students' induction to College in September 2011.

At Queen's University, emergency life support skills are taught to all first year medical, dental, nursing and midwifery students. The University also has around 330 staff first aiders who are trained in emergency life support skills.

At the University of Ulster, all pre-registration nursing students are taught emergency life support skills based on nationally agreed Resuscitation Council guidelines. Students enrolled on Allied Health Professional courses at the University are also provided with training in basic life support skills including cardiopulmonary resuscitation in their first year of study.

StranmillisUniversityCollege proactively promotes First Aid training for staff and students, particularly through its Students' Union. Similarly, at St Mary's UniversityCollege, the Students' Union organises a Paediatric First Aid Course on an annual basis which is delivered and accredited by the Order of Malta.

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much his Department has spent on external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 410/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department has spent the following amounts on external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11 (Draft)
£'000	453	556	303	292

Kilcooley Women's Education Centre, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to review funding for the Kilcooley Women's Education Centre, Bangor.

(AQW 412/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Kilcooley Women's Education Centre was one of numerous organisations that received support from the Training for Women Network (TWN), an umbrella organisation that was funded under the first call for funding for the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme, 2007-13.

TWN applied for funding under the recent second call for funding, and stated that they would deliver employability training initiatives at a local level through eight partner organisations, including the Kilcooley Women's Centre. However, their application did not score sufficiently highly to be awarded funding under this competitive process. TWN appealed this decision unsuccessfully. The recent second call for applications is now closed and no further applications may be considered.

My Department does not have any statutory basis or remit to core fund any voluntary or community organisations to deliver training or education and has provided no direct funding to the Kilcooley Women's Education Centre.

Educational Attainment

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to improve educational attainment for people from Protestant working class communities.

(AQW 413/11-15)

Dr Farry: As I explained in a recent response to a similar question, by aiming to meet the needs of individual learners my Department's education and training programmes are designed to improve educational achievement across Northern Ireland, including in Protestant working class communities.

As I outlined in the Assembly debate on this topic on 31 May, relevant Departmental programmes include: Training for Success, which guarantees a training place for 16 and 17 year olds, including those who have disengaged from learning; Essential Skills provision, to raise the levels of literacy, numeracy and ICT competence of young people and adults; a wide range of courses in FE colleges, again for school leavers and adults, delivered on a full-time and part-time basis, and with an access programme designed specifically to encourage and support disengaged adults back into learning (FE programmes include a range of professional and technical courses from entry level through to Level 4, delivered in a variety of settings and including Essential Skills, employability skills and access to university courses); the Apprenticeship programme, and programmes designed to raise the skill and qualifications levels of the existing workforce; projects to promote higher education among working class young people (for example "Discovering Queens" and Ulster University's "Step Up Programme", both designed to encourage aspiration towards university education particularly in disadvantaged areas), a key priority that will be strengthened through the Department's widening participation strategy which will aim to raise the aspiration of young people to progress to higher education; and the Steps to Work programme, which provides a range of assistance to unemployed and economically inactive people, including access to Essential Skills provision and to short accredited training courses.

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

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

While there is, clearly, no room for complacency, I indicated in the debate some encouraging trends in the participation in education on the part of those from deprived areas that are predominantly Protestant. In particular, the fact that in the three year period to 2009/10 there was a 10% increase in FE enrolments, a 71% increase in Essential Skills enrolments, and a 7% increase in higher education participation.

In the Assembly debate, there was a strong recognition that while my Department and the Department of Education have important lead roles to play in this area, there is a complexity of wider societal

factors that will have to be addressed by other Departments and their agencies, if these issues are to be addressed effectively. Therefore, I look forward to continuing to work with others in this important area.

Corporation Tax

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of whether Northern Ireland has, or will have, the skills required to ensure increased foreign investment, as predicted by the Economic Advisory Group, should there be a reduction in the level of corporation tax.

(AQW 438/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Economic Advisory Group paper identifies corporate tax as an important factor in attracting inward investors; however it is not the sole factor. Research shows that, increasingly in the global marketplace, it is skills, innovative capacity and work readiness that businesses are seeking as they make their investment location decisions.

Any reduction in the corporation tax rate will have maximum economic impact when it sits within a business-friendly environment. In practice, for many businesses, this means access to a highly skilled and innovative workforce, and considerable work is underway to ensure that Northern Ireland proves an attractive proposition for such investors.

My Department and Invest Northern Ireland are working very closely together under the Assured Skills programme to ensure that the skills of our workforce match the requirements of Foreign Direct Investment companies.

Support from the Assured Skills programme recently played a strong part in convincing Heritage International Fund Managers Limited, a fund administration services company, to invest in Northern Ireland. Their decision was strongly influenced by the availability of well qualified and skilled staff as well as the competitive cost environment.

In addition, it is important that we continue to refine our offering to match the profile of those companies that we are trying to attract. We are currently undertaking a research project in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to assess the future prospects for improving the quality of foreign direct investment to Northern Ireland.

The recently updated Skills Strategy: "Success through Skills – Transforming Futures" will also help ensure we have the right skills to grow the Northern Ireland economy. The Strategy looks at our current skills base, examines the skills we will need in the future and highlights areas for action, such as higher level skills, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematic skills and Management and Leadership skills.

To achieve this, the implementation plan for the Strategy will increasingly focus on the up-skilling of those people already in the workforce; and, as the economy grows, on attracting moderate levels of appropriately skilled people to Northern Ireland.

European Union Monitoring Committee Report's Working Definition of Anti-Semitism

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the message sent out to ethnic minorities by the University and Colleges Union's decision to condemn and disassociate itself from the European Union Monitoring Committee Report's working definition of Anti-Semitism; and whether he plans to call the Union to account for this action.

(AQW 442/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University and Colleges is an independent union.

There is no place for racism of any form, including anti-Semitism, in further and higher education, or in society. Our further education colleges and higher education institutions have measures in place to ensure that their students are not subject to threatening or abusive behaviour on campus. They have access to a strong legislative framework and guidance to help them deal effectively with instances

of intolerance, racism and harassment on campus. I expect them to vigorously tackle these issues when they arise. Institutions and students have recourse to the law to tackle anti-Semitism, and the institutions themselves are accountable to the courts for their actions in relation to equality and tackling harassment.

I will continue to encourage and support our institutions to ensure that they provide a welcoming learning environment for all people, regardless of their identity or background.

Foreign Students

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many foreign students were attending university in 2008/09.

(AQW 450/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the 2008/09 academic year there were 5,235 students enrolled at Northern Ireland Higher Education institutions whose domicile was outside the United Kingdom. Of these 5,235 students, 3,685 were domiciled inside the European Union.

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

1. These figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
1. Foreign students are defined as those who are domiciled outside of Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

Queen's University and Stranmillis University College: Proposed Merger

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what the estimated cost is of the proposed merger of Queen's University and Stranmillis University College.

(AQW 451/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is my understanding that should the merger proceed, it will be neutral in budgetary terms for my Department. Both Stranmillis University College and Queen's University are funded on the basis of student numbers and research activity carried out. There are no proposals that the number of students at the merged institution will be greater than the number attending both institutions at present. My Department will also need to await the outcome of the next research assessment exercise, expected to be completed in 2014, to learn if there is any impact on overall research funding.

Further Education: Maintenance

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department is making any bids through the June monitoring round for essential maintenance to Further Education Colleges.

(AQO 66/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department has made a capital bid for £2m in June Monitoring in respect of essential minor works required in the Northern and Southern Regional Colleges where there has been no significant investment in many campuses of their estate. In contrast, there has been an extensive capital programme in recent years to improve the quality of the accommodation across the other Further Education Colleges to meet the needs of industry. A Strategic Outline business case to rebuild both the Northern and Southern Colleges' estates has been recently approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Clearly, until this major capital project work is completed, ongoing maintenance/minor works is required.

Agency Workers

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the estimated cost to private sector employers and recruitment agencies of implementing the EU Agency Workers Directive.

(AQO 68/11-15)

Dr Farry: Although the final policy on the transposition of the Directive has not yet been agreed, the impact assessment which accompanied the Department's consultation indicates that private sector employers face annual increased costs of £27.6m, whilst recruitment agencies face annual increased costs of £0.7m. These costs have been calculated on the basis of a 12 week qualifying period for equal treatment.

If the Directive is transposed without this qualifying period, the cost would be £66.1m for private sector employers and £1.9m for recruitment agencies.

For private sector employers, the majority of these costs are made up increased wages, whilst for recruitment agencies the costs mainly comprise administrative burdens.

University of Ulster: Magee Campus

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the viability of expanding the University of Ulster's Magee Campus and whether an expansion would help achieve inclusivity and equality.

(AQO 69/11-15)

Dr Farry: Clearly an expansion at the Magee Campus would be viable if the University of Ulster could attract sufficient students who meet the entrance criteria and secure a sustainable funding stream to meet the infrastructural and teaching costs involved. Under the existing arrangements the costs which would fall to the public purse of an additional 1000 students at Magee would be in the region of £8m annually. It is not immediately apparent, however, how that level of additionality could be found within the resource envelope made available to me by the previous Executive and Assembly.

Regarding inclusivity and equality I am of the view that any investment in Higher Education will help promote those goals. We have a very good track record to date with participation rates among students from socio-economic backgrounds the highest in the UK and the development of a Widening Participation Strategy will seek to maintain that position.

Essential Skills

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the Essential Skills Strategy.

(AQO 70/11-15)

Dr Farry: The revised Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland 'Success through Skills – Transforming Futures' recognises that while there has been progress in raising Northern Ireland's skills profile, more needs to be done to ensure that it is able to compete globally. This will require a substantial increase in the number of people having skills and qualifications at the higher levels. My department has therefore set goals within the Skills Strategy to address the issue of increasing the numbers of participants achieving qualifications at all levels including at Level 2 and Essential Skills, and the rate at which qualifications are achieved.

The 'Essential Skills for Living' Strategy, launched in 2002, continues to address the literacy, numeracy and ICT needs of adults within Northern Ireland. Essential Skills are promoted in a wide range of settings, including the voluntary and community sector, the workplace, prisons and with other hard to reach groups. It is also incorporated, where appropriate, into my Department's further education and training programmes.

To date, just over 59,000 individuals have achieved almost 104,000 Essential Skills qualifications, contributing to the early achievement of a key PSA target and providing learners with the skills they need to progress at home and at work.

A full library of up to date reports detailing the performance of Essential Skills can be accessed at: <http://www.delni.gov.uk/essential-skills-factsheets.htm>

Further Education: Construction Workers

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what initiatives have been undertaken by Further Education Colleges to help unemployed construction workers to re-skill or diversify.

(AQO 71/11-15)

Dr Farry: Further Education colleges offer an extensive range of full and part time courses to prospective students including the unemployed.

Further Education colleges have been running a number of specific programmes that have targeted the unemployed, including construction workers, such as: Kickstart to Work, Kickstart IT, Steering to Success, Employ Me, Step Up to Sustainable Employment, Wind Turbine Training for Electricians and general re-skilling/up-skilling courses in renewable technologies.

Some of these programmes, for example the European Social Fund programme, Employ Me developed by Southern Regional College, are targeted at reskilling those made redundant in the construction industry.

Further Education colleges are also involved with the delivery of the NVQ strand of the Department's Steps to Work programme.

Employment Programmes: Benefits

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures his Department is taking to deal with changes to the benefits system resulting in people moving off Incapacity Benefit and onto Department-led job programmes.

(AQO 72/11-15)

Dr Farry: Approximately 76,000 individuals will have their claim to Incapacity Benefit reassessed over a 3 year period beginning in 2011/12.

It is estimated that 39,000 clients on Employment and Support Allowance and around 7,500 Jobseeker's Allowance claimants will be required to engage with my Department over this period.

Officials have been working closely with their colleagues in the Social Security Agency to ensure there is appropriate advice, support and guidance to clients at every stage of this process.

My main priority is to increase employability for this client group through tailored assistance by trained Employment Service Advisers and access to a wide range of work-focused support through the Steps to Work programme and the Disablement Employment Service programmes.

Higher Education: Postgraduate Awards

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what level of funding his Department is providing for Postgraduate Awards in the 2010/11 academic year.

(AQO 73/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the 2010/11 academic year, my Department is funding 795 postgraduate students at Queen's University and the University of Ulster. To date my Department has made payments of £16.2m in respect of postgraduate students and anticipates making further payments of £11.4m. This would equate to total funding of £27.6m in the current academic year.

Department for Employment and Learning: Welfare Reforms

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consideration he has given to the impact of the proposed welfare reforms on his Department.

(AQO 74/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am acutely aware of the impact of welfare reform on my Department. The outcome for budget 2010 provided insufficient resources to enable me to provide the additional resources necessary to take forward the welfare reforms I have therefore submitted two bids in the June monitoring round which are critical.

£2.5 million pounds is urgently needed to allow the Department to develop and deliver an improved pre-work programme service to the unemployed and economically inactive.

In addition £3.7 million is needed to provide appropriate support to help those people get back into work who are affected by the Incapacity Benefit/Income Support Reassessment programme which is currently underway.

Northern Ireland's needs are greater than the rest of the UK. The unemployment rate for 18 – 24 year olds in Northern Ireland is 20.3% compared to the UK average rate of 17.8%. The economic inactivity rate is 27.8% compared to a UK average of 23.2%. These figures make a compelling argument for more investment in back to work support locally compared to Great Britain.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) how much Invest NI has invested in venture capital funds; and (ii) how much money has been recovered by Invest NI on funds, in which Invest NI or the Industrial Development Board had invested, which were either closed or on fund closure distributions.

(AQW 258/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Crescent Capital II was set up in March 2004. It is a £22.5 million fund and Invest NI is a 33.3% investor alongside a number of private investors. The Fund is still operational. Funds will not be recovered by Invest NI until the end of the 10 year fund life.

Invest NI invested £4.875m in Crescent Capital II in the last 5 years as follows:

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
£'000	-	1,500	750	2,250	375	4,875

Within NISPO, (NI Spin-outs), £5m has been committed to the Invest Growth Fund of which £2.15m has been drawn down. Two £1m university funds were launched in 2009 and this funding has been drawn down by the universities.

Invest NI invested £2.15m in NISPO in the last 3 years as follows:

	2009	2010	2011	Total
£'000	400	500	1,250	2,150

Invest NI is the only investor in these funds and the funds are still active

Invest NI

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether it is general practice for Invest NI to be a subordinate investment partner when investing public money in venture capital funds; and if so, why this is the case.

(AQW 259/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's approach to 'Access to Capital' is to intervene to provide funds and facilitate the development of the venture capital and debt finance markets in Northern Ireland where there is identified market failure in the provision of funding for small companies.

There are structural problems associated with the Northern Ireland economy that have an impact on suppressing demand for equity finance and deterring investors. These problems, including the peripherality of Northern Ireland, its small business population and high levels of economic inactivity, have all had a negative impact on the demand for early stage and development venture capital.

Given that Northern Ireland is a small regional economy, these structural problems are unlikely to change in the short term, and in recognising this, the purpose of the proposed publicly backed VC initiatives is to continue to stimulate the VC market.

The EU Commission recognises that there is market failure in early stage venture capital in all regions of the UK with the exception of London and SE England. In line with other UK funds established around the same time as Crescent II, government intervention was required, in the form of subordinated investment at fund level.

The proposed new £30m Development Fund must raise £20m of private sector funding within the limited partnership, with a maximum of £10m (33%) of its funding from Invest NI. The review of market failure focussed on the difficulty of raising private investment in a regional fund of this nature. It was concluded that, in order to raise £20m of private funding, the public sector element required to be subordinated.

It is not general practice for Invest NI to be a subordinated investment partner in venture capital funds and the proposed Co-investment fund will invest with the private sector on equal terms. There is no subordination.

Invest NI's Subordinated Investor Policy

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) to detail the cost to the public purse of Invest NI's subordinated investor policy in each of the last five years, including funds closed in the last five years but where the investment was made by Invest NI or the Industrial Development Board prior to this five year period; and (ii) how investments which show no return are shown in their accounts;

(AQW 260/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Crescent Capital II investment fund is the only active fund in which Invest NI has a subordinated investment.

Crescent Capital II was set up in March 2004. It is a £22.5 million fund and Invest NI is a 33% investor alongside a number of private investors. The initial cost to Invest NI was therefore £7.5m.

Invest NI invested £4.875m in Crescent Capital II in the last 5 years as follows:

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
£'000	-	1,500	750	2,250	375	4,875

When the Crescent Capital II investment fund is closed, returns will be made to the investor and if a shortfall is realised, the cost of Invest NI's investment will be reported.

Each year, Invest NI reports a 'fair value' assessment of its investments in its published Annual Report and Accounts.

Invest NI

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in each of the last five years, how much has been written off by Invest NI as venture capital investments that reaped no return.

(AQW 261/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has not written off any venture capital investments in the last five years.

Ballycastle to Campbeltown Ferry Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what financial assistance her Department has provided to the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry service; and (ii) for her assessment of the importance of this route to the tourist industry.

(AQW 302/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Scottish Government leads on the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry service matter and they are responsible for taking it forward.

However, I, and my Scottish Government Ministerial counterparts, remain supportive of the provision of a vehicle and passenger ferry service between Ballycastle and Campbeltown, but because of continued budget pressures a reinstatement has not yet been possible. Therefore, as a vehicle and passenger ferry service has not been reinstated no financial assistance has been provided.

In policy terms the restoration of the passenger and vehicle ferry service is currently a Priority 2 within the Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Masterplan 2004-2013, aligned to the Masterplan's objectives of increasing tourists and sustainable tourism in the area, subject to normal public expenditure funding processes.

I recognise the benefits that the recently commenced new 12 passenger, privately funded ferry service will bring to the route.

Invest NI

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) how much Invest NI invested in the Crescent Capital I fund as venture capital; (ii) how much, on the fund's closure was (a) distributed to private investors; and (b) returned to Invest NI ; and (iii) how much Crescent Capital received in management fees.

(AQW 352/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Neither Invest NI nor its predecessor, IDB, invested in Crescent Capital I.

Invest NI

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) how much Invest NI invested in the Crescent Capital II fund as venture capital; (ii) whether, as with the Crescent Capital I fund, this investment was based on Invest NI being a subordinated investment partner.

(AQW 353/11-15)

Mrs Foster: To date Invest NI has invested £6.75m of the total fund of £22.5m.

The investment from Invest NI was based on Invest NI being a subordinated investment partner.

Invest NI

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how much Invest NI intends to allocate to the (a) Co-Investment Fund; and (b) Development Fund in the 2011-15 period; and (ii) whether it intends to be a subordinated investment partner in these funds.

(AQW 354/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (a) The proposed £7.2m Co-investment Fund, is an example of public and private investment on a pari passu (equal terms) basis ie no subordination. Invest NI intends to allocate £4.5m to the Co-investment fund in the period 2011-2015.
- (b) The proposed £30m Development Fund must raise £20m of private sector with a maximum of £10m (33%) of its funding from Invest NI. The Invest NI contribution will be on a subordinated basis, that is the private sector investors will receive a return on their investment ahead of the public sector. This subordination of public sector funding was considered necessary in order to secure the required level of private sector funding. Invest NI intends to allocate £5m to the Development Fund between 2011-2015.

Northern Ireland Electricity's Pension Deficit

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail her Department's understanding of the arrangements that were in place to address Northern Ireland Electricity's pension deficit when the Electricity Supply Board purchased NIE.

(AQW 355/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The amount of revenue which Northern Ireland Electricity's networks business earns is subject to price controls which are set by the Utility Regulator following consultation with the company and other interested stakeholders. The current price control period, which was already in place at the time of ESB's purchase of NIE and which runs until March 2012, provides an allowance for pension contributions and Northern Ireland Electricity is expected to manage pension costs within that allowance.

The Utility Regulator is currently assessing the costs associated with the next price control period, which will run from 2012 until 2017. The issue of pension cost recovery will be fully considered as part of this price control process.

Northern Ireland Electricity's Pension Deficit

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the Electricity Supply Board was given any guarantee that Northern Ireland Electricity's £40 million pension deficit would be recovered from its customers, rather than being a liability attached to the purchase of NIE.

(AQW 384/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No.

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much her Department has spent on external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 411/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department's expenditure on external consultants in each of the last four years is set out below. The 2007-08; 2008-09; and 2009-10 figures are based on accounting information that has been subject to audit. The 2010-11 accounting information has not been subject to audit. Expenditure is in relation to financial years 1st April to 31st March.

Financial Year	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08
External consultancy Expenditure	£1,960,466 (unaudited)	£2,166,671	£1,331,925	£1,302,205

Corporation Tax

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she intends to ask the Economic Advisory Group to investigate the economic impacts of alternatives to a reduction in the level of corporation tax, such as investment in the Green New Deal.

(AQW 439/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A further forward work programme for the Economic Advisory Group is due to be agreed after the summer and the Group and I will discuss what it should contain.

Foyle Cup's Application for Funding

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will review the NI Tourist Board's decision to reject the Foyle Cup's application for funding for this year's tournament.

(AQW 444/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Foyle Cup applied to the new NITB funding scheme but did not score well enough in the process to be awarded funding. An Appeals Panel met on the 12th May to review the application. The appeals panel upheld the original decision. None of the panel members were involved in the original selection process.

As the Foyle Cup is primarily a sporting event, I have asked my officials to discuss alternative funding arrangements with Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL) and Sport NI.

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she has taken to address the concerns of small and medium sized enterprises in Fermanagh, as outlined in a research paper presented to the Minister by the Fermanagh Economic Development Organisation on 9 March 2011.

(AQW 470/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The research paper, which I found to be very comprehensive, covers a range of themes and actions and I understand that members of the Fermanagh Economic Development Organisation (FEDO) team have already met with Invest NI's Chief Executive to discuss their findings.

A number of organisations including Invest NI, Fermanagh District Council, FEDO, the SouthWestCollege and the Department for Employment and Learning have also met to discuss the research paper and proposed actions in more detail. I welcome such a partnership approach to implementing activities at a local level, and I understand that, having considered the proposed actions, the group will direct requests for support to the most relevant government departments.

Indeed I understand that a comprehensive application relating to certain aspects of the paper is currently being prepared for consideration by both my Department and Invest NI. I would welcome such an application and I can assure you that both organisations will give it full consideration and will continue to work to ensure the proposed actions are fully implemented.

Invest NI: Chief Executive Officer

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) when the contractual term, which necessitates the bonus for the CEO of Invest NI, approved by her in May 2011, came into existence; and (ii) what are the exact details of this contractual term.

(AQW 523/11-15)

Mrs Foster: (i) The contractual term commenced on 1 April 2009, on appointment of the Chief Executive.

(ii) The contractual term is that contained in the "Information for Applicants" at the time of recruitment, namely, "The position will command a remuneration package comprising a basic salary of £160k and the potential for a bonus of up to 30% of salary."

The actual bonus amount is determined according to the achievement by the Chief Executive of targets/objectives which are set in advance and subsequently assessed by the Board of Invest NI on an annual basis. No bonus is payable if performance is assessed to be below 60 %. Based on this assessment, the Chairman of Invest NI makes a recommendation to the Minister, whose approval is required.

Rathlin Island Area: Broadband

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if her Department plans to upgrade broadband in the Rathlin Island area to fibre optic.

(AQW 528/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department currently has no plans to fibre upgrade the broadband connection to Rathlin Island. A fibre upgrade would require the installation of a subterranean cable which would be prohibitively expensive. Broadband access to Rathlin is currently fed using a radio link from Ballycastle exchange to a Digital Subscriber Line Access Multiplexer (DSLAM) on the island. While the radio link has recently been upgraded, this only impacts on the resilience and capacity of the link and does not impact on the broadband speeds to consumers on the island. However, it is advised that the DSLAM has sufficient capacity to serve the current needs of consumers.

Small Businesses: Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what grants are available for people who wish to start up a small business.

(AQW 530/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI provides a range of financial assistance to support the establishment and growth of new export focussed businesses. This support is targeted particularly at businesses that sell in markets outside Northern Ireland, are actively pursuing growth plans, and can contribute to increased Northern Ireland productivity. Financial support is based on the needs of the project and is normally targeted at areas such as Research and Development, Marketing and Employment.

Invest NI's Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) provides information, advice and the capability development that enables people to plan and help achieve successful locally focussed Start-Up businesses.

Social enterprises can attract a grant of up to £10,000 towards business start-up costs including salary, marketing, equipment and overheads via the Social Entrepreneurship Programme.

The Short Term Employment Scheme (STES) has been developed to provide a range of grant based employment support. These include grants of between £1,000 - £1,500 for business starts in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and for individuals not being in employment, education or training (known as NEETS).

Further Information can be found on Invest NI's Website www.investni.com

Potential Inward Investors

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of potential inward investors that have visited the East Derry area in the last 12 months; (ii) the number of jobs envisaged as a result; and (iii) the number of similar visits planned in the next three months.

(AQW 536/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During the past twelve months, two potential inward investment companies have visited the East Londonderry constituency. Invest NI's overseas Sales and Marketing teams also visited the area in March 2011 and met with local stakeholders to gain a greater understanding of the area's unique selling proposition.

It is not possible to align individual visits with specific employment related Foreign Direct Investment projects and companies will often visit potential locations several times before making a decision to invest. Securing an inward investment project is the end point of an extensive negotiation process and it may often be 18 to 24 months before an investor makes a final decision on the location and it is only at this point that Invest NI can report on the number of jobs proposed.

At present, there is one further company planning to visit the East Londonderry constituency in the next three months.

Agrifood Sector

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to work alongside the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to create jobs within the agri-food sector.

(AQW 575/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Last June, in conjunction with the former DARD Minister, I launched the Focus on Food growth strategy for the Agri-food sector. This strategy was prepared in collaboration with DARD and the Agri-food sector and outlines a number of key performance targets and areas of action for the further development of the sector going forward. My Department plans to continue working closely with DARD on the delivery of this strategy.

I also recently announced the introduction of a new Short Term Employment Scheme which outlines a range of measures designed to help rebuild the Northern Ireland economy, including one specifically aimed at increasing employment in the food processing sector.

The Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme, which is administered by DARD, is also actively promoted to Invest NI's client companies and Invest NI is currently working with colleagues in DARD to process over 70 project applications that were received under the Scheme in May.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board: Campaigns

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration she has given to increasing the number of regions to be featured in Northern Ireland Tourist Board's campaigns.

(AQW 583/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) remit is to promote the whole of Northern Ireland to both the domestic and Republic of Ireland markets with a view to increasing visitor numbers and spend. Each year, NITB undertakes a series of seasonal marketing campaigns in both markets. Products and regions featured are based on what motivates our key customer segments which have been identified through substantial research.

These award winning campaigns have successfully driven both domestic and Republic of Ireland visitor numbers and spend over recent years with both markets performing extremely well. Last year's campaigns cumulatively delivered a return on investment of £8 for every £1 invested.

Rural Areas: Broadband Services

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what financial assistance has been allocated to telecommunication providers to enable all rural areas to receive broadband; and (ii) for her assessment of the level of broadband service currently available in rural areas.

(AQW 610/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since 2004 DETI has invested some £25m to deliver improvements in the internal connectivity of the telecommunications infrastructure across all of Northern Ireland enabling the delivery of broadband services, via a mix of technologies and from a range of suppliers, with speeds ranging between 512 kilobits per second and 100 megabits per second. This includes £9.23m invested in the Local Broadband Access Contract, £13.6m allocated to the Next Generation Broadband project, £1.027m in support of

satellite broadband provision and £890k allocated to projects being taken forward under the Northern Ireland Broadband Fund. It is not possible to define how much funding was made available for rural areas under the Local Broadband Access Contract. However, this investment ensured that a basic broadband service was accessible across all of Northern Ireland. Two-thirds of the monies allocated to the Next Generation Broadband Project are focused on rural areas. Furthermore, both the satellite provision and the initiatives taken forward under the Northern Ireland Broadband Fund are aimed entirely at broadband access for rural areas.

Due to these interventions, it remains the case that, since December 2005 broadband services with download speeds of 512kbps or more have been available across the whole of Northern Ireland from a range of local, national and international suppliers using a range of technologies.

Exports

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what action her Department is taking to support exports; and (ii) for her assessment of the current growth of exports.

(AQW 626/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department, through Invest NI, has a comprehensive range of initiatives available to help Northern Ireland companies research, explore and sell in export markets.

Measures focused on capability development, provide companies with the opportunity to participate in organised workshops, covering a range of export related topics and access to a consultancy service providing practical advice to both new and existing exporters. Companies can also avail of the opportunity to participate in Invest NI's annual programme of trade missions to established export markets across Europe and the Middle and Far East, as well as to a number of high growth emerging markets such as Brazil, South Africa, Russia and Kurdistan.

Invest NI has established a number of in market support networks with experienced trade advisers based in key export markets who can provide companies with market research, practical advice and guidance in exporting to those markets. In addition, Invest NI's Business Information Centre, at its headquarters in Belfast offers businesses access to a comprehensive range of worldwide business directories, company databases, market research and business related information.

In terms of the current state of our exports, the latest data shows that whilst manufacturing exports from Northern Ireland amounted to £5.2 billion in 2009/10, this represented a decline of 8.5%, compared to growth of 8.2% in the previous year. However, this is to be expected in the context of the prevailing economic conditions of the time, particularly given that sales to the Republic of Ireland, one of our key export markets, decreased by £99 million (6.3%) that year. The Republic of Ireland accounts for over one quarter (28.5%) of all manufacturing exports from Northern Ireland and the ongoing economic and financial crisis there is likely to have continued implications for exports from Northern Ireland.

On a more positive note, some sub-sectors have continued to achieve export growth despite challenging economic conditions, with pharmaceutical exports increasing by one third (34.0%) in 2009/10. The Other Transport Equipment and Chemicals sub-sectors also recorded increases of 28.2% and 11.3% respectively.

The service sector also continues to provide opportunities for export growth, particularly those elements of the sector that have been identified as having high potential. Exports from these high potential sub-sectors have increased by 70% over the last five years, with business and management consultancy showing particularly strong growth, with their exports more than doubling over this period.

Despite its size, Northern Ireland remains a relatively export orientated economy, our exports as a percentage of Gross Value Added are 18.2%, compared to the UK average of 17.9%, and, in export terms, we are ranked seventh highest of the twelve UK regions.

Ballycastle Area: Local Economy and Tourism

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has in relation to the local economy and tourism in the Ballycastle area, in the next 12 months.

(AQW 627/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am fully committed to the development of tourism across Northern Ireland and recognise the contribution it can make to economic growth and I have agreed to meet you to discuss hotel provision on the NorthCoast in general and Ballycastle in particular.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board through the Causeway Coast & Glens Tourism Masterplan and Tourism Development Scheme are currently investing in facilities in Ballycastle to support its development as a key visitor resort along the Causeway Coastal Route (CCR). These include infrastructural and interpretation improvements at key sites such as Ballycastle Seafront and Ballycastle harbour and ferry terminal which will improve the sense of welcome and visual attractiveness of the area.

In addition, work commenced on the development of a Marina amenity facility at Ballycastle harbour in January 2011 and is scheduled for completion towards the end of the year. The development will provide washing, changing and toilet facilities for those arriving at Ballycastle by boat. The development is part of the larger Sail West programme of activities across Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland which has been part funded by my Department through the Interreg IVA Programme.

I have also been invited to officially launch Moyle District Council's Tourism Development Strategy and Action Plan 2011 – 2011. As a key part of the Causeway Coast & Glens Masterplan this will provide the framework for tourism development going forward. In this context I would encourage local councils within the CausewayCoast and Glens destination to engage strategically and adapt a collaborative approach to tourism development within the area in the context of Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020.

Archived Departmental Documentation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much her Department spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years.

(AQW 646/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has spent the following in each of the last three years on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation.

Financial Year	2008 – 2009	2009 – 2010	2010 – 2011
Spend	£41,872.37	£34,897.77	£18,720.65

Mobile Phone Roaming Charges

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions her Department has had with stakeholders in the telecommunications industry in relation to the removal of mobile phone roaming charges across the Island of Ireland.

(AQW 655/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since 2007 roaming tariffs for voice and SMS services across all of Europe have been capped under EU regulations. The European Commission has set a target for the difference between national and roaming charges to approach zero by 2015. Significant progress has been made in relation to pricing in what is a privatised and independently regulated industry. I met the Northern Ireland Director of OFCOM earlier this year and urged the Regulator to do more to address the deficit in mobile coverage in Northern Ireland. Officials also regularly meet with OFCOM and industry on a range of telecoms matters, including mobile coverage and continue to monitor developments and reactions to the EU proposals.

Broadband Access

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action has been taken to improve broadband access for the rural community in East Antrim.

(AQW 694/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In December 2009, DETI embarked on the Next Generation Broadband Project. The aim of this project, which is being delivered by BT, is to bring higher speed broadband services to 85% of businesses by 2011 however through the wholesale arrangements set down by the contract, residential consumers can also access to these higher speed services through the new fibred access points. Cabinet upgrades have been completed across some 27 areas in the East Antrim constituency making available broadband services with potential download speeds of up to 40Mbps. Details of where these upgrades are located can be found at www.fasterbroadbandni.com or www.nibroadband.com.

It is recognised that, due to distance from a cabinet, not all premises will benefit from the technology deployed under the Next Generation Broadband Project. For that reason, through a contract with Avanti Communications, DETI has ensured that a satellite broadband service offering download speeds of between 512Kbps and 3Mbps remains in place.

In addition, the NI Broadband Fund, launched in August 2008, provides support for businesses and organisations wishing to promote solutions for delivery of commercial, high speed broadband services in rural locations. Five calls for projects have been completed under this competitive fund to date with a sixth anticipated in the summer of this year. In each instance when calls are launched, as well as advertising in the press, Departmental officials alert the Chief Executives and Economic Development Officers in all District Councils providing them with an opportunity to work with local service providers to develop applications seeking support for localised broadband solutions.

Milk Cup Funding

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she can take to review the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's decision to reject this year's Milk Cup funding application.

(AQW 710/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Milk Cup applied to the new NITB funding scheme in February 2011. The scheme was heavily oversubscribed and funding was allocated to those events which scored the highest marks against the pre-set criteria. Unfortunately the Milk Cup did not score well enough in the process to be awarded funding. As the Milk Cup is primarily a sporting event, I have asked my officials to discuss alternative funding arrangements with Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL) and Sport NI.

Corporation Tax: Investment

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of whether a reduction in corporation tax would increase inward investment.

(AQO 87/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My independent Economic Advisory Group published research on this matter on 26 May 2011. The research shows that corporation tax is a material factor for the attraction of the inward investment. It indicated that a reduction in corporation tax would significantly increase investment and jobs in Northern Ireland, with Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) accounting for over 40% of the net additional jobs.

My Department has also commissioned FDI Intelligence to undertake a wider research project into FDI. Within this wide research an assessment is also being made of the potential increase in FDI jobs from a reduction in corporation tax. The emerging results from this research are broadly consistent with the EAG paper.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department has taken, and plans to take, to address the current structure of Air Passenger Duty and the disadvantage it creates between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 765/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I and Executive colleagues have raised the impact of Air Passenger Duty (APD) on Northern Ireland with HM Treasury Ministers. While it was disappointing that the Budget 2011 did not announce a reduction in APD, HM Treasury have frozen APD rates and are consulting on the structure of the duty.

The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is leading on the Northern Ireland response to the HM Treasury consultation. My officials have been working closely with counterparts in DFP to ensure that the Northern Ireland Executive puts a strong case to HM Treasury in respect of the impact of APD on Northern Ireland.

Enterprise Zone

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on discussions she has had with Her Majesty's Treasury in relation to making Northern Ireland an economic enterprise zone.

(AQO 85/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Discussions with Her Majesty's Treasury with respect to enterprise zones have been in the context of rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy. This would include lowering the rate of Corporation Tax and introducing other measures that have the potential to stimulate growth in the Northern Ireland economy.

The Coalition Government published a consultation paper on Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy on 24 March 2011. The Consultation will close on 24 June 2011.

The First and Deputy First Ministers, the Finance Minister and I met with Her Majesty's Treasury and business representatives to discuss this important issue on 8 June 2011.

Corporation Tax: Select Committee Report

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the recent report from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee 'Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland'.

(AQO 86/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I welcome the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee report which took evidence from business people, trade unions, economists and politicians.

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee report states that maximising Northern Ireland's competitiveness must be the goal of the Executive. Their report concludes that "on balance we believe there is a convincing case for reducing the corporation tax rate in Northern Ireland".

This conclusion was very also much in tune with the research produced by my own Economic Advisory Group. They found that reducing Corporation Tax here would help us move toward living standards experienced elsewhere in the UK, through attracting more investment and creating more job opportunities, which in turn would benefit many in our community.

Air Passenger Duty

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact of the current level of Air Passenger Duty on the economy.

(AQO 82/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As a consequence of our geographical location, we rely heavily on air access.

Air Passenger Duty impacts on all business sectors and in particular on long haul flights which are important for Foreign Direct Investment and tourism. The current rates of Air Passenger Duty are the highest in Europe and place Northern Ireland at a significant disadvantage.

The negative impact of Air Passenger Duty on Northern Ireland is increased because of competitive pressure from the Republic of Ireland. This has become even more acute following the Irish Government's decision to reduce and possibly remove altogether, their equivalent tax.

Her Majesty's Treasury is currently consulting on the structure of Air Passenger Duty. I and my Executive colleagues will ensure that a strong message is sent to Treasury that this negative tax needs to be revisited.

Employment: 16-to 24-Year-olds

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures her Department is taking to create jobs specifically for 16-24 year olds.

(AQO 83/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has a range of initiatives to assist people of all ages, including those currently out of work, to become self employed and start their own businesses.

A key initiative is the Youth Enterprise Programme, which is aimed at 16 to 24 year-olds and provides tailored, enhanced enterprise support at the pre-start and growth stages. The core focus of the Programme is to support young people to think about and act on business start up and growth.

The new Short Term Employment Scheme also includes a specific measure targeted at young people who are not currently in employment, education or training. This will offer a fixed grant of £1,500 to provide an additional incentive to start a business. The grant will be awarded on completion and approval of a business plan on Invest NI's 'Go For It' Programme.

Natural Gas Network

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department plans to progress the expansion of the natural gas network.

(AQO 84/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I intend to issue a public consultation later this month. This will seek views from key stakeholders on the potential for extending the natural gas network to further areas in the West and North West of Northern Ireland and other new areas, such as East Down. Extending the gas network would increase consumer choice and reduce dependence on coal and oil. There are, however, many issues to be considered, not least how any extension of the gas network might be funded.

Green New Deal

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the steps Invest NI has taken, and intends to take, to help in the delivery of the Green New Deal.

(AQO 88/11-15)

Mrs Foster: An Inter-departmental Working Group chaired by the Department of Social Development has been established to take work on Green New Deal forward.

I have also recently met with the Minister for Social Development to discuss the proposals from the Green New Deal.

Business: Bureaucracy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the positive impact that the proposed reduction in EU red tape for small business may have on our companies.

(AQO 89/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Economic success for Northern Ireland depends on businesses developing products and pursuing markets. Any reduction in the regulatory burden facilitates this. Since many of the regulations affecting businesses originate at EU level, any improvements there are particularly to be welcomed.

Green Economy

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department will implement a strategy to develop the green economy.

(AQO 90/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The framework for the new Economic Strategy, which is currently being developed by the Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy, has identified the important contribution made by the green economy in encouraging business growth and growing the private sector.

Within my Department, Invest NI has developed a strategy to maximise the return to Northern Ireland from heightened global activity in the development and deployment of renewable energy and resource efficient technologies. This includes identifying opportunities in the renewable energy sector and promoting and implementing energy and resource efficiency measures within business.

Department of the Environment

Beaches: Quality

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, following the recent failure of some beaches to meet water quality standards (i) if he has any plans to improve the quality of beaches, including Ballyholme Beach, Bangor; and (ii) to detail the level of funding allocated to improve the quality of beaches in the 2011-15 period.

(AQW 329/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Water quality at Ballyholme and Newcastle beaches failed to meet the EC Bathing Waters Directive requirements for 2010.

Following detailed pollution investigations, the failures at Ballyholme were attributed to heavy rainfall exposing known inadequacies in the Bangor sewerage system. The discharges from the Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) at Newcastle and the associated storm overflows have resulted in the beach at Newcastle failing to meet the mandatory requirements of the Directive.

My Department's Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) continues to press Northern Ireland Water (NIW) to give a high priority to the upgrade of sewage infrastructure in these areas.

Within available funding, NIW is taking forward a capital programme of sewer upgrades within the Bangor Catchment over the next three years, at a cost of approximately £7 million. This work included upgrades and rationalisation of combined storm overflows (CSOs) at Carnalea, Rathmore Stream, Belfast Lough, LukesPoint, Clandeboye Stream, Orlock/Sandeel, Seacliff and Bangor Marina.

As part of the NIW Public Private Partnership (PPP) programme approximately £44 million of capital monies has been spent on the new North Down/Ards Wastewater Treatment Works at Donaghadee. This includes the construction of Donaghadee and Millisle Pumping Stations and pumping mains, as well as the long sea outfall some 600m off the Briggs Rocks.

NIW is presently completing a capital upgrade programme on the Newcastle sewerage system with a spend of approximately £5 million. This work includes rationalisation of the overflows within the system, structural upgrades and the provision of storm attenuation in CastlePark. In addition it is anticipated that a start will be made this year to the upgrade of Newcastle Wastewater Treatment Works within an approximate spend of £10 million

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the recent fire at Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, to detail the assistance his Department intends to provide to Ballymena Council for the rebuilding of the cottage.

(AQW 331/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department has already taken action. NIEA's Conservation Architect for the area visited the site shortly after the fire and has been in liaison with Council Officials. He reports that the building is capable of restoration and that Council Officials are currently in talks with their insurers.

NIEA holds a detailed photographic archive record of the building which is available to the Council and their architects to help with an accurate restoration of lost parts of the building. NIEA's Conservation Architects will also be available to help advise on appropriate work.

Given that the building was insured, we expect costs to be covered by the Council's insurance.

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department intends to take to assist in the restoration of Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, which was damaged by a fire.

(AQW 344/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department has already taken action. NIEA's Conservation Architect for the area visited the site shortly after the fire and has been in liaison with Council Officials. He reports that the building is capable of restoration and that Council Officials are currently in talks with their insurers.

NIEA holds a detailed photographic archive record of the building which is available to the Council and their architects to help with an accurate restoration of lost parts of the building. NIEA's Conservation Architects will also be available to help advise on appropriate work.

Given that the building was insured, we expect costs to be covered by the Council's insurance.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to increase fines imposed on people who breach Tree Preservation Orders.

(AQW 385/11-15)

Mr Attwood: On 4 May the Planning (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 increased the maximum fine on summary conviction for certain offences relating to the contravention of a tree preservation order from £30,000 to £100,000.

MOT Tests

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how much revenue has been generated for his Department from MOT tests in each of the last three years.

(AQW 386/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The total revenue generated in each year was as follows:

2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
£21,160,638	£21,844,696	£23,138,451

The figures are for full tests and retests for private car, motor cycle and large passenger carrying vehicles which are tested under the Motor Vehicle Testing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.

Vehicle testing is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment and is delivered by its Driver & Vehicle Agency. The MOT service operates under Trading Fund arrangements where the financial objective is to recover the costs of the services provided, and the fees charged to customers are set accordingly. Income from vehicle testing must therefore be used for the purposes for which the fund was established, as defined in the Driver & Vehicle Testing Agency Trading Fund Order (Northern Ireland) 1996.

Fishing, River, Water and Marine Matters

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he would consider establishing a review committee to look at how best to co-ordinate fishing, river, water and marine matters within one Department.

(AQW 402/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I will consider how best to co-ordinate fishing, river, water and marine matter in the context of the forthcoming Marine Bill and my commitment to review the role and functions of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. However, I understand the argument that it would be beneficial to better co-ordinate, even integrate, the fishing, river, water and marine functions in one Department or one body.

Car Exhausts: Noise Levels

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has to combat the nuisance caused by excessively loud car exhausts.

(AQW 425/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have no plans at present to introduce new measures to combat the nuisance caused by loud car exhausts. Car exhaust systems must comply with the noise requirements of the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 (as amended). These require car exhaust systems and silencers to be maintained in good and efficient working order and not to be altered after the date of manufacture so as to increase the noise made by the escape of exhaust gases. Breach of such requirements is a road traffic offence enforceable by the PSNI and punishable by a fine of up to £1000.

In addition, the Driver and Vehicle Agency will refuse to issue an MOT test certificate under the Motor Vehicle Testing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 if a vehicle exhaust is obviously not fitted or approved by the manufacturer, for example if it is clearly non-standard and over-sized or if the noise emitted from the system is unreasonably above the level expected.

Car Exhausts: Noise Levels

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what power the Executive has to introduce legislation to limit the noise levels of car exhausts.

(AQW 426/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Power to introduce legislation to limit noise levels of car exhausts is contained in the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The Order enables my Department to make regulations in respect of the construction, weight, equipment and use of vehicles, including vehicle noise emissions.

In exercise of this power the Department has made the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 which contain provision for the control of car noise emissions.

These comply with European Community requirements.

Fuel Laundering

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the investigations into the impact that the fuel laundering operation and large quantities of toxic sludge in ditches at Drumacon could have on Lough Ross, given that water from the lake is processed for public consumption.

(AQW 465/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) continues to liaise closely with Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and the authorities in the Republic of Ireland to ensure that the public drinking water source at Lough Ross is protected.

NIW is content that the risk of contamination is low, as raw water abstracted from Lough Ross into Carron Hill Water Treatment Works is taken from below water level (oil floats on the water surface) and the potential discharge point is across the lake, and so some distance from, the abstraction point.

NIW has also increased the routine drinking water quality monitoring following this incident. This monitoring has, to date, shown no impact on drinking water quality from this incident.

I have asked for a weekly update on the situation and to be advised immediately if there is any deterioration in conditions.

Northern Ireland Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the impact of the removal of the Northern Ireland Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme on the viability of the quarry industry in border constituencies, including Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

(AQW 483/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since 2004 my Department has administered the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme introduced by Treasury in London. This scheme provides 80 per cent relief from the Levy for quarry operators in the North. My Department's primary function is to ensure that the quarrying and aggregates extraction industry complies with planning and environmental regulatory requirements associated with the scheme. I am aware that site operators, particularly those located close to the border, are at a financial disadvantage since the recent suspension of the scheme by HM Treasury, because there is no equivalent tax payable by the industry located in Ireland.

I can assure the member that my Department's officials are working closely with officials in the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Treasury in London to assist the review being undertaken by the European Commission which I hope will lead to the approval of a new relief scheme. I share many of the concerns of those in the business about the adverse impact of the ending of the relief.

Drumacon, Castleblayney: Ditches

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the possible damaging effects on the Lough Ross ecosystem of the fuel laundering operation and the large quantities of toxic sludge in ditches at Drumacon, Castleblayney.

(AQW 504/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Fuel laundering is a significant environmental issue in Northern Ireland. It is common for fuel laundering chemicals and waste to be dumped on waste ground or by the roadside. Remedying environmental problems caused by fuel laundering constitutes a significant and ongoing burden on the public purse.

Although the site of the diesel laundering plant was in Co. Monaghan, it falls within the catchment of Lough Ross, in Northern Ireland. The lough is used as a source for public drinking water supply by Northern Ireland Water (NIW), serving a significant area of South Armagh. Any materials on the site therefore had the potential to reach Lough Ross.

There was a secondary potential source of pollution associated with this incident, from a lorry and trailer carrying a tank at Blaney Road, Crossmaglen. This location is also within the Lough Ross catchment. Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) attended this scene and deployed pollution prevention equipment to protect nearby waterways in the event of any oil escaping while they fought the fire.

When Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) staff arrived at the site they confirmed that there was no evidence of any oil or other pollutant having escaped, however, they deployed additional oil booms at several points downstream in the waterway. This was carried out as a precaution because, even though no oil or other pollutant was escaping, NIEA staff were aware that a nearby waterway led to Lough Ross.

NIEA staff have continued to monitor the area and have confirmed that no visible pollution reached any surrounding waterways and that no significant pollutant now remains on the site where the lorry burned out.

NIEA takes routine water quality samples from Lough Ross on a monthly basis, to fulfil the requirements of the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC). Full ecological surveys are undertaken every three years which include assessment of macroinvertebrates (aquatic insects), phytoplankton, diatoms and macrophytes (aquatic plants). Monitoring indicates that the main pressure on the ecological status of the lake is nutrient enrichment.

The effects on the ecosystem of pollution cannot be predicted. This will depend on whether any of the pollutant enters watercourses feeding Lough Ross, the extent of any contamination, flow and weather conditions. Experience of oil or fuel related pollution incidents in rivers indicates that macroinvertebrates may be affected significantly, and recovery may take several years. Monitoring at the lough will be kept under review, and any indication of pollution will be investigated.

NIEA and NIW continue to liaise closely with counterparts in the Republic, including the Environmental Protection Agency and Monaghan County Council, to ensure any pollution threat at the original source of this incident in Castleblaney is fully resolved. It is important to note that neither NIEA nor NIW has any jurisdiction on this site; and that it is for the relevant ROI authorities to address any remaining issues on the site.

NIW advise that there are no issues with the drinking water quality at present. They are content that the risk of contamination of raw water abstracted into Lough Ross is low because water is abstracted from below water level (oil floats on the water surface) and the potential discharge point, of any contaminants from this incident, is across the lake, and so some distance from the abstraction point.

NIW have also increased their routine drinking water sampling and monitoring following this incident. This monitoring has, to date, shown no impact on drinking water quality.

MOT Tests

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment how many vehicles failed an MOT test in each of the last three years; and what percentage of the total number of vehicles that underwent the test failed. **(AQW 535/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: The details for the requested period are tabulated below. For the purposes of this response, the Question is taken to refer to private cars.

Year	Number of Failed Tests	% of Failed Tests
2008/09	122,767	21.08

Year	Number of Failed Tests	% of Failed Tests
2009/10	129,844	21.48
2010/11	137,582	22.51

Listed Buildings

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of listed buildings in the North Down area; and (ii) the listed buildings that are located in the (a) Bangor; (b) Donaghadee; and (c) Holywood areas.

(AQW 613/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Based upon the 1974 ward boundaries, which is how my Department holds such records, the total number of listed buildings in the North Down Borough Council Area is 256. The North Down constituency includes two electoral wards of Ards Borough Council in Donaghadee which contain a further 58 listed buildings. This gives a total of 314 listed buildings in your constituency.

You will be aware, however, that there has been boundary changes since 1974 and therefore this figure should not be taken as definitive in relation to the current boundaries. For that reason I have appended, for your information, a table which shows the number of the listed buildings within each ward of the North Down and Ards Borough Council Areas.

In regard to the Bangor and Holywood areas, such boundaries are not defined as a sub-set of the Listed Buildings database and as a result I am not able to provide detailed information beyond that given below for their (historic) electoral wards.

NUMBER OF LISTED BUILDINGS IN THE NORTH DOWN AND ARDS DISTRICT COUNCIL AREAS

HB23 - North Down		
1	Groomsport	13
2	Churchill	1
3	Ballyholme	1
4	Ballymagee	1
5	Bangor Harbour	24
6	Conlig	4
7	Bangor Castle	24
8	Whitehill	0
9	Rathgael	0
10	Clandeboyne	18
11	Silverstream	0
12	Spring Hill	0
13	Bryansburn	1
14	Princetown	16
15	Crawfordsburn	23
16	Craigavad	17
17	Loughview	6

HB24 - ARDS		
1	Portaferry	73
2	Kircubbin	22
3	Ballyhalbert	5
4	Grey Abbey	62
5	Carrowdore	6
6	Donaghadee North	26
7	Donaghadee South	32
8	Loughries	10
9	Movilla	5
10	Glen	3
11	Scrabo	16
12	Ulsterville	0
13	Central	43
14	Comber North	0
15	Comber South	32
16	Ballygowan	13
17	Killinchy	31

HB23 - North Down		
18	Cultra	29
19	Hollywood Demesne	12
20	Hollywood Priory	66
	Total	256

HB24 - ARDS		
	Total	379

Proposed Incinerator at Glenavy

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment whether he can confirm that (i) his predecessor's press release of 31 August 2010 in relation to his intention to approve plans for an incinerator at Glenavy has no legal standing; and (ii) that a Notice of Opinion has not been issued in relation to the planning application.

(AQW 635/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- (i) While the press release issued by the former Minister of the Environment on 31 August 2010 indicated his intention in the two Rose Energy planning applications at that time, it does not represent a formal planning decision of the Department of the Environment.
- (ii) I can confirm that a Notice of Opinion in relation to the two Rose Energy planning applications has not been issued.

High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the implementation of the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(AQO 95/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Assembly amended the High Hedges Bill to require the Department to introduce subordinate legislation to limit the maximum level of fee a complainant should pay and to allow for the transfer of the fee to the hedge owner.

Both the primary and subordinate legislation are required to provide the full operational regime so the primary cannot be commenced until the subordinate legislation is ready.

As some of the proposed subordinate legislation has not been consulted on a public consultation will be required and both sets of Regulations will need to pass through the Assembly processes.

I am currently considering a timetable for delivery. I am very aware of the length of time primary and secondary legislation can take generally and I am attempting to identify how to proceed quickly and properly in progressing this case. I will advise the Environment Committee in due course.

Local Government: Review of Public Administration

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the time frame for the completion of the Review of Public Administration.

(AQO 96/11-15)

Mr Attwood: With your permission Mr Speaker, I propose to answer Questions 6 and 8 together.

The reform of local government is a key priority and remains very much at the top of my agenda. I am aiming to get the Executive's agreement to a timetable for reorganisation as soon as possible.

I believe early decisions are needed to create certainty across the local government sector and with those Departments that wish to transfer functions.

My objective is to move forward decisively, improve services and drive positive reform. I will be working hard in the coming days to achieve the right results.

Planning: Rural Areas

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of whether the current planning policy accommodates non-farming rural people who wish to live in the countryside.

(AQO 97/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Current planning policy does accommodate non-farming rural people who wish to live in the countryside. The policies which do this are contained in Planning Policy Statement 21 which deals with sustainable development in the countryside. I have met officials on this issue, have instructed that potential and valid flexibilities in the operation of the policy are developed to identify where inconsistencies of application may exist and generally assess how to move forward positively on the matter.

Local Government: Review of Public Administration

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Review of Public Administration including the reduction in the number of local councils from twenty-six to eleven.

(AQO 98/11-15)

Mr Attwood: With your permission Mr Speaker, I propose to answer Questions 6 and 8 together.

The reform of local government is a key priority and remains very much at the top of my agenda. I am aiming to get the Executive's agreement to a timetable for reorganisation as soon as possible.

I believe early decisions are needed to create certainty across the local government sector and with those Departments that wish to transfer functions.

My objective is to move forward decisively, improve services and drive positive reform. I will be working hard in the coming days to achieve the right results.

Waste Management

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his proposals in relation to waste management and whether he intends to introduce a single waste management authority.

(AQO 100/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am committed to improving waste management, and I am pleased to advise that my Department is implementing a range of interventions. These include the Rethink Waste capital and revenue funds, the Waste and Resources Action Programme and a national Rethink Waste communications campaign. I will also be considering the responses received to the current consultation on a new recycling policy. Additionally I am supportive of the work of the North South Market Development Steering Group to drive forward a programme for developing markets for recycled materials across the island. I shall be discussing this matter with my Ministerial Colleague in the South at a Bi-lateral on 1 July 2011.

Northern Ireland's Waste Management Strategy 2006-20 is the policy basis for Northern Ireland's waste programme. The Waste Programme Board, which I now chair, undertook a recent review of the strategy and identified a revised prioritised programme of actions and interventions for key areas of the waste agenda. My Department will work closely with key internal and external stakeholders to ensure that this new programme captures all the right targets and is achievable given current resource constraints.

The Strategic Waste Infrastructure Programme remains an integral element of the waste programme and is essential to enabling compliance with landfill diversion targets and the avoidance of financial

penalties for non-compliance. I will continue to deploy available resources in the most cost-effective manner to ensure that Waste Infrastructure Programme objectives are met.

I believe that there is strong justification for the creation of a Single Waste Authority. Any discussion must be based on evidence. My predecessor asked officials to prepare a detailed economic appraisal to identify the most efficient way to deliver waste management functions, and I agree with this approach. The results of that economic appraisal should be available shortly and I will consider its conclusions carefully before deciding on the way forward.

Marine Management

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will consider including the establishment of a marine management organisation in the proposed Marine Bill.

(AQO 101/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I will introduce the Marine Bill to the Assembly at the earliest possible opportunity. In this context, I will give further consideration to the best delivery arrangements for marine management in Northern Ireland, as the Bill progresses. I met with a range of external groups on 13 June 2011 to identify further possible additions to the draft Bill currently being prepared to ensure that the Bill is as expansive, farseeing and challenging as possible.

Mayobridge: Tyre Storage Depot

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to address the health and safety issues at the premises at Chapel Road, Mayobridge, which holds half a million tyres.

(AQO 102/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The operator at Chapel Road, Mayobridge has a waste management licence which permits him to accept up to 7,000 tonnes of waste tyres at the site per year.

The licence includes a number of conditions to manage and control the safe storage, recycling and disposal of waste tyres. NIEA staff also regularly assess fire break separation, security and access and the operator's fire/emergency action plan. The Agency works closely with the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and local Environmental Health Department.

NIEA has suspended the site licence on two recent occasions. At present a partial Suspension Notice applies to the site which permits the company to maintain a viable business and at the same time reduce the quantity of stockpiled tyres on the licensed site and an unauthorised adjoining area.

NIEA has entered into an agreement with the company to implement a remediation plan for the site. This agreement includes measures in relation to health and safety and importantly includes a plan to reduce the total number of tyres held on site. A fire safety plan has also been commissioned for the site as well as additional security. The Health and Safety Executive has been informed and have visited the site under their remit.

Over the past 8 months the company has considerably reduced the number of tyres on the site and currently there are approximately 2,200 tonnes or about 264,000 tyres. The agreement in place requires the company to reduce the tonnage to about 700 tonnes by August 2011. NIEA has regular review meetings with the company to assess progress. Should they fail to meet this target within the specified timescale, NIEA will determine if further regulatory action is required.

The Agency believes that unauthorised storage of tyres has taken place and in line with our Enforcement and Prosecution Policy has sent a file on the case to the Public Prosecution Service. The PPS has still to make a decision on whether to proceed with prosecution. I will advise members of developments in this matter.

The Department has also taken enforcement action under planning legislation seeking the cessation of the importation of tyres onto the unauthorised part of the site and the removal of all tyres externally stored at the site.

The company has submitted a planning application including an Environmental Impact Statement to regularise the situation and seeks planning approval to develop a tyre recycling facility on the entire site. The Department is giving the application careful consideration.

CO2 Emissions

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment what new initiatives his Department intends to introduce to help reduce CO2 emissions.

(AQO 103/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Reducing our CO2 emissions and helping to address climate change is a cross-cutting issue and is an enormous challenge for all of us. It is crucial therefore that we act in a joined up manner not just for the benefit of the environment, but also for our economic and social well-being. I believe that tackling climate change provides us with an opportunity to protect our built and natural heritage while at the same time delivering a more resource efficient, sustainable economy and a fairer society. That is why one of my first actions as Minister has been to ask my officials to consider how government currently delivers its climate change responsibilities and to identify areas where further legislation might be of benefit.

I have also sought and will consider the advice of the independent Committee on Climate Change and the experience of other administrations in developing and delivering climate change policy through legislation. My early view is that we should put climate change targets in the face of a Climate Change Bill and that the targets should be rigorous and challenging.

This week, I will Chair the first meeting of the Cross-Departmental Working Group on Climate Change, to agree a workplan for 2011/2012. This group will provide a platform to continue to develop and progress a holistic approach to tackling climatic change. It will analyse sectors and policies; making recommendations where needed to ensure we not only reduce CO2 emissions but also agree an adaptation plan for Northern Ireland which will address the identified risks from the predicted climatic change.

The overall outcome that I am seeking is a series of interventions that will help protect the environment while maximising the social and economic benefit to be derived from it. This in turn will deliver opportunities to drive a fundamental restructuring of the economy with a renewed focus on resource efficiency and innovation to promote business efficiency and the development of a green economy. I have also instructed officials in a very tight timeframe to identify how DOE and other departments might push opportunities and practises to significantly further embrace green energy.

Planning: Sprucefield

Mr Givan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Sprucefield planning application.
(AQO 104/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The planning application was referred to the Planning Appeals Commission by my predecessor in December 2009 for a public local inquiry. The holding of this inquiry has been delayed by judicial review proceedings, centred on questions relating to the adequacy and advertising of the environmental information submitted with the application. Both judicial reviews have now been withdrawn.

My officials wrote to the applicants on 26 January 2011 requesting additional environmental information to progress the inquiry.

The applicants have until 26 June 2011 to submit this material and the PAC have been advised of the likely timescale for the receipt and advertising of the information.

Following receipt of this additional information, my officials will assess the material and, if considered satisfactory, will write to the PAC asking that arrangements for the resumption of the inquiry be put in place. While the PAC will be asked to place the application in first place on my Department's priority

list of Article 31 cases referred to the Commission, it is unlikely that the inquiry will resume before September/October this year.

Following the receipt of the PAC's report on the public inquiry, I will make my decision on the application as soon as possible.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Local Banks

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the response of the local banks to the needs of businesses in the current economic climate.

(AQW 383/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Ensuring that Northern Ireland has a competitive banking sector that meets the needs of businesses and consumers remains, strategically, a very important issue as our economy struggles to recover from the recession and I have been liaising with the local banks and the British Bankers Association (BBA) in this regard for some time now.

In that context, I have previously welcomed the actions identified in the BBA Business Finance Taskforce report to improve access to finance and improve customer relationships. However, while I view this report as a positive step forward, I wrote recently to the BBA to indicate that I remain somewhat disappointed about the pace of implementation.

Furthermore, the lack of regular information on bank lending in Northern Ireland remains a constraint to our understanding of the current situation in this regard and I have also stressed how important it is that this is provided urgently. This will help provide a clearer picture of the extent to which the availability of finance is supporting economic recovery in Northern Ireland.

Unpaid Rates

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the amount of unpaid rates in each council area in each of the last five years.

(AQW 399/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The rates unpaid by District Council area at the end of each rating year are published in the Land & Property Services Annual Report and Accounts. LPS systems are not able to provide a breakdown by District Council area prior to 2008. The LPS Annual Report and Accounts for 2010-11 is currently being finalised and is expected to be laid in the Assembly at the end of June.

The figures shown on the attached table are cumulative figures of debt outstanding at each date and include debt carried forward from previous years.

Land & Property Services continues to pursue all unpaid rates, whilst recognising the genuine financial difficulties being experienced by many ratepayers. The Agency seeks to agree payment arrangements with ratepayers where possible but will otherwise take legal action against debtors.

District Council	Debt as at 31st March (£'000)		
	2008	2009	2010
Antrim	2,782	2,915	4,086
Ards	4,057	4,653	5,534
Armagh	3,474	3,679	4,375
Ballymena	3,259	2,900	3,599

District Council	Debt as at 31st March (£'000)		
	2008	2009	2010
Ballymoney	1,087	1,019	1,328
Banbridge	2,167	2,325	2,743
Belfast	43,496	46,526	52,514
Carrickfergus	1,603	2,528	2,622
Castlereagh	3,647	2,891	4,614
Coleraine	3,395	3,454	3,674
Cookstown	1,612	1,345	1,426
Craigavon	6,726	6,011	8,189
Derry	8,332	9,682	10,094
Down	3,966	4,202	5,627
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	2,645	2,477	3,080
Fermanagh	2,891	3,207	3,309
Larne	1,310	1,595	1,454
Limavady	1,355	1,683	1,881
Lisburn	7,073	8,523	10,131
Magherafelt	1,288	1,370	1,613
Moyle	583	711	816
Newry & Mourne	6,521	6,989	8,587
Newtownabbey	5,108	6,329	6,827
North Down	4,905	5,314	7,199
Omagh	2,659	2,311	2,986
Strabane	2,056	2,479	2,160
Totals	127,997	137,117	160,468
Cash Unallocated to Ratepayer Accounts	-4,218	-649	-3,507
Totals	123,780	136,468	156,962

The figures may not total exactly due to rounding.

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department has spent on external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 406/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Expenditure by my Department on external consultants in each financial year since May 2007 is set out in the following table. The information provided is for complete financial years beginning on 1 April each year.

Financial Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Expenditure on external consultants £m	6.3	4.5	1.1	0.1 *

* The 2010/11 expenditure is provisional and is subject to validation and finalisation of the departmental resource accounts and test drilling exercise.

Barnett Consequentials

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the Barnett Consequentials for his Department arising from Legal Aid funding in England.

(AQW 424/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Changes in Legal Aid funding in England are one of many components which impact on the Barnett determined public expenditure allocations to Northern Ireland. Allocation of these Barnett consequentials is for the Executive to determine.

Barnett consequentials are non-hypothecated, i.e. they do not go automatically to their equivalent spending areas within Northern Ireland. However, due to the ring fencing arrangements, agreed by the Executive for the Justice Budget during the Budget 2010 process, Barnett consequentials arising directly from the change in planned spending on comparable Home Office and Justice services in England were applied to the budget for the Department of Justice.

Civil Service: Sick Leave

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the levels of sick leave within the Civil Service in each of the last three years, broken down by community background.

(AQW 433/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Detailed information on sick absence rates in the Northern Ireland Civil Service is contained in regular reports from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Copies of the reports up to 2009/10 are available from the Agency and can be viewed at

http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Analysis_of_Sickness_Absence_0910.html.

Community background information is collected to enable the Northern Ireland Civil Service to fulfil its obligations under the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, which are to submit an annual monitoring return to the Equality Commission and to carry out regular reviews of the workforce composition and employment practices. Community background data is also used to monitor the effectiveness of NICS' policies on equality of opportunity. The examination of sick absence levels by community background is not relevant to the management of sickness absence and is not carried out.

Cycle to Work Scheme

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the extra costs required for the full implementation of the Cycle to Work Scheme to which he referred in his letter of 31 May 2011.

(AQW 434/11-15)

Mr Wilson: To introduce a NICS wide Cycle to Work Scheme would cost around £100,000, £10,000 more than the original estimate, with additional running costs of £30,000 a year for the duration of the scheme. It was initially anticipated that start up costs would be negligible and that no running costs would be incurred, as this would form part of the salary sacrifice scheme which was already in place.

Corporation Tax

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any estimates of the administrative costs associated with the collection of corporation tax should the rate of tax be reduced.
(AQW 436/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Government consultation document on Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy indicates that Northern Ireland would be expected to bear the additional cost of administering the regime where Corporation Tax is devolved. However, it stated that it was not possible at this stage to assess exactly what the HMRC costs of administering any devolved Northern Ireland tax would be.

Identifying and agreeing these costs will be a key element of the negotiations we will need to have with the Treasury before any decision can be reached on devolving Corporation Tax.

Corporation Tax

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for the estimated indirect cost to the local economy of a reduction in the block grant that would result from a reduction in corporation tax.
(AQW 437/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Government consultation document on Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy outlines the potential public expenditure costs and additional investment that could be expected as a consequence of reducing Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland.

However, it does not provide an estimate of the overall economic impact of reducing Corporation Tax, nor does it separately identify the economic consequences of reducing public expenditure. These are key issues on which the Government is seeking views as part of the consultation process.

However, the report published by the Economic Advisory Group on 26 May 2011 suggests that reducing Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland would have a net positive impact on the local economy in terms of both employment and output. In particular, the report estimates that an average of 4,500 net additional jobs per year could be created in the longer-term.

Ministerial Cars: Drivers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail how arrangements for the appointment, status and payment of drivers of ministerial cars differ from those which existed before devolution was established in May 2007; and the reasons for any changes and when any changes took place.
(AQW 472/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I understand that before devolution was established in May 2007, direct rule Ministers were driven by the Police.

For most of the previous Assembly mandate, 8 Ministers were driven by official drivers from the Ministerial car pool and 5 Ministers had drivers supplied and funded by their party.

On 1 April 2011, responsibility for Ministerial transport was transferred to individual departments. It was agreed that, when not needed for Ministerial purposes, the car would be available for other Departmental use, including the transport of officials. This allowed the officials' car pool to be discontinued.

Currently within DFP the Ministerial driver is a civil servant, appointed in the normal way and funded by my department.

Department Staff

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of people employed at each pay grade in each Department, broken down by community background.

(AQW 481/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested is set out in the attached tables. They show the position as at 1 January 2011 and include all Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) permanent staff. In addition to staff in the general service grades all departments employ staff in other disciplines that have their own grading structures. The tables therefore show all staff by general service and analogous grades. In order to protect the community background of individuals, cell sizes less than 10 cannot be released. Due to the small number in the 'Not Determined' category it has been merged with the next lowest category for the department.

The information contained in the tables should be treated with caution. There are variations in the community background profile between various grades and departments. However, for the purposes of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 the NICS is treated as a single employer. The NICS submits a single monitoring return to the Equality Commission each year and every three years carries out a review of the whole organisation. The NICS has common grade structures, employment policies and recruitment and promotion systems. The scope of individual departments to influence the community background profile of their staff is very limited as it is illegal to select individuals for appointment, promotion or transfer on the basis of their community background.

NICS PERMANENT STAFF BY DEPARTMENT BROKEN DOWN BY ANALOGOUS GRADE AND COMMUNITY BACKGROUND @ 1ST JANUARY 2011

		Department: DARD		
		Community Background		
		Protestant	Catholic/Not Determined	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	133	142	275
	DP	140	104	244
	S0	312	213	525
	EOI/EOII	456	442	898
	AO	186	249	435
	AA	113	143	256
	Industrial	199	243	442
	Group Total	1539	1536	3075

Department: DCAL				
		Community Background		
		Protestant	Catholic/Not Determined	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	14	14	28
	DP	15	22	37
	SO	27	27	54
	EOI/EOII	41	39	80
	AO/AO	36	38	74
	Industrial	13	10	23
	Group Total	146	150	296

Department: DE				
		Community Background		
		Protestant	Catholic/Not Determined	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	56	61	117
	DP	55	26	81
	SO	51	28	79
	EOI/EOII	109	61	170
	AO	88	56	144
	AA	33	11	44
	Industrial	0	0	0
	Group Total	392	243	635

Department: DETI				
		Community Background		
		Protestant	Catholic/Not Determined	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	41	20	61
	DP	76	37	113
	SO	49	47	96
	EOI/EOII	119	80	199
	AO	73	39	112
	AA	34	15	49
	Industrial	0	0	0
	Group Total	392	238	630

Department: DFP				
		Community Background		
		Protestant	Catholic/Not Determined	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G5+	26	15	41
	G6/G7	169	157	326
	DP	275	225	500
	SO	344	252	596
	EOI/EOII	540	444	984
	AO	453	485	938
	AA/Industrial	142	83	225
	Group Total	1949	1661	3610

Department: DEL				
		Community Background		
		Protestant/Not Determined	Catholic	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	36	32	68
	DP	61	56	117
	SO	91	104	195
	EOI/EOII	413	618	1031
	AO	265	384	649
	AA	39	44	83
	Industrial	0	0	0
	Group Total	905	1238	2143

Department: DHSSPS				
		Community Background		
		Protestant	Catholic/Not Determined	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	64	68	132
	DP	90	71	161
	SO	100	74	174
	EOI/EOII	105	74	179
	AO/AA	91	32	123
	Industrial	0	0	0
	Group Total	450	319	769

Department: DOE				
		Community Background		
		Protestant	Catholic/Not Determined	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	74	83	157
	DP	179	158	337
	SO	252	265	517
	EOI/EOII	303	325	628
	AO	471	461	932
	AA	93	78	171
	Industrial	33	24	57
	Group Total	1405	1394	2799

Department: DRD				
		Community Background		
		Protestant	Catholic/Not Determined	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	62	38	100
	DP	121	97	218
	SO	193	151	344
	EOI/EOII	306	334	640
	AO	132	167	299
	AA	176	174	350
	Industrial	305	237	542
	Group Total	1295	1198	2493

Department: DSD				
		Community Background		
		Protestant/Not Determined	Catholic	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	49	65	114
	DP	81	122	203
	S0	201	246	447
	EOI/EOII	1135	1504	2639
	AO	1614	2147	3761
	AA	290	323	613
	Industrial	0	0	0
	Group Total	3370	4407	7777

Department: OFMDFM				
		Community Background		
		Protestant	Catholic/Not Determined	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G5+	16	11	27
	G6/G7	31	21	52
	DP	33	37	70
	S0	45	38	83
	EOI/EOII	52	33	85
	AO/AA	52	24	76
	Industrial	0	0	0
	Group Total	229	164	393

Department: DOJ				
		Community Background		
		Protestant	Catholic/Not Determined	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G5+	20	12	32
	G6/G7	88	51	139
	DP	149	91	240
	SO	234	185	419
	EOI/EOII	393	255	648
	AO	560	338	898
	AA/Industrial	97	43	140
	Group Total	1541	975	2516

Department: PPS				
		Community Background		
		Protestant/Not Determined	Catholic	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G7+	34	36	70
	DP	51	65	116
	SO	11	14	25
	EOI/EOII	62	46	108
	AO	69	80	149
	AA	41	56	97
	Industrial	0	0	0
	Group Total	268	297	565

Department: All				
		Community Background		
		Protestant	Catholic/Not Determined	Group Total
		Headcount	Headcount	Headcount
Analogous Grade	G5+	149	103	252
	G6/G7	759	728	1487
	DP	1309	1128	2437
	S0	1898	1656	3554
	EOI/EOII	3990	4299	8289
	AO	3965	4537	8502
	AA	1078	989	2067
	Industrial	590	523	1113
	Group Total	13738	13963	27701

Northern Ireland Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what impact the removal of the Northern Ireland Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme has had on the Executive's capital budget.

(AQW 482/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There will be no direct impact on the Executive's capital budget. However, as the quarry industry will have to absorb this "additional cost", it is possible that aggregates prices will increase, and as the public sector is the industry's biggest customer, this could potentially impact on planned public works.

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what legislation his Department intends to introduce (i) 2011/12; and (ii) this mandate.

(AQW 488/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In addition to the normal Budget Bills, proposals for primary legislation are currently being developed in relation to rating and superannuation issues.

Further proposals may be brought forward later in the mandate to give effect to new or changes to existing policies.

Northern Ireland Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the discussions his Department has had with the British Government regarding the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme.

(AQW 492/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have been concerned for some time now about the impact the suspension of the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme (ALCS) is having in Northern Ireland and have raised the need for an early replacement scheme with Treasury Ministers on several occasions since the EU Court decision last September. I reiterated this concern during my meeting with Justine Greening (Economic Secretary

to the Treasury) on 16 March 2011 and stressed again the need for the Government to urgently address this issue given the very damaging effect it is having on our local industry.

The Economic Secretary assured me that HM Treasury are committed to securing a replacement ALCS. However, we now know that the European Commission will be carrying out a full review of the Scheme, and it therefore remains vitally important that every effort is made to work with the Commission and encourage them to complete their review as soon as possible. Both DFP and Treasury officials will do all that they can to facilitate this and meet regularly.

I was pleased that the Chancellor announced in Budget 2011 that the scheduled increase in the aggregates levy rate from £2.00 to £2.10 has been delayed following the suspension of the ALCS. The Chancellor also confirmed that provision for any replacement scheme would be made in the 2011 Finance Bill. This is an important step which means that the introduction of a replacement scheme would not be delayed by the need for UK legislation at a later stage in the process.

I can assure you that my Department and will continue to work with HM Treasury to ensure that a replacement scheme is put in place as soon as is practically possible.

Grant Programmes

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what investigations have taken place to assess the amount of money that could be saved if the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education were to work in co-operation with the Department for Regional Development's existing grant programmes instead of each operating completely autonomous programmes.

(AQW 493/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I understand that this question relates to the provision of transport. The Department of Finance and Personnel's Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) has been working closely with the Department of Education and the Education and Library Boards on a number of areas of education expenditure, including the provision of school transport. The Stage One Study, which has been completed, is available on the Department of Education's website, and has revealed variations in unit cost in relation to the provision of school transport. Further work is currently in hand to explain these variations and determine ways in which best value for money can be achieved. The interface with other transport providers is a part of this work.

It is of course incumbent on all departments and agencies on an ongoing basis to ensure that they achieve best value for money across all programmes and services.

Rating Revaluation

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when a rating re-valuation of all non-domestic properties will (i) take place; and (ii) be completed.

(AQW 505/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is currently intended for the next non domestic revaluation to come into effect on 1 April 2015. This would see Northern Ireland aligning with the next revaluation of non domestic properties in the rest of the UK, which is also due to occur at that time.

This is a matter that is likely to require Executive endorsement and this will be sought before work begins in a year or two's time.

The actual process of valuing non domestic properties will be undertaken by the valuation side within Land and Property Service in advance of the 1 April 2015 effective date.

Local Banks

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assessment he has made of the current approach taken by local banks to lending to local businesses.

(AQW 518/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Ensuring that Northern Ireland has a competitive banking sector that meets the needs of businesses and consumers remains, strategically, a very important issue as our economy struggles to recover from the recession and I have been liaising with the local banks and the British Bankers Association (BBA) in this regard for some time now.

Anecdotal evidence - the reports I received from business organisations and constituents - still suggests that the availability of credit remains constrained and that the cost of credit can sometimes be prohibitive. Data for the UK as a whole would confirm this.

In that context, I have previously welcomed the actions identified in the BBA Business Finance Taskforce report to improve access to finance, to improve customer relationships, and to improve information on bank lending and performance. However, while I view this report as a positive step forward, I wrote last month to the BBA to indicate that I remain somewhat disappointed about the pace of implementation.

Furthermore, the lack of regular information on bank lending in Northern Ireland remains a constraint to our understanding of the current situation in this regard and I have also stressed how important it is that this is provided urgently. This will help provide a clearer picture of the extent to which the availability of finance is supporting economic recovery in Northern Ireland.

Fleet Transport

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the cost of providing cars for (i) Ministers; (ii) Junior Ministers; (iii) civil servants; and (iv) others in each of the last three years; and to outline any planned investment in fleet transport over the next twelve months.

(AQW 524/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The overall costs of providing cars for Ministers, Junior Ministers and civil servants for each of the last 3 years are detailed in the attached table. The figures which include drivers' salaries, fuel and vehicle maintenance, cannot be split by user category. Cars were not provided for the fourth category 'others'.

A new fleet of 13 Ministerial vehicles has very recently been procured. The total capital and 3-year servicing costs are £252K. There are no current plans to invest in any further fleet transport over the next twelve months.

Year	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Total Running Costs (salary costs, fuel costs and car maintenance)	£433k	£441k	£470k

Procurement Cards

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many taxpayer-funded procurement cards are in use by departmental officials across the Civil Service and in arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 556/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department of Finance and Personnel (including its arm's-length bodies) currently holds three taxpayer-funded procurement cards.

This response is provided for the Department of Finance and Personnel only, as information on the procurement cards held across the wider Civil Service and arm's-length bodies is not held centrally. The Member should contact individual departments for their information.

Invest NI: Chief Executive Officer

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 1/11-15, (i) whether, after he rejected the business case presented on 14 April 2011, any further business case or request for approval was presented to his Department in relation to a proposed bonus for the CEO of Invest NI; and (ii) when such a case was presented and what was the outcome.

(AQW 573/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Following my rejection of the business case presented on 14th April 2011, my Department have not received any further proposal or business case for the CEO of Invest NI.

Ballymena Health and Social Care Centre Business Case

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the proposed Ballymena Health and Social Care Centre business case, which is now with his Department for consideration.

(AQW 714/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Ballymena Health and Social Care Centre business case was received in my department on the 9 June 2011. My officials are currently examining the business case to ensure that the project represents value for money and is affordable within the DHSSPS's capital and revenue allocations. My department has a target to respond to business cases within a three week period and the Ballymena Health and Social Care Centre business case will be processed in that time frame provided there is no need for further information or clarification from DHSSPS.

Corporation Tax

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he, or any of his officials, have had discussions with the Attorney General for Northern Ireland regarding the legality of the potential devolution of corporation tax varying powers to the Assembly.

(AQW 737/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My department has not taken specific advice from the Attorney General regarding the legality of the potential devolution of corporation tax varying powers.

Should the UK Government agree to devolve the power to vary corporation tax to the NI Executive, it is commonly accepted that this would be dependent on new / amended national taxation and devolution legislation being put in place by Westminster.

Corporation Tax

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what advice his Department has sought from Her Majesty's Treasury and Revenue and Customs regarding the framework for the potential devolution of corporation tax varying powers to the Assembly.

(AQW 738/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Government consultation document on Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy includes references to a number of implementation options and administration issues should the decision be made to devolve the power to vary the corporation tax rate.

Officials have discussed all of these different implementation and administration issues with HM Treasury and HMRC colleagues during the preparation of the consultation document.

Agreeing a satisfactory resolution to these issues will be a key element of the negotiations we will need to have with the Treasury.

Civil Service: Standards of Conduct

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the Civil Service Standards of Conduct, including how and at what levels they are applied.

(AQW 804/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Standards of Conduct policy for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) can be found in the Staff Handbook which can be viewed on the Department of Finance and Personnel website. The policy is applicable to all levels of staff in the NICS. The link to the policy is <http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/6.01-standards-of-conduct.pdf>

Corporation Tax and End-year Flexibility

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the discussions he has had with Her Majesty's Treasury in relation to corporation tax and end-year flexibility arrangements.

(AQO 108/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The First Minister, deputy First Minister, DETI Minister and I met with David Gauke and Owen Paterson in February and March of this year, to discuss the then draft Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy paper, which is currently out for public consultation, ending on 24 June 2011.

At these meetings, we made it clear that the UK Government needed to work with the Executive to look at the different options for varying corporation tax. We also identified a need to examine the costs which remain very high, and at the upper end of previous estimates, and also asked that the paper be more explicit about the benefits we might expect. Further work is needed in these areas and we will continue to engage with the Treasury in this regard following the close of the consultation.

More recently we attended a consultation event in London on 8th June that was chaired by the Exchequer Secretary where we heard views from multinational businesses and other private sector stakeholders on the impact they believed a reduction in corporation tax would have on the attractiveness and the ease of doing business in Northern Ireland.

With regards end-year flexibility arrangements, I have already written to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury expressing my concerns on the proposed Budget Exchange system. I have also proposed an alternative scheme, which I believe will do much more to incentivise good financial management. I have arranged to meet with the Chief Secretary on 29 June to discuss the issue. I expect we will have a further discussion at the Finance Ministers quadrilateral meeting next month as the Ministers in Scotland and Wales have similar concerns.

Corporation Tax

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the most recent negotiations he has had with Her Majesty's Treasury in relation to corporation tax.

(AQO 114/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The First Minister, deputy First Minister, DETI Minister and I met with David Gauke and Owen Paterson in February and March of this year, to discuss the then draft Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy paper, which is currently out for public consultation, ending on 24 June 2011.

At these meetings, we made it clear that the UK Government needed to work with the Executive to look at the different options for varying corporation tax. We also identified a need to examine the costs which remain very high, and at the upper end of previous estimates, and also asked that the paper be more explicit about the benefits we might expect. Further work is needed in these areas and we will continue to engage with the Treasury in this regard following the close of the consultation.

More recently we attended a consultation event in London on 8th June that was chaired by the Exchequer Secretary where we heard views from multinational businesses and other private sector stakeholders on the impact they believed a reduction in corporation tax would have on the attractiveness and the ease of doing business in Northern Ireland.

Rates: Development Sites

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will consider the introduction of a rating element to be paid on gap sites or locations where buildings have been demolished in anticipation of property development but which have remained undeveloped for more than one year. **(AQO 107/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: Proposals to implement a tax on previously developed or derelict land were examined as part of the Executive's 2007 Rating Review.

Given the reversal in property market conditions in 2008 the decision was taken not to proceed. This decision was taken because of concerns that it would add to land holding costs and therefore impact on the construction sector, which has suffered significantly as a result of the downturn. The conditions are no better today and I think that this decision should still stand.

There would also be major practicable difficulties in extending the rating system to cover redevelopment sites or land. Rating has always been based on existing (or in some cases previous) use and an owner could easily avoid the imposition of any significant rating charge by declaring the land to be a car park or some other low value alternative use. There could also be wider complications in terms of the valuation that would be attributed to these sites, how this would align with the normal basis of rental value and also the absence of market rental evidence to underpin the assessments.

It is my Department's considered view, therefore, that the rating system could not accommodate such a charge and what would be required would have to be a new tax. This view is shared by the Department of Communities and Local Government in Whitehall, which has responsibility for business rates policy for England, as that Department also looked into the matter a couple of years ago.

EU Funding

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps have been taken to maximise the level of funding from the European Union. **(AQO 113/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: Firstly, I would like to confirm the position on the Northern Ireland EU Structural Funds Programmes—the budgets for these Programmes are a fixed allocation. We will continue to work to maximise our drawdown of this funding; the Departments and Bodies delivering these programmes will ensure that the full value of each Programme is drawn down. To date, all Programmes have met and exceeded their annual EU spending targets.

The 2011-15 Executive Budget commits Northern Ireland departments to increasing drawdown of discretionary European funds by 20% over the next four years. The Barroso Task Force Working Group (BTWG), under the chair of OFMDFM Junior Ministers, is working to establish how best to pursue and benefit from European funding, policies and networking opportunities.

The INTERREG IVB and C programmes are good examples of DFP efforts to increase Northern Ireland's uptake of EU funds beyond our own local Structural Funds programmes. These Programmes have an eligible area made up of several member states or, in the case of the INTERREG IVC Programme, all 27 member states. All regions within a Programme's eligible area can submit project ideas for possible funding but only the best projects are accepted. The number of projects with Northern Ireland partners approved under the IVB and IVC Programmes under the current programming period (42) is already more than double the number approved under the last programming period (17).

Lone Pensioner Allowance

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the uptake of the Lone Pensioner Allowance.

(AQO 115/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Since its introduction by the Executive on 1 April 2008, the total amount of money awarded to ratepayers (both owner occupiers and in the rented sector) as at 29 May 2011 under the Lone Pensioner Allowance was £15,337,928

The scheme is available to all pensioners aged 70 or over living alone, and almost 30,000 have benefitted since 2008, at an average award level of £170 per year.

I believe that the scheme has been an important element of the rating reforms implemented by the Executive. The scheme is not means tested. I encourage all eligible ratepayers to apply for this allowance, which provides a relief of 20% on rate bills. Land & Property Services, working

closely with other parts of government and with the voluntary sector, continues to encourage take up of the scheme. Land & Property Services provides updated information on awards under the scheme on its website.

Department of Finance and Personnel: Arm's-length Bodies

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people are employed by the arm's-length bodies for which his Department has responsibility.

(AQO 116/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There are currently 11 people employed by arm's length bodies for which my Department has responsibility.

9 people are employed in the Public Service Commission for NI, 1 person is employed as the Lay Observer for NI and 1 person is employed in the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme for NI Governance Group.

Civil Service: Sickness Absence

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action he intends to take following the report by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency which shows that the level of sickness absence in Departments equates, in pay terms, to a £22.9 million loss of productivity.

(AQO 117/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Tackling the high level of sickness absence across the NI Departments has been one of my key priorities since first becoming Minister for Finance and Personnel.

A comprehensive action plan, building on the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee, is in place to address sickness absence across all departments and the robust application of the recently revised Sickness Absence and Inefficiency Sickness Absence policies will help to drive down absence rates, thereby reducing costs and improving productivity.

Long-term absence generates huge costs, both in financial and human terms. We know that the main reason for long-term sickness absence relate to illnesses such as anxiety, stress and depression. This is now a widespread issue affecting much of the public and indeed the private sector and the NICS is not immune.

We are focussing specifically on the effective management of long term absence in order to see a meaningful and sustained improvement in the level of sickness absence.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) Conference

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he is aware of the recent Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) conference which was held in Westminster and the subsequent meeting which was attended by researchers from the conference and MPs; and whether any of his departmental officials attended either of these events or have assessed the findings.

(AQW 348/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I am aware that the Invest in ME conference took place in Westminster on 20 May. Departmental officials did not attend the conference or the subsequent meeting

The conference focused on clinical and research issues. Publications referring to work on the XMRV virus and ME continue to be scrutinized by scientists and clinicians globally and there is consensus in the literature about the need for more high quality research until a clear answer is achieved.

While this research is as yet inconclusive both regarding the cause of ME and how the virus is transmitted, in Northern Ireland we will continue to assess developments to ensure that future education and clinical practice are influenced by the emerging evidence.

Emergency Life Support Skills

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department has taken in the last year to promote the teaching of emergency life support skills in schools, workplaces and communities; and what plans he has to encourage this in the future.

(AQW 395/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department published the Cardiovascular Service Framework for Health and Wellbeing in June 2009. Standard 9 states that Health and Social Care Professionals should work with schools, workplaces and communities to raise awareness of and access to emergency life support (ELS) skills.

A number of models to raise awareness of and provide training in Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) are in operation in Northern Ireland within Health and Social Care Trusts and other statutory, community and voluntary organisations. The Public Health Agency in co operation with HSC Trusts and voluntary providers is developing a regional business case for the next HSC commissioning plan 2012/13 to ensure that the various programmes currently in place are coordinated and integrated to provide quality-assured training in CPR equitably across the province.

The Department has also recently started a pilot scheme to train volunteers in Emergency Life Support skills and the use of an Automated External Defibrillator. The pilot scheme which is aimed at people involved in sport, will be evaluated in early 2012.

In relation to the workplace, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has advised that the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1982 require employers to make suitable first aid provisions in all workplaces and this may require the appointment of one or more trained first aiders. Changes will be introduced from 1 September 2011 that will make it easier for small businesses to avail of training in basic first aid, including resuscitation.

I understand the Minister for Education will provide an answer in relation to schools and the Minister for Employment and Learning will respond in relation to further and higher educational facilities.

Dental Registration Fees

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the services to which additional money raised from dental registration fees will be directed.

(AQW 396/11-15)

Mr Poots: Income derived from all RQIA regulatory activities, such as registration and inspection, is used to off-set the amount of funding provided by the Department and required by RQIA to fulfil its responsibilities as regulator.

HM Treasury guidance recommends that full recovery of regulatory costs should be the Government's aim.

Dental Registration Fees

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will consider a review of dental registration fees and the time-limit to register with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority.

(AQW 397/11-15)

Mr Poots: As regards a review of dental registration fees I refer you to my answer contained in AQW 285/11-15.

The time-limit to register was set by the regulator, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA), in order to secure the prompt return of registration application forms and help manage the regulation process. Principals in dental practices who have not yet returned a completed application for registration should contact RQIA and arrange a revised date for return of the application where appropriate.

Local Care Homes

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures are in place in local care homes to prevent the kind of abuse to which residents in Winterbourne View in England were subjected.

(AQW 419/11-15)

Mr Poots: In Northern Ireland all nursing and residential care homes are regulated by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) and are subject to a minimum of two inspections per year. Where concerns arise, RQIA has power to carry out further unannounced inspections at any time of the day or night.

Each home is required to have appropriate policies and procedures in place in relation to both staffing and the protection of vulnerable adults. During inspection RQIA may review records in relation to these policies.

Homes have a legal responsibility to notify any serious injury to a resident or any event which adversely affects the care, health, welfare or safety of any resident, any accident in the home or any allegation of misconduct by those managing the home or working in the home.

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has spent on external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 430/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since 2007/08 the expenditure incurred by my Department on external consultants (including Health Estates Agency, prior to its amalgamation into the Department from 1 April 2009), is as follows.

Financial Year	Core Department (£)	Health Estates (£)	Total Annual Expenditure (£)
2009/10	651,390	Not Applicable	651,390

Financial Year	Core Department (£)	Health Estates (£)	Total Annual Expenditure (£)
2008/09	606,066	146,445	752,511
2007/08	2,034,151	278,410	2,312,561

The expenditure for 2007/08 reflects the full financial year i.e. from the 1 April 2007.

Final expenditure on external consultancy for 2010/11 is not yet available.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many new referrals have had appointments with a Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.

(AQW 446/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of new outpatient attendances with a Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years is outlined in the table below:

Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
No. of new outpatient attendances ¹	1,661	1,499	1,670

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

- 1 Data relate to the number of new outpatient attendances. The number of new outpatient attendances will not necessarily equate to the number of individuals attending a new outpatient appointment during the period as individuals may attend more than once.

Chronic Orthopaedic Problems: Children

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

(AQW 447/11-15)

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

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

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

Year	No. of new outpatient attendances	No. of review outpatient attendances	Total no. of outpatient attendances
2008/09	1,661	5,762	7,423
2009/10	1,499	5,502	7,001
2010/11	1,670	5,346	7,016

Source: Belfast HSC Trust

- 1 Data relate to the number of outpatient attendances. The number of outpatient attendances will not equate to the number of individuals attending an outpatient appointment during the period as individuals may attend more than once.

(ii) The number of inpatient admissions with a Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon at the Belfast HSC Trust: 2008/09 to 2010/11

Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Total number of inpatient admissions	419	405	368

Source: Belfast HSC Trust

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

Craigavon Area Hospital

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when work will commence on the two new operating theatres proposed for the Craigavon Area Hospital; and when the work will be completed.

(AQW 458/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am not yet in a position to confirm when work on the two new theatres will commence. The Southern Health and Social Care Trust is currently finalising the tender process. Once the main contractor is appointed, it is estimated that construction work will take approximately 18 months to complete.

Heart and Circulatory Disease

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions his Department has taken in the last three years to reduce heart and circulatory disease.

(AQW 466/11-15)

Mr Poots: Primary prevention campaigns and programmes aimed at the known risk factors of cardiovascular diseases (smoking and obesity) have been in place for a number of years.

The Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) within the General Medical Services contract has an emphasis on both the minimisation of risk factors for heart and circulatory disease and on the secondary prevention of heart and circulatory disease. In addition, a three year Directed Enhanced Service which supports the Service Framework for Cardiovascular Health and Well-being was introduced in 2008/09.

The Cardiovascular Service Framework, introduced in 2009 sets out comprehensive pathways and standards for prevention, early diagnosis, treatment, long term management, and palliative care in relation to cardiovascular disease. The Public Health Agency leads on implementation of the Cardiovascular Service Framework in collaboration with other stakeholders. Specific actions have included,

- Stroke Competency Framework
- Stroke Units
- Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA services)

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what legislation his Department intends to introduce in (i) 2011/12; and (ii) this mandate.

(AQW 487/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is my intention to introduce primary legislation in relation to the following areas including Mental Capacity, Pharmacy Control of Entry, Ophthalmic Services, Tobacco Retailer Sanctions, Public Health, Adoption and the devolution of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007. It will also be necessary to make some amendments to existing legislation such as the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (NI) 2008, the Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (NI) 2009 and the Fire and Rescue Services (NI) Order 2006.

At this stage, the likelihood is that the primary legislation will not be introduced in 2011/12, but will be introduced during the course of this Assembly mandate.

It is also my intention to introduce subordinate legislation in 2011/12 arising from the Sunbeds Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and the Safeguarding Board Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, both of which were passed by the Assembly in the previous mandate.

There may also be a need to introduce subordinate legislation during the course of this Assembly mandate arising as a result of some of the primary legislation. However, at this point, it is not possible to be precise as to the nature or volume of such legislation.

Fostering a Child: Waiting Time

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average waiting time to foster a child in each Health and Social Care Trust area in each year since their formation.

(AQW 495/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures detailing average waiting times to foster a child in each Health and Social Care Trust each year since their formation are not available centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Antrim Area Hospital Car park

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what length of time a visitor to Antrim Area Hospital has to leave the car park after paying for their parking ticket; and for his assessment of this time-frame, given that many people using the car park have mobility issues.

(AQW 503/11-15)

Mr Poots: The length of time allowed between paying for a car parking ticket and leaving the car park is 15 minutes. Help is available through an intercom system at entry and exit points of the car park and at the pay stations to assist anyone with mobility problems.

PSNI and Social Services Gateway Teams: Joint Protocol

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many times the joint protocol between the PSNI and Social Services Gateway Teams was applied in (i) 2009; and (ii) 2010.

(AQW 506/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures detailing how many times the joint protocol between the PSNI and Social Services Gateway Teams was applied in 2009 and 2010, are not available centrally in this format.

Statistical bulletin, 'Children Order Statistical Tables for Northern Ireland 2009/10' details the numbers of Child Protection Joint Protocol Investigations carried out between the PSNI and HSC Trusts during the year ending 31 March 2010. This bulletin is available from the DHSSPS website at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib-3/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/children_statistics/stats-cib-children_order.htm

Previous editions of this bulletin, including that for 2008/09, are available from the same website.

Figures detailed in these two bulletins indicate that Child Protection Joint Protocol Investigations increased by 26% (151) from 572 in 2008/09 to 723 in 2009/10, and as a proportion of all Child Protection Investigations, those involving Joint Protocol increased by one percentage point from 20% to 21% respectively.

Upper Bann: Multiple Sclerosis Services

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the provision of Multiple Sclerosis services in the Upper Bann constituency.

(AQW 519/11-15)

Mr Poots: Clients residing in the Upper Bann constituency have access to the full range of core community health and social care services. These include physiotherapy, occupational therapy, community nursing, speech and language therapy, dietetics, social work and social care, podiatry, domiciliary care, day care and daytime opportunities, and respite. They also have access to Thompson House and Forster Green hospitals for assessment and rehabilitation, and there is an MS Nurse Specialist based within the Southern HSC Trust who can provide specialist support as required.

Muckamore Abbey

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether patients in Muckamore Abbey will be forced to be resettled against their own, or their families', wishes.

(AQW 547/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department continues to work with the Health and Social Care Board, (HSCB) Health and Social Care Trusts (the "Trust") and the Department for Social Development to resettle all those patients currently in long stay learning disability hospitals, the key consideration being that their lives will be improved by the process.

The principle of "betterment" remains the key consideration for the Trusts in the resettlement of individuals in the community and that includes full discussion with the individual, family and carers on accommodation arrangements, support for independent living and the range of health and social care services which are required.

Clinicians and professional staff from the learning disability hospitals are of the opinion that, with the appropriate level of care and support, all patients could and should live relatively independent lives within the community. However, the Trusts will continue to respect the wishes of patients and their families in dealing with each individual case.

Muckamore Abbey Patients

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's plans for the resettlement of Muckamore Abbey patients.

(AQW 548/11-15)

Mr Poots: Priority for resettlement was given at Executive level in 2008 through the Programme for Government target that by 2013, anyone with a learning disability is promptly and suitably treated in the community and no-one remains unnecessarily in hospital.

By 31 March 2011, 116 long stay patients had been resettled from learning disability hospitals to appropriate places in the community compared to the March 2006 total.

My Department continues to work with the Health and Social Care Board, Health and Social Care Trusts and the Department for Social Development to resettle all those patients currently in long stay learning disability hospitals, the key consideration being that their lives will be improved by the process.

This year I am allocating £6.8m towards the resettlement of 60 people across all of the learning disability hospitals in Northern Ireland. I am advised that the majority of those will be from MuckamoreAbbeyHospital.

Sign Language Interpreting Sessions

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many bookings for sign language interpreting sessions were taken by Hands that Talk under their contract with the Western Health and Social Care Trust in (a) 2009/10; and (b) 2010/11; (ii) how many of these sessions were carried out by interpreters registered with the National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) as (a) a Member of the Register of Sign Language Interpreters; and (b) a Junior Trainee Interpreter; and (iii) how many of the sessions were carried out by interpreters not registered with the NRCPD.

(AQW 572/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of bookings for sign language interpreting sessions taken by Hands That Talk under their contract with the Western Health and Social Care Trust was 330 in 2009/10 and 351 in 2010/11. All of these sessions were carried out by interpreters registered by NRCPD as a Member of the Register of Sign Language Interpreters.

Suicide Support Groups

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his Department's policies and practices for ensuring that suicide support groups are established in every part of Northern Ireland where a need exists; and what financial support is available to such groups to provide an adequate service for users.

(AQW 581/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department allocates £6.7m per annum for the provision of suicide prevention services. This includes £3.2m for the implementation of the Protect Life Strategy and £3.5m for the operation of Lifeline service. Around £2.7m of this is allocated to community groups to support community-led suicide prevention services.

The Public Health Agency (PHA) works with local implementation groups in the five Health Trust areas to develop community action plans which are then funded from the Protect Life budget. Local implementation groups include representation from the statutory and voluntary/community sectors, and from families bereaved by suicide.

The PHA and the Health and Social Care Trusts employ suicide prevention co-ordinators in each of the Trust areas. Part of the remit of these posts is to ensure that suicide prevention services are available locally, and to support the establishment and operation of community-based groups to address suicide in their areas.

Emergency Life Support Skills

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to increase emergency life support skills training in schools, workplaces and communities.

(AQW 582/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department published the Cardiovascular Service Framework for Health and Wellbeing in June 2009. Standard 9 states that Health and Social Care Professionals should work with schools, workplaces and communities to raise awareness of and access to emergency life support (ELS) skills.

A number of models to raise awareness of and provide training in Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) are in operation in Northern Ireland within Health and Social Care Trusts and other statutory, community and voluntary organisations. The Public Health Agency in co operation with HSC Trusts and voluntary providers is developing a regional business case for the next HSC commissioning plan 2012/13 to ensure that the various programmes currently in place are coordinated and integrated to provide quality-assured training in CPR equitably across the province.

The Department has also recently started a pilot scheme to train volunteers in Emergency Life Support skills and the use of an Automated External Defibrillator. The pilot scheme which is aimed at people involved in sport, will be evaluated in early 2012.

In relation to the workplace, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has advised that the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1982 require employers to make suitable first aid provisions in all workplaces and this may require the appointment of one or more trained first aiders. Changes will be introduced from 1 September 2011 that will make it easier for small businesses to avail of training in basic first aid, including resuscitation.

I understand the Minister for Education will provide an answer in relation to schools.

McKinsey Report

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of how the recommendations contained in the McKinsey Report compare to his stated intention to 'promote greater involvement of frontline professionals in decision making and service development'; and how he will ensure that the views and contributions of frontline staff are included in his plans for the future of the Health Service.

(AQW 611/11-15)

Mr Poots: The McKinsey report provides firm evidence that there is scope for greater productivity while delivering cash releasing efficiencies but this is only one body of work which will inform my decisions on plans for the future of Health and Social Care services. I will also want to take full account of the recommendations emanating from the forthcoming PEDU Review, to which I am fully committed, and which I expect to get underway shortly and also the recent work carried out by Professor Appleby. I am determined to develop a clear and sustainable strategy to maximise the outcomes of health and social care, focusing on: prevention and public health; quality of care and; containing costs.

Greater collaboration and involvement with frontline professionals is at the heart of my plans. I want to drive up the quality of services and improve outcomes for patients and clients and that will require the commitment and support of everyone involved, from those involved in support roles such as portering, cleaning and security to those delivering care and treatment at the coal face. I am keen to ensure that the views, experience and expertise of all staff are harnessed to best effect in shaping policies to improve Health and Social care.

In the days and weeks ahead I will be meeting with a wide range of interested parties - from representatives of the professions to patient and client groups - and directly seeking their views. In due course, my plans will be subject to appropriate public consultation exercise during which the views of all interested parties on the future of the health service will be gathered and taken into account in decisions on the way ahead.

Archived Departmental Documentation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department spent on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation in each of the last three years.

(AQW 622/11-15)

Mr Poots: Over the last three years my Department has not incurred any expenditure on renting storage space for archived departmental documentation.

Sensory Processing Disorder

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) children; and (ii) adults have been diagnosed with Sensory Processing Disorder in each Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last five years.

(AQW 679/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available.

Southern Cross Healthcare

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware of any proposed changes to the rental fees to be paid to Southern Cross Healthcare; and for his assessment of the impact this will have on care homes.

(AQW 688/11-15)

Mr Poots: The level of tariff paid to care homes is a matter for local negotiation between the HSC and care home providers. There are currently no plans to change the level of tariff paid to Southern Cross.

Southern Cross Healthcare

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact on care provision arising from of the decision by Southern Cross Healthcare Group to reduce its staff numbers and service provision.

(AQW 722/11-15)

Mr Poots: All registered residential care and nursing homes are required by legislation to employ an appropriate number of staff to enable them to meet the health and welfare needs of residents. Homes are subject to a minimum of two inspections per year by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) which monitors compliance with this legislation.

Southern Cross is currently engaging with staff on how the company can be run more efficiently and redundancies are one potential outcome of this process. Regardless of outcome, Southern Cross will not be exempt from the requirement to ensure that each home has an appropriate number of staff to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its residents and the RQIA will remain in close contact with the company to ensure this is the case.

Secure Accommodation Units

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of Secure Accommodation Units and the number of people each unit can facilitate.

(AQW 752/11-15)

Mr Poots: My understanding is that you are asking specifically about children's Secure Accommodation Units, and I can advise you that the only such unit in Northern Ireland is Lakewood Regional Secure Care Centre, within the South Eastern HSC Trust.

Lakewood will house sixteen 11 to 18 year old children when at full capacity, on both a short and long term basis.

Mater Hospital, Belfast: Accident and Emergency Cover

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can confirm that there will be full and continued Accident and Emergency cover at the Mater Hospital, Belfast in view of the speculation of its imminent closure.

(AQW 817/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have not made any decisions regarding the re-configuration of health and social care services. I shall be looking at issues which impact on the provision of treatment and care in the Trusts. I want to assure the public that the safety and quality of services will be my first concern. My focus will be on improvement in health outcomes for the population of Northern Ireland.

Department of Justice

PSNI: Equal Pay Dispute

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what progress has been made in reaching the equal pay dispute of Civil Servants seconded to the PSNI and the Northern Ireland Office.

(AQW 330/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): In respect of staff in the Department of Justice with previous service in PSNI and the Northern Ireland Office, it remains my position that no legal liability has been established which would justify making an equal pay settlement. However, it is also my position that my officials should meet with the trade union NIPSA if they have further or new issues to discuss.

In respect of police staff, the Department of Finance and Personnel have advised that as pay and grading delegation was granted to the Northern Ireland Office (including Police Staff) in 1996, no liability exists in respect of equal pay when comparing PSNI support staff and civil servants.

In respect of both civil servants and police staff, cases have been lodged in the County Court.

Local District Policing Partnerships

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the effectiveness of the local District Policing Partnerships.

(AQW 347/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Policing Board (the Board) has a statutory responsibility to assess the effectiveness of District Policing Partnerships (DPPs) in performing their statutory duties.

To fulfil this requirement, the Board undertakes an ongoing performance assessment of each DPP and Belfast Sub-Group against an agreed DPP Effectiveness Framework.

In August 2010, the Board's Community Engagement Committee (CEC) considered an annual assessment of the work of DPPs and Belfast Sub-Groups for the 2009/10 reporting year. The Board subsequently published a summary report in relation to DPP performance during the 2009/10 reporting year.

Information from the report confirms that;

- A total of 20 DPPs and Belfast Sub-Groups met between 10 and 12 of the 13 targets assessed,
- 8 DPPs met either 8 or 9 targets from the 13 targets assessed, and
- 1 DPP met less than 7 targets from the 13 targets assessed during the 2009/10 reporting period.

Prisoners

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of (i) prisoner fatalities; and (ii) prisoners who escaped detention from (a) 12 April 2009 until he took up office; and (b) from 13 April 2010 to 12 April 2011.

(AQW 358/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) **Prisoner Fatalities**

(a) From 12 April 2009 to 11 April 2010, there were four prisoner fatalities, two by natural causes, one suspected suicide and one prisoner who died while in police custody.

(b) From 12 April 2010 (when I took up office) to 11 April 2011, there were three prisoner fatalities, two by natural causes and one suspected suicide.

(ii) **Escapes from Detention**

(a) From 12 April 2009 to 11 April 2010, one prisoner escaped from detention at Hydebank Wood.

(b) From 12 April 2010 to 11 April 2011, one prisoner escaped from an outside hospital, where he was receiving treatment.

Both prisoners who escaped from detention have been returned to custody.

In addition to this three prisoners were erroneously released from custody in late 2010. Devidas Paliutus is currently being held on a murder charge in the Republic of Ireland, having elected to be tried there. The two other prisoners have both been returned to custody in Northern Ireland.

Injunctions or Super-injunctions

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last five years, (i) how many injunctions or super-injunctions have been granted to convicted criminals who (a) have served their sentence; or (b) are currently in prison; and (iii) to detail how many have received legal aid for these applications and at what cost.

(AQW 369/11-15)

Mr Ford: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Case Number 11/000893

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17/11-15, whether a defence bill was submitted to Legal Aid for costs of £10,205, and how this figure was reached in line with the Legal Services Commission rates.

(AQW 376/11-15)

Mr Ford: The bill in respect of the Crown Court trial has not yet been submitted.

The fees in respect of the committal proceedings, in case number 11/000893, were paid in April and detailed in the table below. There are no further claims due for the committal hearing. The fee payable is made up of the standard fee for the category of case, together with travel and mileage being payable in addition to that fee in accordance with the Magistrates' Courts and County Court Appeals (Criminal Legal Aid) (Costs) Rules (NI) 2009.

	PC	VAT	Total
Committal fee	820.00		

	PC	VAT	Total
Travel	115.52		
Mileage	68.56		
Total	1004.08	200.82	1204.90

Case Number 10/111192

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the costs for the defence in case number 10/111192 have been submitted to Legal Aid for payment; and if so, (i) when they were submitted; (ii) when it will be paid; and (iii) how much will be paid.

(AQW 414/11-15)

Mr Ford: All of the legal bills for the defence costs of case 10/111192 have not yet been submitted.

The bill for defence costs in the Crown Court trial was submitted in February 2011. The total fees, which were authorised and paid in March 2011, were £6, 383.17 (including VAT of £1, 063.86).

The bills for the defence costs in the Magistrates Court have not yet been submitted. The estimated costs remain in the region of £1, 500 (including VAT).

Legal Aid

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Justice to list the categories under which legal aid is paid; and how much has been paid out under each category in each of the last five years.

(AQW 420/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below represents a five year period of expenditure covering five categories of legal aid. Figures were provided by the NI Legal Services Commission.

Year	Criminal £m	Legal Advice and Assistance £m	ABWOR £m	Children Order £m	Civil £m	Total Expenditure £m
2005-2006	30.6	2.6	1.6	3.1	20.1	58.0
2006-2007	41.7	3.2	1.4	4.6	18.5	69.4
2007-2008	44.5	2.6	1.7	4.0	19.2	72.0
2008-2009	50.6	3.6	1.6	5.2	22.1	83.1
2009-2010	60.0	3.5	1.8	5.5	26.1	96.9

Criminal Legal Aid

Criminal legal aid provides free legal representation to an accused person facing criminal charges in the Magistrates' Court, appeals to the County Court and for trials in the Crown Court. It is available for adult and youth defendants and is granted by the Judiciary subject to two tests being met, namely the accused has insufficient means and it is in the interests of justice that free legal aid should be granted.

Legal Advice and Assistance

This is popularly known as the "Green Form Scheme" and allows a person to obtain preliminary legal advice from a solicitor on any point of Northern Ireland Law.

Assistance by Way of Representation (ABWOR)

ABWOR is an extension of the Advice and Assistance scheme and allows a solicitor, and in some instances counsel, to provide representation to an assisted person in a number of civil proceedings in the Magistrates' Courts

The Children Order(Northern Ireland) Order 1995

Funding for proceedings under the Children (NI) Order 1995 is provided as either ABWOR (Assistance By Way of Representation) or civil legal aid, depending on the court before which the proceedings are brought.

Civil Legal Aid

Civil legal aid provides legal representation in civil court proceedings, primarily in the County Court and High Court. Access to civil legal aid is determined by the NI Legal Services Commission.

Legal Aid

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how the amount spent on Legal Aid in the last available financial year compares with (i) England; (ii) Scotland; (iii) Wales; and (iv) the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 421/11-15)

Mr Ford:

	Total Legal Aid Expenditure	Population millions	Per Capita Spend
England and Wales	£ 2149m	54.4	£ 39.50
Scotland	£ 150.5m	5.4	£ 27.87
Northern Ireland	£ 96.9m	1.8	£ 53.83
Ireland	€ 87.00	4.2	€ 20.71

Figures are for the year 2009/10, except for the Republic of Ireland, which are for the calendar year 2010.

Orders of No Order (Final Order)

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice (i) why there was an increase in the number of Orders of No Order (Final Order) made by Courts in the first quarter of this year; and (ii) what was the subject of each original application.

(AQW 471/11-15)

Mr Ford: A total of 46 (All figures are provisional until the publication of the annual Judicial Statistics) orders of 'No Order' were made in the period October to December 2010 compared to 60¹ orders of 'No Order' in the period January to March 2011. The number of No Orders made will fluctuate over different periods. In the same period there was a 15% decrease in the number of final orders made.

The table below provides a breakdown of initiating applications which resulted in an order of "No Order" in the period January – March 2011.

	Number
Article 50 Care Family Proceedings Court	6

1 Includes Edenderry Nursery School, Holywood Nursery School and Priory College

	Number
Article 8 Family Care Centre	4
Article 8 Family Proceedings Court	33
C2 Application – leave granted to commence proceedings	1
Contact with a child in care Family Care Centre	2
Declaration of parentage	1
Extend Education Supervision Order	4
Application for Prohibited Steps	6
Extend Emergency Protection Order	3
Total	60

The provisional quarterly bulletin for October to December 2010 recorded a nil return for the number of 'No Orders' made. The 'No Order' statistics were incorporated under the 'Other Orders' category in error. This error would have been identified in the annual validation exercise and has now been rectified for all quarterly bulletins.

Contact Orders

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice, given that there were 815 Contact Orders made during the first quarter of this year, why there were 2.420 interim Contact Orders made.

(AQW 473/11-15)

Mr Ford: Interim orders are often used by the court to establish the level and frequency of contact suitable in each case. As a consequence there may be a number of interim orders made for an individual case before the final contact order is made.

Contact Orders

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many of the 815 Contact Orders that were made in the first quarter of this year were applied for by (i) mothers; (ii) fathers; and (iii) others.

(AQW 475/11-15)

Mr Ford: The familial designation of a person applying for a contact order is not readily available and could only be obtained/compiled at disproportionate cost.

Legal Aid

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total cost of legal aid in each of the last five years.

(AQW 486/11-15)

Mr Ford:

TOTAL COST OF LEGAL AID IN EACH OF THE LAST 5 YEARS

Financial Year	Legal Aid Fund Expenditure £'m	Grant in Aid Expenditure £'m	Total Expenditure £'m
2006/07	69.4	5.5	74.9
2007/08	72.0	5.7	77.7
2008/09	83.1	6.7	89.8

Financial Year	Legal Aid Fund Expenditure £'m	Grant in Aid Expenditure £'m	Total Expenditure £'m
2009/10	96.9	7.4	104.3
2010/11	93.3	7.8	101.1

The figures used in the above table are the cash expenditure figures. The expenditure has been provided for the administrative costs of Legal Aid (Grant in Aid) and the expenditure for the Legal Aid Fund.

Separated Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3264/11, whether the definition of a separated prisoner remains unchanged.

(AQW 513/11-15)

Mr Ford: The definition of a separated prisoner, as detailed in AQW3264/11, has not changed.

Community Police Officers: Mobile Phones

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 21/11-15, (i) who meets the running costs and call charges of the mobile phones supplied to Community Police Officers by the District Policing Partnerships; and (ii) to detail the running costs and call charges to date.

(AQW 516/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have been advised that the running costs and call charges of the mobile phones supplied to Community Police Officers by the District Policing Partnerships are met by the PSNI, and costs and charges to date are therefore an operational matter for the Chief Constable.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Colin Howell Cases: Legal Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice (i) for an update on the legal costs of the Colin Howell cases; and (ii) what steps have been taken, or will be taken, to recover these costs from Mr Howell's estate.

(AQW 537/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total amount of fees paid to date in respect of Colin Howell's representation in the Magistrates' Court is £32,050.35 (exc VAT of £4,507.30). There is still an outstanding bill to be paid and therefore the total cost will be greater. These bills cover his representation in respect of the charges of murder and sexual assault.

The Legal Services Commission has still not received any bills for assessment in relation to the Crown Court murder trial. The Commission has not amended its provisional estimate that the cost of this case is unlikely to be less than £24,000 (inc VAT).

The Commission has also not received any bills for assessment in relation to the Crown Court trial for the subsequent sexual assault charges. The provisional estimate for this trial indicates that the cost is unlikely to be less than £15,000 (inc VAT).

At present there is no facility to recover legal aid costs from Colin Howell. An enabling power was included in the Justice Act (NI) 2011 to facilitate the introduction of Recovery of Defence Costs Orders, but this will not apply retrospectively to the Howell case.

Agreement Ending Roe House Protest

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the proposed new search facility outlined in the text of 'Agreement Ending Roe House Protest'.

(AQW 543/11-15)

Mr Ford: In line with the agreement of 12 August, a new search facility for separated prisoners, located within the Bush and Roe House complex, became operational on 17 November 2010. This facility has removed the requirement for routine full body searching of separated prisoners moving between areas within the prison.

All separated prisoners entering and leaving the Bush and Roe complex are required to be searched in the new facility. The search is "airport style" requiring outer clothing and shoes to be removed, a rubdown search of the person carried out and the use of technical aids to assist with the detection of contraband.

Sex Offender

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 99/11-15, for his assessment of (i) how such a vague address can ensure public safety given that the address cannot be constantly policed or patrolled; and (ii) whether a park is a suitable place for the sex-offender to reside given his previous record.

(AQW 595/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Sexual Offences Act 2003 allows the naming of a location of a place where an offender can regularly be found. A park bench falls within that category. If the person cannot be found at the location notified, then he may be committing an offence.

The risk from sex offenders in the community is assessed and managed under multi agency public protection arrangements, the focus of which is to reduce the risk an individual may pose. Risk management plans are specific to each individual offender and, therefore, address all circumstances in relation to the risk posed.

I cannot comment on individual cases.

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what legislation his Department intends to introduce in (i) 2011/12; and (ii) the following years of this mandate.

(AQW 640/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is one bill currently at the preparation stage which I plan to bring forward in 2011/12. The Compliance Bill, a working title at the moment, will ensure that Northern Ireland is compliant with Human Rights requirements in two specific and separate areas: DNA and fingerprint retention; and sex offender notification.

There are three other bills at a more formative stage that I plan to bring forward later in the current mandate. Firstly, a strategic Justice Bill designed to deliver faster, fairer justice; secondly, new mental capacity legislation, on which my Department is working closely with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety; and thirdly, a Bail Bill, proposals for which are being prepared by the Northern Ireland Law Commission.

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice when staff first raised concerns about the issues at the Prisoner Assessment Unit which ultimately led to its closure.

(AQW 648/11-15)

Mr Ford: Staff first raised concerns following two unconnected incidents which took place on 7 and 17 of April which involved a breach of prison rules by several prisoners at the Prisoner Assessment Unit. The prisoners involved in these incidents were subsequently returned to Maghaberry Prison.

A third incident, again involving a breach of prison rules, took place on Sunday 18 April and was brought to the attention of Maghaberry Senior Management on 21 April.

Following this, a decision was taken immediately to temporarily close the Unit to facilitate a thorough review and investigation into each of the incidents.

Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW159/11-15, at which of the three stage testing in the community was the prisoner who was returned to Maghaberry Prison in April 2011, **(AQW 652/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The prisoner in question was in Phase Two of the pre-release scheme prior to recall. He was working in the community from Monday through to Friday, whilst residing at the PAU. Due to lack of hostel placements in the community he resided in the PAU at the weekend, during which he was allowed periods of daytime Unaccompanied Temporary Release.

Legal Aid Dispute

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to barristers and the Legal Aid dispute, whether prospective barristers sourced from England will be able to practise in Northern Ireland; and how will they be able to take instructions from solicitors who are also involved in the dispute.

(AQW 653/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are no major impediments to stop a barrister normally based in England from coming to practise in Northern Ireland. There are a number of instances where barristers from England have appeared before the courts here. My officials have written to 664 barristers, including 21 barristers from outside Northern Ireland who have previously represented clients before the courts in Northern Ireland, with a view to determining whether or not they are prepared to take on Crown Court work.

A barrister wishing to practise here must apply to the General Council of the Bar of Northern Ireland, (the Bar Council), before being permitted to practise. An abridged, flexible procedure for barristers from outside Northern Ireland wishing to obtain a temporary practising certificate is available from the Bar Council. In the event that barristers from England do choose to take on work in Northern Ireland, it would be a matter for them to determine in what manner they would take instructions from solicitors.

Legal Aid Rates

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to solicitors who have come off record and barristers who refuse to accept cases under the new Legal Aid rates, whether cases, which are currently halted because of the lack of legal representation for the defendant, could be dismissed due to unreasonable delay.

(AQW 654/11-15)

Mr Ford: Whether a case should be dismissed for any reason is a matter for the Judge in any individual case. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on this.

I am making every effort to ensure that defendants have access to legal representation, so that cases can proceed without delay. My officials have written to 664 barristers and all solicitors' firms in Northern Ireland, with a view to determining whether or not they are prepared to take on Crown Court work at the new rates agreed by the Assembly. A list of solicitors willing to take on Crown Court work has been compiled and sent to defendants whom it appears may be without legal representation.

Newry Crown Court

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) for his assessment of the proceedings which occurred at Newry Crown Court on 9 June 2011, when a defence team did not have sight of legal papers prior to entering a plea or fully consulting with their client; (ii) whether his Department, or any other agency, intends to investigate the issue; and (iii) whether he will make a statement in relation to this matter. **(AQW 755/11-15)**

Mr Ford: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on ongoing court proceedings in an individual case. Proceedings before any court are a matter for the Judge in that court. The regulation of the legal profession is a matter for the Law Society in respect of solicitors and the Bar Council in respect of barristers. Both organisations have published complaints procedures, should any person wish to complain about the standard of the legal services they have received. I do not, therefore, plan to investigate further or make a statement on this issue.

Prison Service: External Advisers

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the external advisers who have been appointed to the Prison Service in the last 12 months, including what recruitment procedures were followed and the associated remuneration. **(AQW 796/11-15)**

Mr Ford: As part of the Northern Ireland Prison Service's Strategic Efficiency & Effectiveness Programme the Prison Service has undertaken a number of short term external appointments.

Two former HMPS profilers developed a Target Operating Model required for an Exit Business Case at a cost of £20,000 plus travel and accommodation. Approval was sought and given as a Direct Award Contract, given the highly specific and limited expertise required.

The Department of Finance & Personnel's Business & Consultancy Service are currently undertaking two pieces of work.

Firstly, developmental work on the Role of the Prison Officer and that of a Prison Officer - Support Grade at a cost of £8,170. Secondly, an extensive review of the NIPS Estate Management function that will explore new and innovative solutions and analyse various operating models. The Review will provide a long-term strategic blueprint for NIPS at a cost of £45,530.

A review of the NIPS Dog Deployment Policy was carried out by two members of the HMPS National Dog and Technical Support Group. There was no charge for this work other than travel and accommodation costs.

Work undertaken using tender and framework procurement routes included two contracts for the development of Asbestos Registers at a cost of £5,700 and £8,600, a Legionella Audit for £5,200, Preparation of a Measured Term Contract Documentation and Tender evaluation for £18,000, preparation of Tender Contract Documentation for Monitoring and Targeting Energy Usage for £17,350, and a Condition Survey of Medium Pressure Hot Water for £ 5,570.

Death by Dangerous Driving

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice (i) what is the sentencing range for the offence of death by dangerous driving; and (ii) what aggravating and mitigating factors are taken into consideration when a sentence is passed for this offence. **(AQW 812/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The maximum sentence permitted in law for the offence of causing death by dangerous driving is 14 years' imprisonment. The determination of the appropriate sentence in individual cases is of course a matter for the judiciary taking account of any aggravating or mitigating factors pertaining to that case. The judiciary are assisted in determining the appropriate sentence by guideline judgements from the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal. The relevant guideline judgments for this offence are R

–v- McCartney [2007] NICA 41 and Attorney General's Reference (Number 2 of 2008) (McGinn) [2008] NICA 40 which set out in some detail the sentencing range to be applied for this offence in relation to the varying degrees of culpability of the offender. They are available publicly on the website of the Judicial Studies Board (www.jsbni.com) under Sentencing Guidelines – Road Traffic Offences. These judgments also set out aggravating and mitigating factors which may be considered in determining an individual sentence within the relevant sentencing range.

Prison Service

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he had with Prison Service personnel in relation to the creation of the posts of (i) Organisational Change Manager; (ii) HR and Organisational Development Directorate Project Manager; (iii) Finance and Corporate Services Directorate Project Manager; and (iv) Offender Policy and Regimes Directorate Project Manager.

(AQW 815/11-15)

Mr Ford: The interim report by the Prison Review team indicated that the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service “will need the support of a dedicated programme manager, with experience of change management in a large and service-providing organisation, supported by a dedicated team, which must include a strong and professional HR capability”.

I have had regular meetings with the Director General regarding the Prison Review Team’s interim report and he has kept me informed of the process being followed to recruit the Change Management Team.

Department for Regional Development

A6 Dualling Scheme and Dungiven Bypass

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the timescale for the completion of the (i) A6 dualling scheme; and (ii) Dungiven Bypass.

(AQW 294/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department’s Roads Service expects to publish an Environmental Statement, draft Direction Order and draft Vesting Order later this year for the 30 kilometre dual carriageway from Londonderry to Dungiven, including a dual carriageway bypass of Dungiven. Publication of these Orders will invite formal comment and objection and this will most likely lead to a public inquiry in Spring 2012, to examine the case for and against the scheme.

Given the reduction of two fifths in the Executive’s overall capital funding, the funds currently allocated to my Department in the 2011-2015 budget would not allow construction of the Londonderry to Dungiven dual carriageway or Dungiven Bypass to commence before 2014-2015, at the earliest.

Glen Road, Derry: Traffic-calming Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail why a public consultation was not carried out prior to the installation of a traffic-calming scheme on the Glen Road, Derry.

(AQW 295/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department’s Roads Service has advised that the installation of traffic islands on the Glen Road was as a follow-up to an earlier resurfacing scheme and a formal public consultation was not required.

I understand that officials from Roads Service met with the Member and the residents of the area during the construction of the islands, and a number of changes were effected to accommodate their concerns.

University of Ulsters' Magee College: Residents' Parking Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking in relation to a residents' parking scheme in the vicinity of the University of Ulsters' Magee College. (AQW 296/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a working group, set up last year to consider options for dealing with parking in the vicinity of the Magee Campus in Londonderry, is expected to report its findings by the end of summer 2011. It is anticipated that a Residents' Parking Scheme will be included as an option for some residents in the area. However, the progression of any Residents' Parking Scheme will be dependent upon those areas identified meeting the necessary criteria and achieving the required level of support from residents.

Sydenham Bypass Carriageway

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed upgrade of the Sydenham Bypass carriageway network. (AQW 310/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is continuing to develop proposals for the A2 Sydenham Bypass Improvement Scheme. The proposed scheme will widen a 2.5km length between Bridge End and Knocknagoney from dual 2-lane carriageway to a dual 3-lane carriageway.

The scheme is being developed through a three stage assessment process:

- Stage 1 – focused on identifying the environmental, engineering, economic and traffic advantages and disadvantages, as well as the constraints associated with broadly defined improvement strategies. This concluded in the selection of the Proposed Corridor in May 2008;
- Stage 2 – is a detailed assessment of the range of options within the Proposed Corridor. This concluded in the selection of the Preferred Option in February 2010; and
- Stage 3 – involves detailed assessment of the Preferred Option, on which work is currently progressing. This will result in the publication of the Statutory Orders, which include the draft Direction Orders, Environmental Statement and Vesting Orders. Following this, there will then be a formal consultation period for comment and depending on the response a Public Inquiry may be held. The publication of the draft orders is envisaged in 2012.

It is not envisaged that the scheme will proceed to procurement during the current 2011-2015 budget period.

Craigantlet Crossroads, Holywood: Proposed Roundabouts

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how much funding has been allocated for two proposed roundabouts adjacent to Craigantlet Crossroads in Holywood; and (ii) the timescale for the work to commence on the scheme. (AQW 311/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a proposed scheme to upgrade two junctions in the vicinity of Craigantlet Crossroads will cost in the region of £2.1 million. It is anticipated that a planning application and environmental statement for this major improvement scheme will be submitted in autumn of this year.

The timescale for construction of this scheme will be dependent on the outcomes of the various statutory processes, land acquisition and the availability of the necessary finance.

While a firm commitment on funding for this project cannot be given until the various statutory processes have been successfully completed, the scheme remains a high priority for Roads Service.

Staff Sick Leave

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of staff taking two or more periods of sick leave in a year.

(AQW 335/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The latest statistics published by NISRA for the 2009/10 financial year showed that my Department had the lowest level of absence in the non-industrial grades in the NI Civil Service at 6.7 average working days lost per full-time member of staff. My Department will continue to focus on managing sick absence effectively and, in so doing, will robustly apply the terms set out in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Inefficiency Sickness Absence policy. This policy includes Review Points, ie points at which a sickness absence record must be reviewed. The NI Civil Service Review Points are 4 occasions or 10 working days in a rolling 12-month period.

When a member of staff reaches the Review Point, inefficiency action, including Written Warnings and ultimately dismissal, may be initiated.

Blue Badges

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of people who were refused a Blue Badge renewal in the last 12 months, and of these, how many had their Blue Badge renewed after reassessment.

(AQW 357/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would advise the Member that records maintained by my Department's Roads Service do not differentiate between details of renewal and first-time appeals against the refusal of a Blue Badge and I am therefore unable to provide the information requested.

However, I can advise that in the 2010/11 financial year, a total of 971 Blue Badge applications were refused, of which 366 were appealed and in 299 cases, the appeal was successful. For most of the successful appeals, medical evidence was provided which had not been included with the original application.

Ballykelly Bypass

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development if will assess the level of daily vehicle usage of the A2 dual carriageway between Maydown and Londonderry Airport to ascertain the need for the Ballykelly Bypass.

(AQW 359/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service regularly monitors traffic flows across the road network and will continue to do so. No traffic flow surveys have been carried out along the new A2 Maydown to City of Derry Airport dual carriageway scheme since its completion in February 2011, however, surveys are currently being planned. It is unlikely that the traffic flows at this location will influence the need for the A2 Ballykelly Bypass.

The preferred route for the Ballykelly Bypass was announced in March 2010, at which time a Cost Benefit Analysis, which is a measure of the scheme's economic viability, confirmed that it would deliver a positive economic return.

Traffic flows used for the A2 Ballykelly Bypass preferred route assessment were ascertained by undertaking surveys in November 2008. The results of which were:

- 13,845 vehicles to the west of the village; and
- 14,792 vehicles to the east of the village.

A26 between Ballymena and Glarryford and Glarryford and the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the difference in the levels of daily vehicle usage of the A26 between (i) Ballymena and Glarryford; and (ii) Glarryford and the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine.

(AQW 360/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the latest validated information for the A26 Frosses Road is contained in the Roads Service Report 'Traffic and Travel Information 2009' which incorporates the Annual Traffic Census and Vehicle Kilometres of Travel statistics.

There are four automated traffic counting sites along the stretch of the A26 between Ballymena and the Causeway Hospital. The Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) flow for each site is calculated from the information collected and the tables below detail the 2009 validated information for the four sites, together with information currently being processed for inclusion in the forthcoming 2010 Report:

Between Ballymena and Glarryford		
Location	Year	Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)
North of M2 Ballymena Bypass at Teeshan (site 113)	2009	21,720
	2010	20,280

Between Glarryford and Causeway Hospital, Coleraine		
Location	Year	Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)
South-East of Ballymoney at Glenlough (site 317)	2009	15,050
	2010	14,610
Ballymoney By-pass East of Ballybogey Road (site 316)	2009	17,150
	2010	15,560
Coleraine to Ballymoney at Windyhall (site 310)	2009	15,940
	2010	16,130

The traffic volume varies along the A26 Frosses Road with reductions in flows as traffic leave the route for destinations, such as Ballycastle via the A44 Drone's Road, Cloughmills and Dunloy. The AADT volume is in excess of 20,000 vehicles per day immediately north of Ballymena, reducing to between 14,500 and 15,500 vehicles per day in the vicinity of Ballymoney, before increasing to over 16,000 vehicles per day near Coleraine. In comparison with 2009, the 2010 AADT volume has reduced at the Ballymena and Ballymoney sites and increased at the site closer to Coleraine. However, I should advise that the 2010 information have yet to be verified.

A6 from Castledawson to Derry

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to the decoupling of the by-pass planned for Dungiven as part of the proposed upgrade to the A6 from Castledawson to Derry.

(AQW 361/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service expects to publish an Environmental Statement, draft Direction Order and draft Vesting Order later this year for the 30 kilometre dual carriageway from

Londonderry to Dungiven, including a dual carriageway bypass of Dungiven. Publication of these Orders will invite formal comment and objection, and this will most likely lead to a public inquiry in Spring 2012 to examine the case for and against the scheme.

Given the reduction of two-fifths in the Executive's overall capital funding, the funds currently allocated to my Department in the 2011-2015 budget would not allow construction of the Londonderry to Dungiven dual carriageway, or Dungiven Bypass to commence before 2014-2015, at the earliest.

Park and Ride Schemes

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to list the Park and Ride schemes which are currently in operation; (ii) to detail how much each scheme cost to (a) set up; and (b) run on an annual basis; and (iii) to detail the amount of revenue raised to date by each scheme.

(AQW 367/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In addition to a wide range of Park and Share schemes, there are 44 Park and Ride schemes in Northern Ireland operated by Translink or my Department's Roads Service. Details of those schemes and the requested information, where available, are set out in the table below. It is not possible, however, to provide the information requested in relation to all sites.

With regard to set up costs, a number of the schemes set out in the table have been in operation for some considerable time and it is no longer possible to separately identify the initial construction costs.

While the operation of sites will incur costs, the majority of Park and Ride sites are operated as complementary infrastructure to bus and rail operations and any annual maintenance costs would be subsumed within general maintenance costs. Separate running costs for these sites could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Most Park and Ride sites are not revenue raising and do not levy parking charges. Rather, they aim to facilitate access to public transport by car users with customers paying for the relevant bus or rail service that they require. Details of the small number of revenue raising sites in which my Department's Roads Service is currently involved are set out separately in the further table below. The table provides details of all Roads Service revenue raised and annual direct running costs associated with the car park costs.

TABLE 1: NON-REVENUE RAISING PARK AND RIDE SITES

Site Name	Set-Up Costs	Annual Running Costs
Altnagelvin / Drumahoe	£250,000	£3,200
Antrim	Nil	n/a*
Ballee, Ballymena	£85,000	Nil
Ballgawley Rbt.	£77,000	Nil
Ballycastle	n/a	n/a
Ballyclare Bus Station	n/a	n/a
Ballymena	n/a	n/a
Ballymoney	n/a	n/a
Bangor	n/a	n/a
Black's Road	£344,000	£31,000
Cairnshill	£1,610,000	£13,000
Carnalea	n/a	n/a

Site Name	Set-Up Costs	Annual Running Costs
Carrickfergus	£612,581	n/a
Castledawson Rbt	n/a	Nil
Castlerock	n/a	n/a
Central Station	n/a	n/a
Coleraine	n/a	n/a
Craigadick	n/a	Nil
Dungannon	£137,854	n/a
Dunsilly	£285,000	Nil
Eastside, Belfast	£80,000	Details set out in Table 2
The Elk, Castledawson	n/a	Nil
Finaghy	£91,165	n/a
Greenisland	£325,100	n/a
Helen's Bay	n/a	n/a
Hollywood	n/a	n/a
Larne	n/a	n/a
Larne Station	n/a	n/a
Lisburn	n/a	n/a
Londonderry	n/a	n/a
Lough Road, Lurgan	n/a	n/a
Lurgan	£214,982	n/a
Maguiresbridge	n/a	n/a
Moira	£127,153	n/a
Mossley West	£17,153	n/a
Newry Station	£2,269,000	n/a
Northside, Belfast	n/a	Details set out in Table 2
Portadown	n/a	n/a
Ravenscroft Avenue	£25,000	n/a
Sprucefield	£329,000	£38,500
Strabane	n/a	n/a
TemplepatrickVillage	£73,000	Nil
Toome Bypass	£50,000	Nil
Whiteabbey	£526,034	n/a
Whitehead	£121,294	n/a
York Street	n/a	Details set out in Table 2

Site Name	Set-Up Costs	Annual Running Costs
Yorkgate	n/a	n/a

*na: Not Available

TABLE 2: REVENUE RAISING PARK AND RIDE SITES

Financial Year (ending 31 March)	DRD Roads Service Car Park	Revenue £	Direct Costs £
2010-11	EastsidePark& Ride, Belfast	76,827	£78,530
	NorthsidePark& Ride, Belfast	127,955	£125,026
	York Street 2, Park & Ride, Belfast	20,615	£32,141
2009-10	EastsidePark& Ride, Belfast	84,470	£88,862
	NorthsidePark& Ride, Belfast	148,662	£141,816
	York Street 2, Park & Ride, Belfast	42,605	£32,656
2008-09	EastsidePark& Ride, Belfast	83,895	£75,763
	NorthsidePark& Ride, Belfast	157,746	£132,288
	York Street 2, Park & Ride, Belfast	76,377	£29,253
2007-08	EastsidePark& Ride, Belfast	86,485	£61,433
	NorthsidePark& Ride, Belfast	161,572	£116,390
	York Street 2, Park & Ride, Belfast	73,034	£19,172
2006-07	EastsidePark& Ride, Belfast	71,014	£91,374
	NorthsidePark& Ride, Belfast	146,677	£168,485
	York Street 2, Park & Ride, Belfast	51,447	£37,082

South Belfast: Residents-Only Parking Schemes

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development how he intends to progress earlier plans for Residents Only Parking Schemes in South Belfast.

(AQW 368/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that following representations received concerning the cost of residents' parking permits in areas that were not wholly or partially within a Neighbourhood Renewal Area, as defined by the Department for Social Development, its officials are currently finalising a review of the economic appraisal.

When this review is completed and the existing proposed cost is either confirmed or a revised cost established, officials will re-engage with local community representatives.

With regard to other areas where there will be no charge for permits, officials are awaiting contact from local representatives.

Further progress of these schemes will depend on the availability of the necessary resources required to both develop and implement such schemes.

Enniskillen: Waste Water Pumping Stations

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the work that is planned to tackle the recurring odour problem at waste water pumping stations in Enniskillen, which is affecting the residents of the Danny's Mill Road area.

(AQW 373/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that odour control equipment has been installed at the wastewater pumping station in Enniskillen, which should contribute to a reduction in the level of odours in the Danny's Mill Road area. The equipment became operational on 6 May 2011 and NIW will monitor its performance and make any adjustments necessary to ensure it remains effective.

On-Street Car Parking Charges

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development when he will make an announcement on whether he intends to proceed with on-street car parking charges.

(AQW 388/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In response to the potential impact on retail trade, I have initiated a review of the policy of introducing new on-street parking charges in towns throughout Northern Ireland.

I intend to announce my decision in due course.

NI Water

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development how many NI Water customers were recently overcharged, broken down by (i) constituency; and (ii) council area.

(AQW 389/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 83/11 dated 31 May 2011.

Departmental Documentation

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to continue providing all departmental documentation in Irish.

(AQW 408/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: No. I understand it has not been the practice of the Department to provide all departmental documents in Irish. I have made some changes to departmental writing paper and advertisements. I have also asked officials to review the Codes of Courtesy for Irish and Ulster Scots, to ensure that my Department meets its obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in the most cost effective way.

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 431/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's expenditure on external consultants in each financial year since April 2007 is set out in the table below:

Financial Year	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Expenditure £	1,839,078	781,444	543,000	401,377*

* The expenditure quoted for the 2010-11 financial year is a provisional outturn figure.

Street Lighting

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to use energy saving light bulbs for street lighting.

(AQW 533/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it seeks to use the most suitable street lighting equipment for energy efficiency and performance. Conventional energy saving light bulbs, such as compact fluorescents, are generally not the most energy efficient choice for street lighting.

Other energy efficient lamps, such as Light Emitting Diodes (LEDs), are likely to become viable for street lighting in the near future. Roads Service has already trialled a number of LED lanterns, and plans further installations to assess their efficiency and performance, with a view to more widespread use in future.

SmartPasses

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will make representations to his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland on SmartPasses, and other concessionary schemes, which are accepted on Bus Éireann services but are being rejected when passengers use the EX33 (Goldline 274 equivalent) service, which is a commercial service run under the auspices of Bus Éireann.

(AQW 544/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Northern Ireland residents who are holders of a Senior SmartPass (for those over the age of 65), a Registered Blind SmartPass or a War Disablement SmartPass are entitled to free travel on cross-border bus and rail services, part funded by the Irish Department of Social Protection. This concession is available only on those services participating in the Irish Free Travel Scheme.

Although there are currently eight participating daily return services on the Londonderry to Dublin/Dublin Airport route on which holders of these Northern Ireland SmartPasses can enjoy free travel, the X33 express bus service which operates two additional daily return services, at premium fares, does not have participation in the Irish Free Travel Scheme. The Bus Éireann timetable sets out that free travel is not available on X33 services.

My officials have brought the Member's concerns to the attention of the Department of Social Protection.

Antrim to Crumlin Railway Line

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to review the upgrading of the Antrim to Crumlin railway line.

(AQW 568/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have no plans to review the current status of the railway line between Antrim and Knockmore junction. Translink continues to maintain the line to the standard necessary to allow it to be used for diversionary services. Any work that might be carried out to bring back regular services to this line is considered to be beyond the period of the current budget settlement.

Door-to-Door Transport Service

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people used the Door-to-Door transport service in each of the last five years.

(AQW 675/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The information is not available in the format requested. Door-to-Door service providers record the number of passenger trips undertaken but not the number of people who use the service.

The number of passenger trips in each of the last five years is as follow:-

2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
2,261	43,588	75,291	91,486	94,103

It should be noted that contracted Door-to-Door services in Belfast and Londonderry only commenced in April 2008.

New Local Urban Transport Service

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development what contractual safeguards are in place for the new local urban transport service for people with disabilities to ensure that the level of service provided during off-peak periods is based on the needs of users and not on cost.

(AQW 676/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The recent invitation to tender documents for the Door-to-Door service provision asked bidders to submit proposals for a “core hours” Door-to-Door service between 9:00am and 5:00pm, Monday to Friday. Additionally bidders were asked to provide costs for service delivery in the “non-core hours” of 7:30am to 9:00am and 5:00pm to 11:30pm Monday to Friday and between 7:30am and 11:30 pm on Saturdays and Sundays.

The intention of the new tender specification is to protect service delivery during the busy core hours when the majority of trips are provided. It also allows for services in “non-core hours”. The number of trips will be determine by both the needs of the users and the budget available which remains at broadly the same level as last year.

Private Housing Estates: Unadopted Roads

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the impact of the economic downturn on developers, what action he intends to take to ensure that unadopted roads in private housing estates are completed to an acceptable standard and that footpaths and street lighting are provided.

(AQW 771/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Prior to starting building works on any development where the layout of roads and footways has been determined under the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980, a developer is required to enter into an agreement with my Department’s Roads Service to provide the roads, footpaths and street lighting to the Department’s standards, as prescribed in The Private Streets (Construction) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994.

This agreement is secured by a bond that allows Roads Service to complete the road works should the developer default.

Department for Social Development

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how much his Department has spent on external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 432/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The information on external consultancy spend within the Department for Social Development (including the Social Security Agency and Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division) for each financial year from 2007/08 to 2010/11 is set out in the table provided.

	*2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	**2010/11
DSD	£739,447	£2,411,170	£1,399,999	£1,209,731

* Information provided is inclusive for the full financial year

** Please note that these figures are provisional subject to the completion and audit of end year accounts.

Social Security Benefits

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to list the Social Security Benefits which (a) can be automatically transferred to Northern Ireland; and (b) are closed down and have to be reapplied for when a resident from another part of the UK moves to Northern Ireland; (ii) the reasons for the different approach to the respective benefits; and (iii) for an estimate of additional costs associated with reprocessing applications.

(AQW 440/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Memorandum of Reciprocal Arrangements between Great Britain and Northern Ireland relating to social security enables claims for certain benefits to link without the need for a fresh claim when a person moves between the two jurisdictions. The Arrangements cover contributory and non-contributory benefits but exclude income-related benefits. Negotiations are ongoing with the Department for Work and Pensions on a possible amendment to the Memorandum to include Employment and Support Allowance which has both a contributory and an income-related component.

- (i) The benefits covered by the Arrangements are Incapacity Benefit, contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Bereavement Payment, Widowed Parent's Allowance, Bereavement Allowance, Widow's Pension, Widowed Mother's Allowance, Maternity Allowance, contributory and non-contributory State Pensions, Industrial Injuries Benefits, Child's Special Allowance (for existing beneficiaries), Severe Disablement Allowance (for existing beneficiaries) and the age addition payable as an increase to the State Pension for people over the age of 80.
- (ii) Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit, State Pension Credit and certain statutory payments such as Statutory Sick Pay are not covered.
- (iii) As income-related benefits are not covered by the Memorandum, a new claim is necessary. Income-related benefits are based on a person's income and needs, and any move between Great Britain and Northern Ireland would of necessity involve a change of circumstances which would need to be reassessed.
- (iii) The Social Security Agency does not routinely record cases of applications for Social Security benefits where residents move from another part of the United Kingdom to Northern Ireland. Therefore the Social Security Agency is unable to provide information on any additional costs associated with reprocessing applications in this type of case.

Pension Credit

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people do not claim the Pension Credit to which they are entitled.

(AQW 449/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not held by my Department as there is no available data source that can be used to accurately estimate how many people do not claim Pension Credit. Benefit uptake is one of the Social Security Agency's key priorities. Since 2005 around 90,000 invitations have been issued to older people offering a benefit assessment through the Advice Sector and 250,000 mail shots have been sent out to raise awareness of State Pension Credit. This work is complimented by participation in local promotional events and general assistance with information and advice through the Social Security Agency network of offices. By June 2011 these exercises had generated an additional £26m of annual benefit and arrears to people over 60. The number of recipients receiving State Pension Credit at May 2011 is 97,101.

MLAs' Surgeries in Community Houses

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are any restrictions on MLAs holding surgeries in community houses owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 478/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive's policy requires that any dwellings let to community groups on a community basis, should not be used in such a manner that may erroneously suggest or give the impression that the Housing Executive endorses or wishes to promote the political views or stance of any political party. The Housing Executive seeks to maintain absolute impartiality in relation to such matters. Schedule 8 of the Housing Executive's standard Community Lease therefore provides that these dwellings are not to be used "at any time for the sale or supply or consumption of intoxicating liquor or for political purposes."

The Housing Executive considers that any use of a dwelling let on this basis for the purpose of an MLA holding a surgery would constitute a breach of this provision and would therefore contravene the terms of the Lease under which the dwelling is held.

Window Replacement Schemes

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the window replacement schemes planned for the (a) Newtownards; and (b) Downpatrick District Office areas in this financial year; (ii) the number of homes involved in each scheme; and (iii) the cost of each scheme.

(AQW 484/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that it has the following schemes programmed for both its Newtownards and Downpatrick District Office areas this financial year that may involve window replacement:-

Newtownards	316 dwellings	Glen Estate, Newtownards & Laburnum/Lower Crescent, Comber
Downpatrick	369 dwellings	Annsborough, Ardglass, Ballynahinch, Crossgar, Dundrum, Killyleagh & Newcastle

However, a survey of the dwellings has yet to be conducted and windows will only be replaced if the frames are in poor condition and warrant replacement. The cost for each scheme will not be known until the surveys are completed. It should be noted that the schemes will only proceed as funding becomes available.

Window Replacement Schemes

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the window replacement schemes planned for the Foyle constituency.

(AQW 485/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A window replacement scheme is programmed for the Creggan Estate for December 2011 for 70 dwellings at an estimated cost of £210,000. The properties involved are in Beechwood Crescent, Dunaff Gardens, Central Drive, Dawros Gardens, Demesne Gardens and Dunree Gardens. A second scheme for Creggan for 117 dwellings is also being considered, subject to additional funding becoming available during the year. The properties involved will be located in Westway, Inniscarn Crescent, Bligh's Lane, Bligh's Gardens, Crawford Court and Fountain Street.

Solid Fuel Fires

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive will carry out a review of its policy which does not allow tenants to have solid fuel fires.

(AQW 494/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is currently conducting a review of its heating policy which is expected to be completed in the Autumn. The issue of solid fuel fires will be addressed within this review.

Housing Executive: Weekly Rental Rate

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the average Housing Executive weekly rental rate since April 2011 for (i) a one bed flat or apartment; (ii) a two bed flat or house; (iii) a three bed house; and (iv) a four bed house.

(AQW 496/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that it operates a point based rent system and within house types there may be significant variables that impact on rent charges. The average Housing Executive weekly rents (exclusive of rates charges) applicable from 4 April 2011 are as follows:-

House Type	Weekly Rental Rate
1 Bedroom flat	Between £34.19 - £38.85
2 Bedroom flat	Between £35.74 - £40.40
2 Bedroom house	Between £48.17 - £54.39
3 Bedroom house	Between £54.39 - £60.61
4 Bedroom house	Between £55.94 - £65.16

Public Sector Social Housing Properties

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many public sector social housing properties were built in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 498/11-15)

Mr McCausland: During the course of the 2010-11 financial year a total of 2,418 units (165 schemes) of social housing were started. This included properties purchased "off the shelf" as well as traditional new build schemes.

A total of 1,409 properties were completed during the same period.

Housing Executive Staff

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number; and (ii) the percentage of full-time staff recruited to the Housing Executive in 2010, broken down by the recruits' community background.

(AQW 499/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below sets out details of the numbers and percentages of full-time staff appointed to the Housing Executive in 2010 by community background.

	Number	Percentage
Protestant	44	50.6
Roman Catholic	39	44.8
Not Known	4	4.6

Alcohol: Minimum Price

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development what assessment he has made of the impact that the introduction of a minimum price for alcohol would have on (i) under-age drinking; and (ii) binge drinking.

(AQW 520/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A substantial knowledge base already exists on the possible relationship between pricing controls and reductions in consumption and alcohol-related harm. In particular research undertaken by Sheffield University concluded that the greatest health benefit impact would be among hazardous and harmful drinkers. A copy of this report is available in the Assembly library. DSD and DHSSPS officials are continuing to develop an evidence base to allow Ministers to develop policies to tackle underage drinking and binge drinking.

Disability Living Allowance Appeals

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many people have won Disability Living Allowance appeals in each of the last three years, broken down by council area; and (ii) what the total figure represents as a percentage of the total number of appeals.

(AQW 521/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Appeals Service arranges Disability Living Allowance appeals to be heard in Tribunal Centres throughout Northern Ireland. Statistical data can be broken down on the basis of each Tribunal Centre but not by council area. The table below outlines the total number of Disability Living Allowance appeals allowed at hearing in each of the last three years, broken down by Tribunal Centre.

DLA Appeals Allowed At Hearing (1st April 2008 to 31st March 2011)				
	Year			
Tribunal Centre	08'09	09'10	10'11	Total
Armagh	48	34	45	127
Ballymena	79	69	87	235
Ballymoney	23	25	17	65
Banbridge	38	23	22	83
Belfast	579	592	547	1718
Coleraine	87	81	75	243
Cookstown	50	39	44	133
Craigavon	108	99	92	299
Downpatrick	65	47	49	161
Dungannon	69	71	60	200
Enniskillen	59	52	70	181
Limavady	66	52	45	163
Londonderry	289	292	188	769
Magherafelt	55	41	52	148
Newry	101	86	85	272
Newtownards	102	127	99	328

DLA Appeals Allowed At Hearing (1st April 2008 to 31st March 2011)				
	Year			
Tribunal Centre	08'09	09'10	10'11	Total
Omagh	62	52	35	149
Strabane	62	54	39	155
Total number of allowed DLA appeals	1942	1836	1651	5429

The total number of Tribunal determinations for Disability Living Allowance appeals, both allowed and disallowed, for the same 3-year period was 15,507. As can be seen from the table, the total number of these appeals allowed at hearing was 5,429, which equates to 35% of all Disability Living Allowance appeal determinations.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in the (i) Larne; and (ii) Carrickfergus area have been refused Disability Living Allowance in the last twelve months.

(AQW 529/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available. The data for Disability Living Allowance refusals/disallowances is held on the Department for Work and Pensions IT System and is only available on a Northern Ireland wide basis (11,945 in the last twelve months). The data cannot be broken down by Local Council area as the Department for Work and Pensions IT System is not configured to capture refusals/disallowances in the same manner as it does for those in receipt of the benefit.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, broken down by council area.

(AQW 553/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the table below. The figures show the number of claims where Disability Living Allowance was in payment at the date of extract. The date of extract was 14th May 2011.

Disability Living Allowance recipients by Council Area

Council Area	May 2011	Council Area	May 2011
Antrim	4,560	Dungannon	6,069
Ards	6,585	Fermanagh	5,293
Armagh	5,664	Larne	2,605
Ballymena	4,476	Limavady	3,355
Ballymoney	2,724	Lisburn	10,762
Banbridge	4,481	Magherafelt	3,723
Belfast	37,081	Moyle	1,524
Carrickfergus	3,339	Newry & Mourne	10,712
Castlereagh	5,396	Newtownabbey	7,333

Council Area	May 2011	Council Area	May 2011
Coleraine	4,302	North Down	5,250
Cookstown	4,273	Omagh	6,971
Craigavon	9,986	Strabane	5,765
Londonderry	14,245	Unallocated	1,712
Down	7,186	Total	185,372

*In producing this analysis, individual records were attributed to a local government district on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated using this method, and some cannot be allocated at all.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance in each of the last three years, broken down by council area.

(AQW 554/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the table below. The figures show the number of claims where Disability Living Allowance was in payment at the dates of extract. The dates of extract are 16 May 2009, 15 May 2010 and 14 May 2011.

DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE RECIPIENTS BY COUNCIL AREA IN EACH OF THE LAST THREE YEARS

CouncilArea	2009	2010	2011	CouncilArea	2009	2010	2011
Antrim	4,340	4,482	4,560	Dungannon	5,844	6,011	6,069
Ards	6,193	6,414	6,585	Fermanagh	5,277	5,215	5,293
Armagh	5,438	5,567	5,664	Larne	2,447	2,548	2,605
Ballymena	4,212	4,359	4,476	Limavady	3,171	3,281	3,355
Ballymoney	2,622	2,718	2,724	Lisburn	10,301	10,694	10,762
Banbridge	4,225	4,426	4,481	Magherafelt	3,481	3,667	3,723
Belfast	35,860	36,839	37,081	Moyle	1,441	1,483	1,524
Carrickfergus	3,260	3,340	3,339	Newry& Mourne	10,363	10,584	10,712
Castlereagh	5,247	5,287	5,396	Newtownabbey	6,897	7,164	7,333
Coleraine	4,080	4,223	4,302	North Down	5,020	5,178	5,250
Cookstown	4,100	4,219	4,273	Omagh	6,647	6,860	6,971
Craigavon	9,692	9,955	9,986	Strabane	5,675	5,747	5,765
Londonderry	13,933	14,213	14,245	Unallocated	946	1,372	1,712
Down	6,847	7,064	7,186	Total	177,559	182,910	185,372

*In producing this analysis, individual records were attributed to a local government district on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated using this method, and some cannot be allocated at all.

Housing Waiting List

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development whether a person on a Northern Ireland housing waiting list can be transferred to a housing waiting list in England; and if so, what mechanisms exist to facilitate this process.

(AQW 596/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that applicants who wish to move outside Northern Ireland must apply directly to join the waiting list of local authorities and housing associations in the area(s) in which they would like to live. The Housing Executive facilitates such applicants by providing information on other local authorities and housing associations.

Former St Patrick's Barracks Site, Ballymena: Houses

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development when the houses on the former St Patrick's Barracks site, Ballymena will be allocated.

(AQW 598/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I understand that ownership of the homes on this site at St.Patrick's Barracks in Ballymena have now transferred from Defence Estates to OFMdfM.

I am keen to see them brought back into use as soon as practicably possible and I have asked my officials to discuss with OFMdfM to see how this can be delivered. However the homes themselves require significant refurbishment and the Housing Association appointed to oversee their improvement advise me it could take up to 5 months to complete the work once on-site. This will obviously delay any allocation of the homes in question however I will be happy to update the member once these homes are ready for allocation.

Ballymena Master Plan

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the implementation of the Ballymena Master Plan.

(AQW 599/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Forty six actions were identified in the Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan, which was published in April 2009. A number of these actions have been completed, including a study of the town's retail capacity, a transport assessment which examines the measures required to address problems in the town and a separate Masterplanning process for the development of the St Patricks Barracks site, which is now owned by OFMdfM.

Several other actions, including a new public realm programme for the town centre and development of a site at Bridge Street are being taken forward by the Department in partnership with Ballymena Borough Council and Ballymena Town Centre Development Ltd, a public-private partnership that involves traders in the town and key public sector agencies.

Maintenance Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to list all the maintenance schemes planned for the Donaghadee area in the next financial year.

(AQW 603/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the following maintenance schemes are planned for this financial year and the next financial year, subject to funding being available:-

2011/12

Kitchen replacements for 27 properties in Victoria at an approximate cost of £135,000

24 fire-doors to flats in Barnagh Grove. The cost of this type of work is currently being negotiated with the Egan contractor.

2012/13

Kitchen replacements for 76 properties in Barnagh Grove and Park and ElmfieldPark at an approximate cost of £380,000.

Bloomfield Estate, Bangor: Pensioners' Bungalows

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans he has for the future of the pensioners' bungalows in Bloomfield Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 664/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I was pleased to accept the member's invitation on my recent visit to Bangor to see for myself the problems with these bungalows. I was also pleased to meet with representatives of the Bloomfield Community Association to hear first hand the problems the residents face, particularly in terms of keeping these bungalows warm during the winter months.

I have asked my officials to work alongside the Housing Executive in preparing an economic appraisal that can consider each of the options available for these particular homes. I expect that work to be completed by October and have assured the residents I will share the results of this with them at that time.

Heating Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what new heating schemes are planned for the North Down area in the next financial year.

(AQW 665/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assume the Member is referring to the current financial year. The following Housing Executive heating schemes are planned for the North Down area during the current financial year. These schemes are subject to the availability of funding. There is no programme as yet for 2012/13.

2011/12	Number of Dwellings	Estimated Cost
Crawfordsburn/Groomsport	80	£462k
Hollywood	101	£515k

Housing Repairs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money the Housing Executive has allocated for housing repairs in the North Down area in the next financial year.

(AQW 667/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assume the Member is referring to the current financial year. The Housing Executive has advised that its proposed expenditure in the current financial year for Planned Maintenance is £1.772 million and for Response Maintenance is £1.775 million, making a total of £3.547 million.

Social Housing Newbuilds

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his Department's plans for social housing new builds in (i) Magherafelt town; (ii) Magherafelt district; and (iii) Cookstown district.

(AQW 746/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am still considering the Social Housing Development Programme and will advise the member of the proposals for Magherafelt and Cookstown within the coming weeks.

Official Report
(Hansard)
Members' Index

MEMBERS' INDEX

Agnew, Mr Stephen

- Assembly Business
 - Minister of Justice, 21, 22
- Committee Business
 - Standing Orders, 268–9, 272–3
- Matters of the Day
 - Mr Brian Lenihan, 201
- Oral Answers
 - Employment and Learning
 - Tuition Fees, 228
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Corporation Tax, 289
- Private Members' Business
 - A5 dual Carriageway, 156
 - Educational Attainment: Working-class Protestants, 70
 - Principal Deputy Speaker, 34–5
- Written Answers
 - Agriculture
 - Circuses: Wild Animals, WA71
 - Education
 - Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, WA158
 - Employment and Learning
 - Corporation Tax, WA187, WA195, WA216
 - Environment
 - Marine Bill, WA96
 - Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Review, WA40
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Ulster Hospital, Dundonald, WA98
 - Craig Ward, WA98

Allister, Mr Jim

- Adjournment
 - A26: Glarryford to Ballycastle, 295, 296, 298, 299
 - Upgrade of the A2 in East Antrim, 89
- Assembly Business
 - Election of Deputy Speakers, 8, 9
 - Election of Speaker, 5–6
 - First Minister and deputy First Minister:
 - Appointment and Pledge of Office, 10, 12, 13
 - Minister of Justice, 21, 24
 - Point of Order, 41, 53, 133, 133–4, 261
- Committee Business
 - Standing Orders, 269, 273, 274, 274–5, 276
- Executive Committee Business
 - Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 206, 211, 219, 243, 251, 251–2, 252

- Matters of the Day
 - HRH The Duke of Edinburgh: Ninetieth Birthday, 201–2, 202
- Ministerial Statements
 - Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 48
- Oral Answers
 - Agriculture
 - Rural Development Programme, 131
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - St Andrews Agreement: Irish Language, 162
 - Education:
 - Parental Choice, 164, 165
 - Employment and Learning
 - EU Engagement, 229
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Northern Ireland Tourist Board: Event Funding Programme, 235
 - Environment
 - Waste Management: Incineration, 283
 - First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Sexual Orientation Strategy, 121
- Private Members' Business
 - A5 dual Carriageway, 142, 144, 151, 152
 - Government Structures, 112, 113, 137–8, 138
 - Nursery and Preschool Education, 182
 - Principal Deputy Speaker, 34, 35
- Written Answers
 - Agriculture
 - Bovine Technologies, WA72
 - External Consultants, WA62
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - External Consultants, WA22
 - Football, WA79
 - Special Adviser, WA81
 - Education
 - External Consultants, WA28, WA175
 - Employment and Learning
 - External Consultants, WA185
 - University of Ulster: Magee Campus, WA189
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Credit Unions, WA34
 - EU Legislation, WA35, WA89
 - External Consultants, WA194
 - Household Electricity Bill, WA91
 - Invest NI, WA191, WA193
 - Subordinated Investor Policy, WA192
 - Invest NI: CEO, WA33, WA195
 - Local Businesses: Bureaucratic Burden, WA89
 - Northern Ireland Electricity's Pension Deficit, WA194

Presbyterian Mutual Society, WA6
 Travel and Subsistence Costs, WA90
 Finance and Personnel
 Bonus Payments, WA6
 Civil Service: Sick Leave, WA215
 Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill
 NIA 10/10, WA41
 External Consultants, WA214
 Invest NI: CEO, WA41, WA227
 Ministerial Cars: Drivers, WA216
 Procurement Cards, WA226
 First Minister and Deputy First Minister
 Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill
 (NIA 10/10), WA134
 Devolution of Policing and Justice: Radio
 Advertisement, WA131
 External Consultants, WA59
 Legal Advice, WA133
 Papal Visit to Northern Ireland, WA1
 Procurement, WA132
 Protocols and Guidance: Office of the First
 Minister and deputy First Minister, WA17
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Abortions, WA97
 Dental Practices, WA44
 External Consultants, WA232
 Free Health Service Care, WA9
 Frontier Workers, WA8
 Republic of Ireland Residents Receiving
 Hospital Care in Northern Ireland, WA43
 S2 Certificate Arrangements, WA8, WA48,
 WA100
 Justice
 Appointment of a Director of Public
 Prosecutions, WA12
 Attorney General for Northern Ireland, WA12
 Orders Prohibiting Publicity on the Granting
 of Injunctive Relief, WA111
 Posts of Lord Chief Justice, the Attorney
 General for Northern Ireland and the
 Director of Public Prosecutions, WA12
 Roman Catholic Church: Child Abuse Cases,
 WA12–13
 Super-Injunctions, WA10
 Regional Development
 A5 Project, WA51
 External Consultants, WA256
 Road Gritting, WA114
 Social Development
 External Consultants, WA258

Anderson, Ms Martina

Assembly Business
 Appointment of Junior Ministers, 19

Ministerial Statements
 Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, WA45–6,
 49
 Private Members' Business
 Special Needs: Services for Young People and
 Adults, 74

Anderson, Mr Sydney

Oral Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Budget Review Group, 286
 First Minister and Deputy First Minister
 Community Relations Week 2011, 121, 122
 Private Members' Business
 Nursery and Preschool Education, 174–5, 175
 Written Answers
 Agriculture
 Staff Sick Leave, WA68
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Gilford Library, WA137, WA138
 Sick Leave, WA25
 Education
 Educational Underachievement, WA27
 Staff Sick Leave, WA83
 Employment and Learning
 Staff Sick Leave, WA87
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Banbridge and Craigavon: Promoting as
 Tourist Destinations, WA35
 Corporation Tax: Select Committee Report,
 WA201
 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II: Visit to the
 Republic of Ireland, WA88
 Northern Ireland Tourist Board: Campaigns,
 WA197
 Staff Sick Leave, WA91
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Staff Sick Leave, WA102
 Regional Development
 Extreme Weather Conditions, WA116
 Staff Sick Leave, WA251
 Social Development
 Extreme Weather Conditions, WA56

Attwood, Mr Alex

Assembly Business
 Appointment of Ministers, 18
 Oral Answers
 Environment
 Local Government Auditor, 283–4, 284,
 284–5
 Planning Applications, 280, 280–1, 281,
 281–2

Road Safety, 285

Waste Management: Incineration, 282, 283

Written Answers

Environment

Archaeological Planning Conditions, WA96

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, WA204

Beaches: Quality, WA203–4

Car Exhausts: Noise Levels, WA205,
WA205–6

Chapel Road, Mayobridge: Premises, WA94

CO2 Emissions, WA212

Drumacoon, Castleblayney: Ditches, WA206–7

Fishing, River, Water and Marine Matters,
WA205

Fly-Posting, WA37–8

Fuel Laundering, WA206

High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011,
WA209

Hilden Mill, Lisburn, WA95

Listed Buildings, WA96, WA208–9

Local Council Staff, WA39–40

Local Government: Reform, WA40

Local Government: Review of Public
Administration, WA209–10, WA210

Marine Bill, WA96

Marine Management, WA211

Mayobridge: Tyre Storage Depot, WA211–12

MOT Tests, WA204–5, WA207–8

Motorcyclists: Safety, WA38

Northern Ireland Aggregates Levy Credit
Scheme, WA206

Northern Ireland Environment Agency:
Review, WA40

Planning Applications: Time taken, WA96–7

Planning Bill (NIA 7/10), WA96

Planning Permission, WA94

Planning: Rural Areas, WA210

Planning: Sprucefield, WA212–13

Proposed Incinerator at Glenavy, WA209

Red Squirrel Population, WA95

Rose Energy's Incinerator at Glenavy, WA36–7

Single Wind Turbine Planning Applications,
WA93

Single-use Carrier Bags, WA36

Tax Discs Processed by Telephone, WA37

Tree Preservation Orders, WA204

Waste Management, WA210–11

Beggs, Mr Roy

Adjournment

Upgrade of the A2 in East Antrim, 86–7

Assembly Business

Election of Deputy Speakers, 7

Oral Answers

First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Commissioner for Older People, 124–5

Health, Social Services and Public Safety - Poots

Private Members' Business

A5 Dual Carriageway, 143–4, 145–6, 146, 156

Educational Attainment: Working-class

Protestants, 55–6, 57, 61

Written Answers

Education

School Attendance, WA179, WA180

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Broadband Access, WA200

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Accident and Emergency Department: Trolley

Waits, WA46

Regional Development

Annual Maintenance Cost of a Dual

Carriageway Elevated Crossing, WA54

Road Schemes, WA13

Roads Maintenance Budget, WA115

Roads Service, WA115

Social Development

Social Security Benefits, WA259

Beggs, Mr Roy (as Deputy Speaker)

Adjournment

A26: Glarryford to Ballycastle, 292, 294, 295,
296, 298

Mid-Ulster Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit, 189

Oral Answers

Environment, 282, 284

Finance and Personnel, 285, 287, 289, 291

Private Members' Business

Government Structures, 135, 136, 137, 138

Special Needs: Services for Young People and
Adults, 76, 83, 84

Bell, Mr Jonathan

Assembly Business

Appointment of Junior Ministers, 19

Oral Answers

First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Sexual Orientation Strategy, 120–1, 121

Boylan, Mr Cathal

Written Answers

First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Planning Appeals Commission, WA17

Boyle, Ms Michaela

Ministerial Statements

Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 47–8

Oral Answers

Education

Parental Choice, 165–6

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Budget Review Group, 285, 286

Private Members' Business

Nursery and Preschool Education, 178–9

Special Needs: Services for Young People and Adults, 83–4

Bradley, Mr Dominic

Assembly Business

Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 29

Executive Committee Business

Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 212–14

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

St Andrews Agreement: Irish Language, 162

Education

Education Ministers, 170

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Broadband Fund, 233

Corporation Tax, 289

Environment

Planning Applications, 281

Private Members' Business

Domestic Violence, 104

Nursery and Preschool Education, 173, 173–4

Bradley, Ms Paula

Ministerial Statements

Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 44

Private Members' Business

Domestic Violence, 109, 109–10

Brady, Mr Mickey

Assembly Business

Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 29

Ministerial Statements

Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 44–5

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

2012 Olympics: Torch Relay, 162, 163

Employment and Learning

Higher Education Strategy, 226

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Northern Ireland Tourist Board: Event Funding Programme, 235

Written Answers

Agriculture

Agrifood, WA71

First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Investment: Government Funding, WA62

Buchanan, Mr Thomas

Assembly Business

Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 28

Executive Committee Business

Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Vote, 246–7

Ministerial Statements

Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 45

Oral Answers

Agriculture

Gorse Fires: Single Farm Payments, 128

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Short-term Employment Scheme, 234

Private Members' Business

A5 Dual Carriageway, 154–5, 155

Byrne, Joe

Assembly Business

Standing Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 30

Ministerial Statements

Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 48

Oral Answers

Agriculture

Less-favoured Areas, 130

Employment and Learning

Pathways to Success, 224, 225

First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Sexual Orientation Strategy, 120, 121

Private Members' Business

A5 Dual Carriageway, 146, 146–7, 147, 149

Campbell, Mr Gregory

Assembly Business

Point of Order, 16, 133, 203

Committee Business

Standing Orders, 265, 266

Matters of the Day

Death of Dr Garret FitzGerald, 37–8

Culture, Arts and Leisure

City of Culture 2013, 159

Employment and Learning

Higher Education Strategy, 226

Private Members' Business

Domestic Violence, 96

Educational Attainment: Working-class Protestants, 60–1, 61
Government structures, 112

Written Answers

Finance and Personnel
Rates: Development Sites, WA229
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
CT Scans, WA99
MRI Scans, WA99

Justice

Colombia Three, WA49
Historical Enquires Team, WA104
Prisoners, WA241

Regional Development

A26 between Ballymena and Glarryford and Glarryford and the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine, WA252
Ballykelly Bypass, WA251
Glens Estate, Limavady: Traffic-calming Measures, WA116

Social Development

Coleraine Town Centre: Retail and Car-Parking Projects, WA125
Fair Rents Officer, WA56
Housing Executive Staff, WA261
Housing Executive: Weekly Rental Rate, WA261
Public Sector Social Housing Properties, WA261

Clarke, Mr Trevor

Adjournment
Mid-Ulster Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit, 193, 196

Assembly Business

Standing Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 31

Committee Business

Standing Orders, 267, 270, 273, 275, 276, 276–7, 277

Oral Answers

Finance and Personnel
Corporation Tax, 288, 289

Written Answers

Education
Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim, WA84, WA181, WA182
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Air Passenger Duty, WA90

Cochrane, Mrs Judith

Executive Committee Business
Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 239–40

Oral Answers

Agriculture
Shared Resources, 127
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Employment: Socially Disadvantaged Areas, 231

Private Members' Business

Nursery and Preschool Education, 176–7, 177

Written Answers

Agriculture
Archived Departmental Documentation, WA136
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Archived Departmental Documentation, WA141
Education
Archived Departmental Documentation, WA173
Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Archived Departmental Documentation, WA199
First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Archived Departmental Documentation, WA134
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Archived Departmental Documentation, WA239

Copeland, Mr Michael

Private Members' Business
Educational Attainment: Working-class Protestants, 63, 63–4, 64

Written Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arm's-length Bodies, WA78
Education
Educational Underachievement, WA157
External Companies: Grounds Maintenance in Schools, WA148
External Suppliers: Telephone Contracts, WA147
Employment and Learning
Employment Programmes: Benefits, WA190

Craig, Mr Jonathan

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure
Ulster-Scots Agency, 164

Education

DE: Procurement, 167–8
Employment and Learning
Further Education: Inspections, 224

Private Members' Business

Nursery and Preschool Education, 179
Special Needs: Services for Young People and Adults, 78–9

Written Answers

Agriculture
Headquarters, WA72

Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Broadway Roundabout, Belfast: Display, WA137
 Craigavon House, Belfast: Regeneration,
 WA139
 Events Marking Historical Occasions, WA139
 Libraries NI, WA142
 Organisations Seeking Funding, WA77
 Somme Heritage Association, WA24

Education
 History of the Northern Ireland State, WA172
 'Inquiry into Successful Post-Primary Schools
 Serving Disadvantaged Communities', WA82
 Integrated Schools, WA172
 Preschool Places, WA86
 Schools: Newbuilds, WA174
 Spend for each Pupil, WA171

Employment and Learning
 Further Education Colleges, WA183

Environment
 Hilden Mill, Lisburn, WA95
 Listed Buildings, WA96

Justice
 Serving Police Officers: Security Provision,
 WA113

Regional Development
 Departmental Documentation, WA256
 Park and Ride Schemes, WA253
 Roads, WA122

Social Development
 Social Security Benefits, WA129, WA130
 Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings
 Scheme, WA125

Cree, Mr Leslie

Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main
 Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for
 the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 211-12

Matters of the Day
 Mr Brian Lenihan, 200

Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 North West 200, 160

Education
 Education Ministers, 170

Written Answers
 Agriculture
 Agrifood, WA73
 Employment and Learning
 Agency Workers, WA188

Dallat, Mr John

Assembly Business
 Election of Deputy Speakers, 7

Matters of the Day
 Death of Dr Garret FitzGerald, 37

Oral Answers
 Agriculture
 Bureaucracy, 131
 Private Members' Business
 Special Needs: Services for Young People and
 Adults, 76

Written Answers
 Education
 School Transport, WA151
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Potential Inward Investors, WA196
 Rural Areas: Broadband Services, WA197

Environment
 Planning: Rural Areas, WA210

Finance and Personnel
 Fleet Transport, WA226
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Fire and Rescue Service, WA102
 Suicide Support Groups, WA237

Justice
 Colin Howell Cases: Legal Costs, WA245

Regional Development
 A6 from Castledawson to Derry, WA252

Dallat, Mr John (as Deputy Speaker)

Adjournment
 Upgrade of the A2 in East Antrim, 84, 87, 89,
 90, 92

Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main
 Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for
 the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 223

Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure, 159, 160
 Employment and Learning, 224, 226

Private Members' Business
 Domestic Violence, 109
 Government Structures, 111, 113, 114
 Nursery and Preschool Education, 171, 176,
 177, 178, 179, 180

Dickson, Mr Stewart

Adjournment
 Upgrade of the A2 in East Antrim, 87-88

Assembly Business
 Suspension of Standing Orders, 41

Ministerial Statements
 Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 46

Private Members' Business
 Domestic Violence, 99, 99-100
 Government Structures, 115-16, 116

Written Answers

- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Green Economy, WA203
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Dental Surgeries, WA10
- Regional Development
 - A2 upgrade, WA53, WA123
 - Loughview Village, Carrickfergus, WA52

Dobson, Mrs Joanne

- Oral Answers
 - Agriculture
 - Bureaucracy, 132
 - Employment and Learning
 - EU Engagement, 229
 - Environment
 - Waste Management: Incineration, 282
- Private Members' Business
 - Nursery and Preschool Education, 179–80
- Written Answers
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Air Passenger Duty, WA201

Doherty, Mr Pat

- Assembly Business
 - Election of Deputy Speakers, 7
 - First Minister and deputy First Minister:
 - Appointment and Pledge of Office, 10
 - Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 29
- Private Members' Business
 - A5 Dual Carriageway, 141–2, 142
- Written Answers
 - First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, WA61

Dunne, Mr Gordon

- Oral Answers
 - Environment
 - Planning Applications, 281
- Written Answers
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Motorsport Infrastructure, WA79
 - Environment
 - Listed Buildings, WA208
 - Regional Development
 - Craigantlet Crossroads, Holywood: Proposed Roundabouts, WA250
 - Sydenham Bypass Carriageway, WA250
 - Social Development
 - West Green, Holywood: Housing, WA126

Durkan, Mr Mark H

- Ministerial Statements
 - Altnagelvin Hospital
 - Radiotherapy Unit, 44
- Oral Answers
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - 2012 Olympics: Torch Relay, 163
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Employment, 232
 - Finance and Personnel
 - Small Business Rate Relief Scheme, 288
- Private Members' Business
 - Special Needs
 - Services for Young People and Adults, 76-7
- Written Answers
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Foyle Cup and Milk Cup Applications for Funding, WA92
 - Foyle Cup's Application for Funding, WA195
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - McKinsey Report, WA238
 - Regional Development
 - A6 Dualling Scheme and Dungiven Bypass, WA249
 - Traffic Calming Scheme on the Glen Road, Derry, WA249
 - University of Ulster's Magee College
 - Residents' Parking Scheme, WA250

Easton, Mr Alex

- Executive Committee Business
 - Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 217-8
- Private Members' Business
 - Educational Attainment
 - Working-class Protestants, 54-5
- Written Answers
 - Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Tree Population in North Down, WA64
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Grants, WA142
 - Education
 - Neighbourhood Renewal, WA149
 - New School Buildings in the Holywood Area, WA3
 - Nursery School Places, WA83
 - Physical Exercise: School Children, WA83
 - School Places for Children in Groomsport, WA2
 - Employment and Learning
 - Educational Attainment, WA186
 - Educational Underachievement, WA31
 - Foreign Students, WA188

- Kilcooley Women's Education Centre, Bangor, WA185
 Neighbourhood Renewal, WA87
 Proposed Merger of Queen's University and Stranmillis University College, WA188
 Proposed Merger of Stranmillis College and Queen's University, Belfast, WA32
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Grants for Small Businesses, WA196
 Presbyterian Mutual Society Savers, WA91
 Environment
 MOT Tests, WA204
 Planning Applications, WA96
 Red Squirrel Population, WA95
 Tree Preservation Orders, WA204
 Finance and Personnel
 Local Banks, WA213
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, WA7
 Health of Working-Class Communities, WA6
 Music Therapy Services, WA7
 Justice
 Contact Orders, WA244
 Firearm Certificate, WA113
 Orders of No Order (Final Order), WA243
 Regional Development
 Abbey Road, Millisle, WA14
 Cannyreagh Road in Donaghadee, WA52
 Footpath Resurfacing Scheme in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor, WA52
 Footpaths and Roads in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, WA118
 New Footpath Schemes, WA50
 Old Footpaths in the Ashfield Area of Donaghadee, WA50
 Priors Lea, Holywood, WA117
 Railway Halt at the IKEA Store, WA121
 Road Calming Measures in the Holywood Area, WA117
 Road Surfacing Programmes, WA13
 Salt and Grit Stock, WA55
 Street Lighting, WA257
 Street Lightening Schemes, WA120
 Street Lighting Schemes, WA121
 Traffic Calming Measures for the Ballymacconnell Road South in Bangor, WA50
 Traffic Calming Measures in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, WA118
 Social Development
 Ballyree Drive Area in Bloomfield Estate, Bangor, WA56
 Bangor Social Security Office, WA57
 Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, WA127
 Disability Living Allowance, WA127
 Disability Living Allowance Appeals, WA126
 Flats at Rathgill Park, Bangor, WA56
 Flats in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor, WA15
 Heating Schemes, WA266
 Housing Repairs, WA266
 Kilcooley Estate in Bangor, WA57
 MLA Surgeries in Community Houses, WA260
 Maintenance Schemes, WA265
 Pension Credit, WA130, WA259
 Pensioners' Bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor, WA15, WA266
 Severe Winter Weather, WA127
- Eastwood, Mr Colum**
 Oral Answers
 Education
 DE: Procurement, 168
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Community Relations Week 2011, 122
 Private Members' Business
 A5 Dual Carriageway, 150-1
 Written Answers
 Education
 Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, WA173
- Elliott, Mr Tom**
 Assembly Business
 Appointment of Ministers, 17
 Election of Deputy Speakers, 7
 Election of Speaker, 5
 Minister of Justice, 23
 Standing Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 30
 Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 27, 28
 Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 218-9, 219-20
 Matters of the Day
 Death of Dr Garret FitzGerald, 38
 Oral Answers
 Environment
 Waste Management: Incineration, 283
 Finance and Personnel
 Corporation Tax: Block Grant, 290
 Private Members' Business
 A5 Dual Carriageway, 142, 151
 Government Structures, 111, 111-12, 112, 114, 118, 119

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Building Sustainable Communities, Capacity Building Programme, WA68
- Education
 - Devenish College in Fermanagh, WA30
 - Review of Public Administration, WA183
- Finance and Personnel
 - Corporation Tax WA227
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, WA62

- Kilcooley Women's Education Centre, Bangor, WA185-6
- Neighbourhood Renewal, WA87, WA184
- North West Regional College, WA32
- Proposed Merger of Queen's University and Stranmillis University College, WA32, WA188
- Staff Sick Leave, WA87
- Stranmillis University College, WA184
- Tuition Fees, WA32, WA87-8
- University of Ulster: Magee Campus, WA189

Farry, Dr Stephen

- Assembly Business
 - Appointment of Ministers, 18-19
 - Minister of Justice, 24
- Oral Answers
 - Employment and Learning
 - Education Maintenance Allowance, 229-30, 230
 - EU Engagement, 228-9, 229
 - Further Education: Inspections, 224
 - Higher Education Strategy, 226, 226-7
 - Pathways to Success, 224-5, 225
 - Tuition Fees, 227, 228
- Private Members' Business
 - Educational Attainment: Working-Class Protestants, 66-70
- Written Answers
 - Employment and Learning
 - Agency Workers, WA189
 - Corporation Tax, WA187
 - DEL: Welfare Reforms, WA191
 - Educational Attainment, WA186-7
 - Educational Underachievement, WA31-2
 - Emergency Life Support Skills, WA185
 - Employment Programmes: Benefits, WA190
 - Essential Skills, WA189
 - European Union Monitoring Committee Report's Working Definition of Anti-Semitism, WA187-8
 - External Consultants, WA185
 - Foreign Students, WA188
 - Further Education
 - Colleges, WA184
 - Construction Workers, WA190
 - Maintenance, WA188
 - Further and Higher Education, WA184
 - Higher Education
 - Postgraduate Awards WA190
 - Institutions Teaching English to Foreign Students, WA30-1

Flanagan, Mr Phil

- Oral Answers
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - World Police and Fire Games, 164
 - Education
 - Teachers: Employment, 169
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Short-Term Employment Scheme, 234
- Private Members' Business
 - Educational Attainment
 - Working-Class Protestants, 61-2
 - Nursery and Preschool Education, 173, 174
- Written Answers
 - Education
 - Music Therapy Services, WA153
 - Summer Schemes for Students with Special Needs, WA29
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Agrifood Sector, WA197
 - Mobile Phone Coverage in Rural Areas, WA89
 - Mobile Phone Roaming Charges, WA199
 - Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Fermanagh, WA195
 - Environment
 - Northern Ireland Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme, WA206
 - Waste Management, WA210
 - Finance and Personnel
 - Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme, WA224
 - Department Staff, WA217
 - Grant Programmes, WA225
 - Northern Ireland Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme, WA224
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - E. Coli, WA103
 - Enniskillen: New Hospital, WA47, WA47-8
 - Foster a Child: Waiting Time, WA235
 - Southern Cross Nursing Homes, WA103
 - Regional Development
 - Waste Water Pumping Stations in Enniskillen, WA256

Social Development
 Ballaghmore Heights, Enniskillen, WA129
 Solid Fuel Fires, WA260

Ford, Mr David

Assembly Business

Appointment of Ministers, 18
 Election of Deputy Speakers, 7-8
 Election of Speaker, 5
 Minister of Justice, 24, 25
 Standing Committees: Chairpersons and
 Deputy Chairpersons, 31
 Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and
 Deputy Chairpersons, 27, 29

Matters of the Day

Dr Garret FitzGerald, 38-9
 Maghaberry Prison: Aaron Hogg, 40
 Mr Brian Lenihan, 200-1

Private Members' Business

Domestic Violence, 106-9

Written Answers

Justice

Agreement Ending Roe House Project, WA246
 Appointment of a Director of Public
 Prosecutions, WA12
 Attorney General for Northern Ireland, WA12
 Case Number 10/111192, WA242
 Case Number 11/000893, WA11, WA241-2
 Colin Howell Cases: Legal Costs, WA245
 Colombiia Three, WA49
 Compensation Payments, WA114
 Contact Orders, WA244
 Convicted Sex Offenders, WA111
 Convictions for Trespassing and Illegal Entry
 to a Quarry, WA50
 Cost of Keeping a Prisoner in Jail, WA110
 Dangers of Entering Quarries, WA109
 Death by Dangerous Driving, WA248-9
 Firearm Certificate, WA113
 Historical Enquiries Team, WA104
 Illegal Republican Parades, WA110-11
 Injunctions or Super-Injunctions, WA241
 Legal Aid, WA242-3, WA243, WA244-5
 Dispute, WA247
 Rates, WA247
 Legal Cases, WA111
 Legislation, WA246
 Local District Policing Partnerships, WA240
 Mobile Phones for Community Police
 Officers, WA12, WA245
 Newry Crown Court, WA248
 Orders of No Order (Final Order), WA243-4
 Orders Prohibiting Publicity on the Granting

of Injunctive Relief, WA112
 Policing Board: Independent Membership,
 WA112
 Posts of Lord Chief Justice, the Attorney
 General for Northern Ireland and the
 Director of Public Prosecutions, WA12
 Prison Service, WA249
 External Advisers, WA248
 Prisoner: Devidas Paliutis, WA11, WA114
 Prisoner Assessment Unit, WA104, WA109,
 WA247
 Belfast WA48
 Prisoners, WA241, WA247
 PSNI: Equal Pay Dispute, WA240
 Queen's Counsels, WA105-9
 Roman Catholic Church: Child Abuse Cases,
 WA13
 Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve:
 GC Gratuity Payment, WA112, WA113
 Separated Prisoners, WA245
 Serving Police Officers: Security Provision,
 WA113
 Sex Offender, WA49, WA246
 Solicitors Protest Against Fees, WA48-9
 Super-Injunctions, WA10

Foster, Mrs Arlene

Assembly Business

Appointment of Ministers, 17

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill
 Second Stage, 262

Matters of the Day

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh: Ninetieth Birthday,
 202

Oral Answers

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Broadband Fund, 232, 232-3, 233
 Construction, 236
 Employment, 231, 232
 Socially Disadvantaged Areas 230, 230-1,
 231

Northern Ireland Tourist Board: Event
 Funding Programme, 235

Short-Term Employment Scheme, 234, 234-5

Finance and Personnel

Budget Review Group, 286, 286-7, 287
 Corporation Tax, 288, 289, 289-90
 Block Grant, 290, 290-1, 291
 Small Business Rate Relief Scheme, 287,
 287-8, 288
 Village, Belfast: Negative Equity, 291

Written Answers

Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Agrifood Sector, WA88, WA197
 Air Passenger Duty, WA90, WA201, WA202
 Archived Departmental Documentation, WA199
 Arthur Cottage, Ballymena WA92
 Ballycastle Area: Local Economy and
 Tourism, WA199
 Ballycastle to Campbeltown Ferry Service,
 WA193
 Ballycastle: Hotel Group Investment, WA33
 Banbridge and Craigavon: Promoting as
 Tourist Destinations, WA35–6
 Broadband Access, WA200
 Business: Bureaucracy, WA203
 Comhaltas Ceoltoirí Éireann and Gaelic
 Games, WA33-4
 Corporation Tax, WA195
 Investment, WA200
 Select Committee Report, WA201
 Credit Unions, WA34–5
 Employment:16-to 24-Year-Olds, WA202
 Enterprise Zone, WA201
 EU Legislation, WA35, WA89
 Exports, WA198
 External Consultants, WA194
 Farm Accidents, WA36
 Farm Safety WA90
 Foyle Cup and Milk Cup Applications for
 Funding, WA92
 Foyle Cup's Application for Funding, WA195
 Geothermal Energy Products, WA34
 Grants for Small Businesses, WA196
 Green Economy, WA203
 Green New Deal, WA202
 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II: Visit to the
 Republic of Ireland, WA89
 Hotel Group Investment in Ballycastle, WA33
 Household Electricity Bill, WA91
 Invest NI, WA191, WA192, WA193, WA194
 CEO, WA33, WA195–6
 Subordinated Investor Policy, WA192
 Legislation, WA92
 Local Businesses: Bureaucratic Burden,
 WA89–90
 Milk Cup Funding, WA200
 Mobile Phone Coverage in Rural Areas,
 WA89
 Mobile Phone Roaming Charges, WA199
 Natural Gas Network, WA202
 Northern Ireland Electricity's Pension Deficit,
 WA194
 Northern Ireland Tourist Board, WA35

Campaigns, WA197
 Potential Inward Investors, WA196-7
 Presbyterian Mutual Society, WA6
 Savers, WA91
 Rural Areas: Broadband Services, WA197–8
 Ruthlin Island Area: Broadband, WA196
 Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in
 Fermanagh, WA195
 Staff Sick Leave, WA91
 Travel and Subsistence Costs, WA90
 Wind Farms, WA5-6

Frew, Mr Paul

Adjournment
 A26: Glarryford to Ballycastle, 296, 298, 298-9
 Assembly Business
 Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and
 Deputy Chairpersons, 27
 Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main
 Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for
 the 2009-2010 Excess Votes 209-11, 211
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Rural Development Programme, 131
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Broadband Fund, 233
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Agrifood Sector, WA19
 Botulism, WA19
 Bovine Tuberculosis, WA65
 Common Agricultural Policy, WA69, WA135
 Reform, WA21
 Farmers: Average Age, WA64
 Groceries Code Adjudicator Bill, WA70
 Less-favoured Area Payments, WA136
 Local Lamb Processing, WA66
 Sheep Electronic Identification Tags, WA21
 Single Farm Payments, WA69
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, WA78
 Education
 Emergency Life Support Skills, WA155
 Employment and Learning
 Emergency Life Support Skills, WA185
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Agrifood Sector, WA88
 Air Passenger Duty, WA201
 Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, WA92
 Farm Safety, WA90
 Milk Cup Funding, WA200

Environment

- Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, WA204
- Motorcyclists: Safety, WA38

Finance and Personnel

- Ballymena Health and Social Care Centre Business Case, WA227
- Rating Revaluation, WA225

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

- Antrim Area Hospital
 - Accident and Emergency, WA46
 - Car Park, WA235
- Dental Registration Fees, WA231, WA232
- Emergency Life Support Skills, WA231
- Music Therapy Services, WA9
- Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) Conference, WA231

Regulation and Quality Improvement

- Authority Legislation, WA100
- Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority Registration Fee, WA99

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

- Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, WA131

Regional Development

- Northern Ireland Water, WA51

Social Development

- Ballymena Master Plan, WA265
- Former St Patrick's Barracks Site, Ballymena: Houses, WA265
- Housing Waiting List, WA265

Gardiner, Mr Samuel

Assembly Business

- Election of Speaker, 4, 5, 6

Committee Business

- Standing Orders, 267, 268, 270

Ministerial Statement

- Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 43

Oral Answers

- Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - 2012 Olympics: Torch Relay, 163

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Bovine Tuberculosis, WA75

Environment

- Local Government: Review of Public Administration, WA209

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

- Community Health Village, Banbridge, WA104
- Craigavon Area Hospital, WA234

Gildernew, Ms Michelle

Assembly Business

- Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 27

Executive Committee Business

- Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 237, 238

Ministerial Statement

- Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 42-3

Oral Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Less-favoured Areas, 129

Private Members' Business

- Domestic Violence, 101

Written Answers

- Employment and Learning
 - Further Education: Construction Workers, WA190

Givan, Mr Paul

Assembly Business

- Minister of Justice, 20
- Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 26

Committee Business

- Standing Orders 266, 268, 269, 269-70, 270, 274

Executive Committee Business

- Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 242-3, 243-4, 255

Matters of the Day

- Maghaberry Prison: Aaron Hogg, 39-40

Ministerial Statement

- Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 47

Oral Answers

- Employment and Learning
 - Tuition Fees, 227-8

Environment

- Local Government Auditor, 284

Private Members' Business

- Domestic Violence, 100, 103
- Nursery and Preschool Education, 178

Written Answers

Environment

- Planning: Sprucefield, WA212

Finance and Personnel

- Unpaid Rates, WA213

Justice

- Injunctions or Super-Injunctions, WA241
- Prison Service, WA249
- External Advisers, WA248

Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister

- Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, WA60

Hale, Mrs Brenda

- Oral Answers
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, 161
- Written Answers
 - Environment
 - High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, WA209

Hamilton, Mr Simon

- Assembly Business
 - Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 28
- Oral Answers
 - Finance and Personnel
 - Corporation Tax, 289
 - Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Corporation Tax, 126
- Private Members' Business
 - Government Structures, 112, 112–13, 113
- Written Answers
 - Agriculture and Rural Development
 - DARD Direct Office: Newtownards, WA70
 - Employment and Learning
 - Department for Employment and Learning: Welfare Reforms, WA190
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Natural Gas Network, WA202
 - Environment
 - Tax Discs Processed by Telephone, WA37
 - Regional Development
 - Wastewater Treatment Works, WA53
 - Social Development
 - Window Replacement Schemes, WA260

Hilditch, Mr David

- Adjournment
 - Upgrade of the A2 in East Antrim, 88–9
- Assembly Business
 - Standing Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 31
- Oral Answers
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - North West 200, 160
- Written Answers
 - Education
 - Budgetary Deficit, WA156
 - Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus, WA157
 - Regional Development
 - A2 Road Widening Scheme, WA118

- Oakfield Drive in the Glenfield Estate, Carrickfergus: Sewage Overflow Problems, WA55

- Social Development
 - Disability Living Allowance, WA263

Humphrey, Mr William

- Oral Answers
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Employment, 232
 - Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Commissioner for Older People, 124
 - EU Funding, 123, 124
- Private Members' Business
 - Educational Attainment: Working-Class Protestants, 57
- Written Answers
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Windsor Park, Belfast: Re-development, WA79
 - Finance and Personnel
 - EU Funding, WA229

Hussey, Mr Ross

- Ministerial Statements
 - Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 45
- Oral Answers
 - Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Less-favoured Areas, 129
 - Employment and Learning
 - Further Education: Inspections, 224
 - Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Corporation Tax, 126
- Private Members' Business
 - A5 Dual Carriageway, 149-50, 150
- Written Answers
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - Shared Cultural Awareness, WA76
 - Shared Culture, WA76
 - Education
 - Investment Delivery Plan, WA171
 - Strabane Academy: Newbuild, WA29
 - Schools: Newbuilds, WA166, WA171
 - Environment
 - Single Wind Turbine Planning Applications, WA93
 - Finance and Personnel
 - Corporation Tax, WA227
 - Registering a Newborn Child, WA41
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Omagh: Local Enhanced Hospital, WA45

Justice

Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve: GC
 Gratuity Payment, WA112, WA113
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 Community Relations Council, WA134
 Victims and Survivors Service, WA18
 Regional Development
 Unadopted Roads, WA120
 Social Development
 Campsie Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme,
 WA16

Irwin, Mr William

Private Members' Business
 Nursery and Preschool Education, 181
 Written Answers
 Environment
 Drumacon, Castleblayney: Ditches, WA206
 Fuel Laundering, WA206

Kelly, Mrs Dolores

Assembly Business
 Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and
 Deputy Chairpersons, 28
 Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main
 Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for
 the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 222, 245-6,
 255, 258
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Gorse Fires: Single Farm Payments, 128
 Employment and Learning
 Tuition Fees, 227
 Environment
 Local Government Auditor, 283, 284
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 EU Funding, 123
 Private Members' Business
 Domestic Violence, 98, 99

Kelly, Mr Gerry

Committee Business
 Standing Orders, 270-1, 271-2, 272
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 North West 200, 160
 Written Answers
 Education
 Review of Public Administration, WA85

Kennedy, Mr Danny

Adjournment
 A26: Glarryford to Ballycastle, 299, 300
 Upgrade of the A2 in East Antrim, 90-2, 92
 Assembly Business
 Appointment of Ministers, 17
 Election of Deputy Speakers, 7
 Statutory Committee: Chairpersons and Deputy
 Chairpersons, 28
 Private Members' Business
 A5 Dual Carriageway, 152-3, 153-4, 154, 156
 Written Answers
 Regional Development
 20mph Speed Limit, WA120-1
 A2 Road Widening Scheme, WA118
 A2 Upgrade, WA53, WA123
 A2 Upgrade Project in East Antrim, WA14
 A5 Project, WA51
 A6 Dualling Scheme and Dungiven Bypass,
 WA249
 A6 from Castledawson to Derry, WA252-3
 A26 between Ballymena and Glarryford and
 Glarryford and the Causeway Hospital,
 Coleraine, WA252
 A26 between Glarryford and the Frosses/
 Drones Road Junction, WA50
 Abbey Road, Millisle, WA14
 Access for People with Disabilities at Bus
 and Railway Stations, WA53
 Annual Maintenance Cost of a Dual
 Carriageway Elevated Crossing, WA54
 Antrim to Crumlin Railway Line, WA257
 Ballykelly Bypass, WA251
 Ballymacconnell Road South in Bangor:
 Traffic-calming Measures, WA50
 Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee: Footpaths
 and Roads, WA118
 Beechfield Estate. Donaghadee: Traffic-
 calming Measures, WA118
 Ballynahinch: Wastewater Treatment Works,
 WA53
 Blue Badges, WA118, WA251
 Bridge End Railway Station, Belfast: Access
 for People with Disabilities, WA53
 Cannyreagh Road in Donaghadee, WA52
 Car Parking Charges, WA14
 Car Parking Charges in Town Centres,
 WA116
 Carrickfergus, WA55
 Coleraine to Londonderry Railway Line, WA15
 Craigtantlet Crossroads, Holywood: Proposed
 Roundabouts, WA250
 Departmental Documentation, WA256

Door-to-Door Transport Service, WA54,
WA55, WA122, WA257-8
Dualling of the A26 between Ballymena and
Ballymoney, WA14
Enniskillen: Waste Water Pumping Stations,
WA256
External Consultants, WA256
Extreme Weather Conditions, WA116-7
Freedom of Information Requests, WA15
Glen Road, Derry: Traffic-calming Scheme,
WA249
Glens Estate, Limavady: Traffic-calming
Measures, WA116
Hollywood Area: Road-calming Measures,
WA117
Housing Developments: Roads, WA118
Incomplete Housing Developments, WA119
Kilcooley Estate, Bangor: Footpath
Resurfacing Scheme, WA52
Lough Cowey, Portaferry, WA52
Loughview Village, Carrickfergus, WA52-3
New Footpath Schemes, WA50
New Local Urban Transport Service, WA258
Northern Ireland Water, WA51, WA246,,
WA256 WA119-20
Customers, WA51-2
North Down: Salt and Grit Stock, WA55
Oakfield drive in the Glenfield Estate,
Carrickfergus: Sewage Overflow Problems,
WA55
Road Surfacing Programmes, WA13
Road Schemes, WA13
Ashfield Area of Donaghadee: Old
Footpaths, WA50
On-street Car Parking, WA14
On-Street Car Parking Charges, WA256
Park and Ride Schemes, WA253-5
Priors Lea, Holywood, WA117-8
Railway Halt at the IKEA Store, WA121
Road Gritting, WA114
Roads, WA122
Roads Maintenance Budget, WA115
Roads Service, WA115-6
SmartPasses, WA257
Staff Sick Leave, WA251
South Belfast: Residents-only Parking
Schemes, WA255
Street Lightening Schemes, WA120, WA121
Street Lighting, WA257
Sydenham Bypass Carriageway, WA250
Taxi Fares for Bus and Train Drivers, WA115
Traffic Calming Measures, WA121-2
Unadopted Roads, WA120

Private Housing Estates, WA258
Unadopted Street Lights, WA119
University of Ulster's Magee College:
Residents' Parking Scheme, WA250

Kinahan, Mr Danny

Assembly Business
Minister of Justice, 23
Standing Committees: Chairpersons and
Deputy Chairpersons, 30
Committee Business
Standing Orders, 270, 271
Executive Committee Business
Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main
Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for
the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 247-8
Matters of the Day
HRH The Duke of Edinburgh: Ninetieth Birthday
Celebrations, 202-3
Oral Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Forests, 133
Finance and Personnel
Budget Review Group, 287
Private Members' Business
Principal Deputy Speaker, 33-4
Special Needs: Services for Young People and
Adults, 79-80
Written Answers
Agriculture and Rural Development
Fishing, River and Water and Marine
Matters, WA70
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Fishing, River and Water and Marine
Matters, WA78
Education
Board of Governors, WA146
Nursery School Places, WA147
Environment
Fishing, River and Water and Marine
Matters, WA205
Planning Bill, WA96
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Muckamore Abbey, WA236
Muckamore Abbey Patients, WA236
Music Therapy Services, WA103
Regional Development
Incomplete Housing Developments, WA119
Housing Developments: Roads, WA118
Social Development
Child Support Agency, WA129

Lewis, Mrs Pam

Ministerial Statements
 Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 48
 Private Members' Business
 Domestic Violence, 94-5
 Written Answers
 Education
 Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim, WA85

Lo, Ms Anna

Assembly Business
 Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 27
 Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 214-15
 Oral Answers
 Environment
 Planning Applications, 281
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Woodland, WA73
 Education
 Preparatory Schools: Funding, WA26
 Environment
 Archeological Planning Conditions, WA95-6
 Marine Management WA211
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Ethnic Minority Projects, WA131
 Racial Equality Forum, WA60

Lunn, Mr Trevor

Matters of the Day
 HRH The Duke of Edinburgh: Ninetieth Birthday, 203
 Oral Answers
 Education
 Teachers: Employment, 169
 Private Members' Business
 A5 Dual Carriageway, 147-8
 Principal Deputy Speaker, 33
 Written Answers
 Culture, Arts Leisure
 Multi-Sports Stadium, WA81
 Employment and Learning
 Essential Skills, WA189
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Green New Deal, WA202

Lynch, Mr Sean

Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Forests, 132, 133

Employment and Learning
 Pathways to Success, 225
 Finance and Personnel
 Budget Review Group, 285, 286

Lyttle, Mr Chris

Assembly Business
 Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 29
 Committee Business
 Standing Orders, 268
 Oral Answers
 First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Community Relations Week 2011, 122
 Private Members' Business
 Educational Attainment: Working-class Protestants, 59-60

McCallister, Mr John

Assembly Business
 Election of Deputy Speakers, 7
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Agriculture: Shared Resources, 128
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, 161
 Private Members' Business
 Government Structures, 119, 119-20, 120
 Principal Deputy Speaker, 32, 32-3
 Written Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Enterprise Zone, WA201

McCann, Ms Jennifer

Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Irish Language Strategy, 161, 162
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Employment, 231, 232
 Environment
 Planning Applications, 280
 Private Members' Business
 Domestic Violence, 104, 104-5
 Special Needs: Services for Young People and Adults, 73-4, 74-5
 Written Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Music Therapy Services, WA103

McCarthy, Mr Kieran

Assembly Business
 Public Petition: Down Community Transport, 93
 Standing Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 31

Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 237–8

Ministerial Statements

Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 44

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

World Police and Fire Games, 163

Private Members' Business

Government Structures, 136

Special Needs: Services for Young People and Adults, 77–8

Written Answers

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Sign Language Interpreting Sessions, WA237

Regional Development

Lough Cowey, Portaferry, WA52

McCartney, Mr Raymond

Assembly Business

Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 28

Matters of the Day

Maghaberry Prison: Aaron Hogg, 39

Ministerial Statements

Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 45

Oral Answers

Environment

Road Safety, 285

Private Members' Business

A5 Dual Carriageway, 155–6, 156–7, 157

Domestic Violence, 101, 101–2, 102

Written Answers

First Minister and deputy First Minister

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation and Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre, WA61

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Neurologists, WA8

PSNI and Social Services Gateway Teams:

Joint Protocol, WA235

Southern Cross Healthcare, WA239

Social Development

Window Replacement Schemes, WA260

McCausland, Mr Nelson

Assembly Business

Appointment of Ministers, 18

Written Answers

Social Development

51 Burren Road, Warrenpoint: Adjacent Lands, WA126

Alcohol: Minimum Pricing, WA126, WA262

Ballaghmore Heights, Enniskillen, WA129

Ballymena Master Plan, WA265

Ballyree Drive Area in Bloomfield Estate, Bangor, WA56

Bangor Social Security Office, WA57

Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, WA127–8

Bloomfield Area of Bangor: Renovating Properties, WA123

Bloomfield Estate, Bangor: Pensioners' Bungalows, WA266

Campsie Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme, WA16

Child Support Agency, WA129

Coleraine Town Centre: Retail and Car-Parking Projects, WA125

Disability Living Allowance, WA127, WA263, WA263–4, WA264

Appeals, WA126–7, WA262–3

Dunclug area of Ballymena, WA55

External Consultants, WA258–9

Extreme Weather Conditions, WA56–7

Fair Rents Officer, WA56

Flats in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor, WA15

Former St Patrick's Barracks Site,

Ballymena: Houses, WA265

Heating Schemes, WA266

Housing Associations, WA124–5

Housing Executive

Staff, WA261

Weekly Rental Rate, WA261

Housing Renovation Schemes, WA123–4

Housing Repairs, WA266

Housing Waiting List, WA265

Kilcooley Estate in Bangor, WA57

Maintenance Schemes, WA265–6

Minimum Price for a Unit of Alcohol, WA16

MLAs' Surgeries in Community Houses, WA260

Neighbourhood Renewal, WA128, WA130

New Social Housing, WA16

Pension Credit, WA130, WA259

Pensioners' Bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor, WA15

Public Sector Social Housing Properties, WA261

Rasharkin: Social Housing Proposals, WA127

Rathgill Park, Bangor: Flats, WA56

Severe Winter Weather, WA127

Social Housing

Newbuilds, WA266

Proposals, WA130

Social Security Benefits, WA129–30, WA130, WA259

Solid Fuel Fires, WA261
 Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings
 Scheme, WA125
 West Green, Hollywood: Housing, WA126
 Window Replacement Schemes, WA260

McClarty, Mr David

Ministerial Statements
 Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 49
 Private Members' Business
 Principal Deputy Speaker, 34

McCrea, Mr Basil

Assembly Business
 Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and
 Deputy Chairpersons, 28
 Committee Business
 Standing Orders, 274, 277
 Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main
 Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for
 the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 207, 240-2,
 254, 256-7, 257
 Matters of the Day
 Maghaberry Prison: Aaron Hogg, 40
 Ministerial Statements
 Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 47
 Oral Answers
 Employment and Learning
 Tuition Fees, 227
 Private Members' Business
 Domestic Violence, 103, 103-4, 104
 Educational Attainment: Working-class
 Protestants, 65, 70, 70-1
 Nursery and Preschool Education, 174, 181,
 182, 184
 Special Needs: Services for Young People and
 Adults, 76
 Written Answers
 Finance and Personnel
 Civil Service: Sickness Absence, WA230

McCrea, Mr Ian

Adjournment
 Mid-Ulster Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit, 191,
 192-3, 193
 Ministerial Statements
 Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 45
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 World Police and Fire Games, 164
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Construction, 236

McDevitt, Mr Conall

Committee Business
 Standing Orders, 268, 270, 272, 275, 276
 Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main
 Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for
 the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 221-2, 222, 253
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Agriculture: Shared Resources, 126, 127
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, 161
 Education
 Education: Parental Choice, 166
 Private Members' Business
 Educational Attainment: Working-class
 Protestants, 65-6, 66
 Government Structures, 114-15
 Nursery and Preschool Education, 171, 171-2,
 172-3, 173, 178, 184, 185
 Written Answers
 Education
 GL and AQE Transfer Tests, WA173
 Nursery School Places, WA143
 Employment and Learning
 Institutions Teaching English to Foreign
 Students, WA30
 Finance and Personnel
 Cycle to Work Scheme, WA215
 First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and
 Integration, WA60
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Pupils with Medication Needs, WA101
 Regional Development
 Car Parking Charges, WA14
 Door-to-Door Transport Services, WA122

McDonnell, Dr Alasdair

Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Rural Development Programme, 130
 Written Answers
 First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Economic Research Institute of Northern
 Ireland, WA131-2
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Local Care Homes, WA232
 Justice
 Legal Aid, WA242

McElduff, Mr Barry

Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Rural Development Programme, 130

Private Members' Business
 A5 Dual Carriageway, 148–9, 149
 Educational Attainment: Working-class Protestants, 64, 64–5, 65, 70

Written Answers

Education
 Omagh Integrated Primary School, WA159
 St Columbkille's Primary School, Carrickmore, Omagh, WA159
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Musgrave Park Hospital: Orthopaedic Consultant, WA42
 Orthopaedic Patients, WA42–3
 Transferring Orthopaedic Consultants and Nurses, WA41–2

McGimpsey, Mr Michael

Written Answers

Employment and Learning
 Further Education: Maintenance, WA188

McGlone, Mr Patsy

Adjournment
 Mid-Ulster Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit, 194–5
 Assembly Business
 Election of Deputy Speakers, 7
 Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 248–9
 Matters of the Day
 Mr Brian Lenihan, 199
 Private Members' Business
 A5 Dual Carriageway, 146, 147
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Chicken Litter, WA74
 Environment
 Local Government: Reform, WA40
 Finance and Personnel
 Civil Service: Standards of Conduct, WA228
 Corporation Tax, WA228
 First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Corporation Tax, WA133
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Mid-Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt, WA47
 Physiotherapist to Patient Ratio, WA8
 Regional Development
 Freedom of Information Requests, WA14–15
 Social Development
 Social Housing Newbuilds, WA266

McGuinness, Mr Martin

Assembly Business
 Appointment of Ministers, 17, 18

Election of Speaker, 4
 First Minister and deputy First Minister:
 Appointment and Pledge of Office, 10, 11, 11–12, 12–13
 Standing Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 30, 31
 Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 26, 27, 28, 29

Matters of the Day

Mr Brian Lenihan, 200

Written Answers

First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Archived Departmental Documentation, WA134
 Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, WA131
 Community Relations Council, WA134
 Corporation Tax, WA133
 Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill, WA134
 Devolution of Policing and Justice: Radio Advertisement, WA131
 Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland, WA132
 Ethnic Minority Projects, WA131
 External Consultants, WA59–60
 Investment: Government Funding, WA62, WA134
 Legal Advice, WA133
 Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, WA61, WA62
 Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation and Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre, WA61
 Minister of Justice, WA60
 Northern Ireland Friends of Israel, WA59
 Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, WA62
 OFMDFM: Fraud, WA61
 Papal Visit to Northern Ireland, WA1
 Planning Appeals Commission, WA17–18
 Procurement, WA132–3
 Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, WA60, WA61
 Protocols and Guidance: OFMDFM, WA17
 Racial Equality Forum, WA60
 Staff who Develop a Disability, WA59
 Victims and Survivors Service, WA18

McIlveen, Mr David

Adjournment
 A26: Glarryford to Ballycastle, 297–8
 Oral Answers
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Northern Ireland Tourist Board: Event Funding Programme, 235

Private Members' Business
 Educational Attainment: Working-class Protestants, 62–3, 63

Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Freedom Foods Market, WA136
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Graduates with a Discipline in Arts and Humanities, WA22
 Education
 Cullybackey High School, WA162
 Free School Meals, WA152
 Newly Qualified Teachers, WA3
 Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register, WA153
 Protestant Teachers, WA152
 Teachers in Roman Catholic Schools, WA2
 Employment and Learning
 European Union Monitoring Committee Report's Working Definition of Anti-Semitism, WA187
 Further and Higher Education, WA184
 Tuition Fees, WA32
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Farm Accidents, WA36
 First Minister and deputy First Minister
 Northern Ireland Friends of Israel, WA59
 Justice
 Queen's Counsels, WA105
 Regional Development
 Antrim to Crumlin Railway Line, WA257

McIlveen, Miss Michelle

Assembly Business
 Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 27

Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 222–3

Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 St Andrews Agreement: Irish Language, 162
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Small Business Rate Relief Scheme, 287

Written Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Sensory Processing Disorder, WA239
 Justice
 Death by Dangerous Driving, WA248

McKay, Mr Daithí

Assembly Business
 Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 28

Oral Answers
 Education
 Education: All-Ireland Co-operation, 169, 170

Private Members' Business
 Educational Attainment: Working-class Protestants, 57–8
 Nursery and Preschool Education, 186–7

Written Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Gaelic Games Tourism, WA22
 Education
 Academic Selection, WA26
 GL Assessment Tests, WA151
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Ballycastle Area: Local Economy and Tourism, WA199
 Ballycastle: Hotel Group Investment, WA33
 Comhaltas Ceoltoíní Éireann and Gaelic Games, WA33
 Exports, WA198
 Geothermal Energy Products, WA34
 Northern Ireland Tourist Board, WA35
 Rathlin Island Area: Broadband, WA196
 Wind Farms, WA5
 Environment
 Planning Permission, WA94
 Single-Use Carrier Bags, WA36
 Regional Development
 A26 between Glarryford and the Frosses/ Drones Road Junction, WA50
 Social Development
 Dunclug area of Ballymena, WA55
 Minimum Price for a Unit of Alcohol, WA16
 New Social Housing, WA16
 Rasharkin: Social Housing Proposals, WA127

McKevitt, Mrs Karen

Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Forests, 133
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 World Police and Fire Games, 164
 Finance and Personnel
 Budget Review Group, 285–6, 286

Private Members' Business
 Nursery and Preschool Education, 180–1

McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel

Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 220–1

Matters of the Day
 Dr Garret FitzGerald, 38

Oral Answers

- Employment and Learning
 - EU Engagement, 228, 229
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Broadband Fund, 232
- Environment
 - Waste Management: Incineration, 282
- Finance and Personnel
 - Corporation Tax: Block Grant, 291
- First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Corporation Tax, 125
- Private Members' Business
 - Government Structures, 134–5, 135
- Written Answers
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - DCAL: Capital Budget 2011-15, WA80
 - Environment
 - Proposed Incinerator at Glenavy, WA209
 - Rose Energy's Incinerator at Glenavy, WA36

McMullan, Mr Oliver

- Adjournment
 - A26: Glarryford to Ballycastle, 296, 297
 - Upgrade of the A2 in East Antrim, 90
- Committee Business
 - Standing Orders, 268
- Written Answers
 - Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Single Farm Payments, WA74
 - Environment
 - CO2 Emissions, WA212
 - First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Minister of Justice, WA60

McNarry, Mr David

- Assembly Business
 - Minister of Justice, 20–1, 21, 22
 - Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 29
- Private Members' Business
 - Nursery and Preschool Education, 175–6, 183, 185
- Written Answers
 - Education
 - Co-ordinated Educational Planning, WA82
 - Educational Underachievement, WA145
 - Education Among Families and Communities: Value, WA145
 - Schools Estate, WA29, WA86
 - Shared Education, WA146

McQuillan, Mr Adrian

- Written Answers
 - Regional Development
 - 20 mph Speed Limit, WA120

Maginness, Mr Alban

- Assembly Business
 - Minister of Justice, 22
 - Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 27
- Committee Business
 - Standing Orders, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 275
- Executive Committee Business
 - Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 207, 249–51
- Matters of the Day
 - Maghaberry Prison: Aaron Hogg, 40
- Oral Answers
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Short-term Employment Scheme, 234
- Private Members' Business
 - Domestic Violence, 105–6
 - Government Structures, 119, 135–6, 136
- Written Answers
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Mater Hospital, Belfast: Accident and Emergency Cover, WA240
 - Regional Development
 - Door-to-Door Transport Service, WA257
 - New Local Urban Transport Service, WA258

Maskey, Mr Alex

- Assembly Business
 - Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 27
- Executive Committee Business
 - Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 244–5
- Oral Answers
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Employment: Socially Disadvantaged Areas, 230
 - Finance and Personnel
 - Village, Belfast: Negative Equity, 291
- Private Members' Business
 - Government Structures, 113–14, 114, 118
 - Nursery and Preschool Education, 181, 182
- Written Answers
 - Regional Development
 - South Belfast: Residents-Only Parking Schemes, WA255

Maskey, Mr Paul

- Assembly Business
 - Standing Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 30

Oral Answers
 Employment and Learning
 Education Maintenance Allowance, 229, 230
 Private Members' Business
 Principal Deputy Speaker, 35
 Written Answers
 Education
 Lisanelly Shared Education Campus, Omagh,
 WA84

Molloy, Mr Francie

Adjournment
 Mid-Ulster Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit, 189–91,
 191–2
 Assembly Business
 Election of Deputy Speakers, 7
 Ministerial Statements
 Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 48–9
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Agriculture: Bureaucracy, 132
 Education
 Education Ministers, 169, 170
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 Sexual Orientation Strategy, 121
 Written Answers
 Finance and Personnel
 Corporation Tax and End-year Flexibility, WA228
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Mid-Ulster Hospital: Minor Injuries Clinic,
 WA102

Molloy, Mr Francie (as Deputy Speaker)

Executive Committee Business
 Budget (No. 2) Bill
 First Stage, 259
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main
 Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for
 the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 251, 252, 259
 Private Members' Business
 A5 Dual Carriageway, 141, 142, 144, 146, 147,
 149, 150, 152, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158

Lord Morrow

Committee Business
 Standing Orders, 266, 266–7
 Ministerial Statements
 Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 49
 Oral Answers
 Employment and Learning
 Pathways to Success, 225
 Private Members' Business
 A5 Dual Carriageway, 143, 144, 145, 149, 151,
 153, 156

Domestic Violence, 102–3, 103
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Botulism, WA63, WA64, WA67, WA68
 Brucellosis, WA135
 Farm Testing, WA20
 Education
 Children with a Disability: Support, WA27
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Business: Bureaucracy, WA203
 Environment
 Local Council Staff, WA39
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Counselling Service for Stroke Victims, WA7
 Secure Accommodation Units, WA239
 Justice
 Case Number 10/111192, WA242
 Case Number 11/000893, WA11, WA241
 Convictions for Trespassing and Illegal Entry
 to a Quarry, WA50
 Dangers of Entering Quarries, WA109
 Legal Aid
 Dispute, WA247
 Rates, WA247
 Legal Cases, WA111
 Mobile Phones for Community Police
 Officers, WA11, WA245
 Newry Crown Court, WA248
 Prisoner: Devidas Paliutis, WA11, WA114
 Prisoner Assessment Unit, WA104, WA109,
 WA246
 Belfast, WA48
 Prisoners, WA247
 Separated Prisoners, WA245
 Sex Offender, WA49, WA246
 Solicitors Protest Against Fees, WA48
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 Staff who Develop a Disability, WA59
 Regional Development
 Blue Badges, WA118, WA251

Moutray, Mr Stephen

Assembly Business
 Standing Committees: Chairpersons and
 Deputy Chairpersons, 30
 Private Members' Business
 Government Structures, 116–17
 Written Answers
 Education
 Academic Selection, WA29
 Neighbourhood Renewal, WA151
 Portadown College and Lurgan College: New

Build, WA146
 Employment and Learning
 Neighbourhood Renewal, WA184
 Tuition Fees, WA87
 Environment
 MOT Tests, WA207
 Finance and Personnel
 Local Banks, WA226
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Royal Victoria Hospital: MRI Scans, WA97
 Upper Bann: Multiple Sclerosis Services,
 WA236
 Justice
 Illegal Republican Parades, WA110
 Local District Policing Partnerships, WA240
 Social Development
 Alcohol: Minimum Price, WA262
 Disability Living Allowance Appeals, WA262
 Neighbourhood Renewal, WA128

Murphy, Mr Conor

Assembly Business
 Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and
 Deputy Chairpersons, 26
 Executive Committee Business
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main
 Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for
 the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 208–9
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Agriculture: Shared Resources, 127
 Finance and Personnel
 Small Business Rate Relief Scheme, 288

Nesbitt, Mr Mike

Private Members' Business
 Government Structures, 138–40
 Written Answers
 Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister
 Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, WA62
 Regional Development
 NI Water, WA119
 Unadopted Street Lights, WA119

Ní Chuilín, Ms Cáral

Assembly Business
 Appointment of Ministers, 18
 Election of Deputy Speakers, 7, 9
 Oral Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 2012 Olympics: Torch Relay, 162–163, 163
 City of Culture 2013, 159, 159–60

Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, 161
 Irish Language Strategy/St Andrews
 Agreement: Irish Language, 162
 North West 200, 160, 160–1
 World Police and Fire Games, 163, 163–4,
 164
 Ulster-Scots Agency, 164
 Written Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Archived Departmental Documentation,
 WA141–2
 Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, WA77, WA78
 Broadway Roundabout, Belfast: Display,
 WA137
 Capital Investment, WA142–3
 Craigavon House, Belfast: Regeneration,
 WA139
 DCAL
 Arm's-length Bodies, WA78
 Capital Budget 2011-15, WA80
 Elite Facilities Programme Funding, WA1
 Events Marking Historical Occasions,
 WA139–41
 External Consultants, WA22
 Film Industry, WA143
 Fishing, River and Water and Marine
 Matters, WA78
 Football, WA79
 Gaelic Games Tourism, WA22
 Gilford Library, WA137–8, WA138
 Graduates with a Discipline in Arts and
 Humanities, WA22–3
 Grants, WA142
 Libraries NI, WA81, WA142
 Closures, WA24
 Consultation, WA24
 Expenditure, WA23
 Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:
 Special Adviser, WA81
 Motorsport Infrastructure, WA79
 Multi-Sports Stadium, WA81–2
 Organisations seeking funding, WA77
 Queen Elizabeth: Diamond Jubilee, WA137
 Shared Cultural Awareness, WA76, WA76–7
 Shared Culture, WA76
 Sick Leave, WA25
 Somme Heritage Association, WA25
 Tollymore National Outdoor Centre, WA80
 Windsor Park, Belfast: Redevelopment, WA79
 Yachting, WA23
 Written Ministerial Statement
 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games,
 WMS1-5

Ó hOisín, Mr Cathal

Oral Answers

- Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - City of Culture 2013, 159, 159–160
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - EU Funding, 122, 123

O'Dowd, Mr John

Assembly Business

- Appointment of Ministers, 17

Oral Answers

Education

- DE: Procurement, 167, 168
- Education: Parental Choice, 164–5, 165, 166
- Education Ministers, 169, 170, 170–1
- Foyle and Londonderry College and Ebrington Primary School, 166, 167
- Teachers: Employment, 168, 168–9, 169

Private Members' Business

- Educational Attainment: Working-Class Protestants, 57
- Nursery and Preschool Education, 183, 183–4, 184, 184–5, 185, 185–6

Written Answers

Education

- Academic Selection, WA26, WA29
- Administration of Medication in School, WA153
- Admissions to P1 in the Bangor Area, WA4
- Archived Departmental Documentation, WA173
- Ballymoney High School: Newbuild, WA25
- Ballymote Area of Downpatrick: Youth Services, WA30
- Bangor Central Integrated Primary School, WA155–6
- Board of Governors, WA146–7
- Braidside Integrated Primary School, Ballymena, WA171
- Budgetary Deficit, WA156–7
- Business Education Unit, WA173
- Castle Tower Special School, Ballymena: Newbuild, WA25–6
- Children with a Disability: Support, WA27
- Co-ordinated Educational Planning, WA82
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, WA150–1, WA154, WA158, WA160, WA160–1, WA162, WA173
- Cullybackey High School, WA162
- Devenish College in Fermanagh, WA30
- Education
 - Among Families and Communities: Value, WA145

- Review of Public Administration, WA85–6
- Spend for each Pupil, WA171
- Educational Underachievement, WA27–8, WA145, WA157–8
- Emergency Life Support Skills, WA155, WA172
- Expenses: Regulations that Govern, WA155
- External Companies: Grounds Maintenance in Schools, WA148–9
- External Consultants, WA28, WA175–9
- External Suppliers: Telephone Contracts, WA147
- Free School Meals, WA152
- Gaelscoil na mBeann, Kilkeel, WA182
- GL Assessment Tests, WA151
- GL and AQE Transfer Tests, WA173
- High School, Ballynahinch, WA84–5
- History of the Northern Ireland State, WA172
- Integrated Schools, WA172
- Inquiry into Successful Post-Primary Schools Serving Disadvantaged Communities, WA82
- Investment Delivery Plan, WA163–6, WA171
- Irish Language School in Kilkeel, WA183
- Lisanelly Shared Education Campus, Omagh, WA84
- Location of Conferences, WA154
- Maintenance for Schools, WA154
- Music Therapy Services, WA153
- National Association of Schoolmasters/ Union of Women Teachers, WA150
- Neighbourhood Renewal, WA149, WA151, WA159
- Newbuilds for Schools, WA2
- New School Buildings in the Hollywood Area, WA3
- Newly Qualified Teachers, WA3
- North Down Area: Capital Funding for Schools, WA28
- Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register, WA153
- Nursery School Places, WA83, WA144, WA147, WA158
- Omagh Integrated Primary School, WA159
- Over-Subscription for P1 Primary School Places, WA4–5
- Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim, WA84, WA85, WA181–2, WA182
- Physical Exercise: School Children, WA83
- Portadown College and Lurgan College: New Builds, WA146
- Pre-school Places, WA86
- Preparatory Schools: Funding, WA26, WA82, WA83

Primary Schools: Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street, WA86
 Primary School Admission: Appeals, WA26
 Protestant Teachers, WA152–3
 Review of Public Administration, WA183
 School
 Attendance, WA179, WA180
 Budgets, WA2
 Places for Children in Groomsport, WA2
 Transport, WA152
 Schools: Newbuilds, WA159, WA166–70, WA171, WA174–5
 Schools Estate, WA29, WA87
 Shared Education, WA146
 South Eastern Education and Library Board, WA183
 St Columbkille's Primary School, Carrickmore, Omagh, WA160
 Staff Sick Leave, WA83–4
 Statutory Youth Service Provision, WA150
 Strabane Academy: Newbuild, WA29–30
 Students with Special Needs: Summer Schemes, WA29
 Teachers in Roman Catholic Schools, WA2–3
 Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus, WA157

O'Neill, Mrs Michelle

Assembly Business
 Appointment of Ministers, 18
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Agriculture
 Bureaucracy, 131, 132
 Shared Resources, 126–7, 127, 128
 Forests, 132–3, 133
 Gorse Fires: Single Farm Payments, 128, 128–9, 129
 Less-favoured Areas, 129, 129–30, 130
 Rural Development Programme, 130, 131
 Written Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Agrifood, WA71, WA73–4
 Sector, WA19–20
 Archived Departmental Documentation, WA136
 Botulism, WA19, WA63–4, WA64, WA67–8, WA68
 Bovine Technologies, WA72
 Bovine Tuberculosis, WA65–6, WA75–6
 Brucellosis, WA135
 Building Sustainable Communities, Capacity Building Programme, WA68
 Chicken Litter, WA75
 Circuses: Wild Animals, WA71–2

Common Agricultural Policy, WA69, WA135–6
 Reform, WA21
 DARD Direct Office: Newtownards, WA70
 DARD: Headquarters, WA72–3
 External Consultants, WA62–3
 Farm Testing, WA20
 Farmers: Average Age, WA65
 Fish Stocks, WA135
 Fishing, river and water and marine matters, WA70
 Freedom Foods Market, WA136–7
 Groceries Code Adjudicator Bill, WA70–1
 Less Favoured Area Payments, WA136
 Local Lamb Processing, WA66
 North Down: Tree Population, WA64
 Sheep Electronic Identification Tags, WA21
 Single Farm Payments, WA69, WA74
 Staff Sick Leave, WA68–9
 Video Image Analysis (VIA) System, WA69–70
 Woodland, WA73

Overend, Mrs Sandra

Adjournment
 Mid-Ulster Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit, 193–4
 Oral Answers
 Agriculture and Rural Development
 Gorse Fires: Single Farm Payments, 129
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 City of Culture 2013, 159
 Employment and Learning
 Higher Education Strategy, 226
 Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 Broadband Fund, 233
 Private Members' Business
 Domestic Violence, 97–8

Poots, Mr Edwin

Adjournment
 Mid-Ulster Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit, 195–6, 196–8
 Assembly Business
 Appointment of Ministers, 18
 Ministerial Statements
 Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 41–2, 43, 43–4, 44, 45, 46, 46–7, 47, 48, 49
 Private Members' Business
 Special Needs: Services for Young People and Adults, 80–1, 81–2, 83
 Written Answers
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Abortions, WA98
 Accident and Emergency Department: Trolley Waits, WA46–7

Antrim Area Hospital: Accident and
Emergency Department, WA46
Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, WA7–8
Causeway Hospital, Coleraine: Renal unit,
WA101
Children with Chronic Orthopaedic Problems,
WA45–6
Community Health Village, Banbridge, WA104
Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon
in the Western Health and Social Care
Trust, WA9
Counselling Service for Stroke Victims, WA7
CT Scans, WA99
Dental Practices, WA44
Dental Surgeries, WA10
E. Coli, WA103
Electroencephalography (EEG) Machines, WA99
Enniskillen: New Hospital, WA47, WA48
Fire and Rescue Service, WA102
Free Health Service Care, WA9
Frontier Workers, WA8
George Sloan Adult Centre, Ballymena, WA45
Health and Personal Social Services (Quality,
Improvement and Regulation) (Northern
Ireland) Order 2003, WA100–1
Health of Working-Class Communities, WA6–7
Mid-Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt, WA47
Minor Injuries Clinic, WA102
MRI Scans, WA99
Musgrave Park Hospital: Orthopaedic
Consultant, WA42
Music Therapy Services, WA7, WA9–10,
WA103, WA103
Neurologists, WA8–9
North Antrim: Multiple Sclerosis Services,
WA102
North Down Area: Mental Health Provision,
WA44
Omagh: Local Enhanced Hospital, WA45
Orthopaedic Patients, WA43
Physiotherapist to Patient Ratio, WA8
Pupils with Medication Needs, WA101
Regulation and Quality Improvement
Authority, WA45
Legislation, WA100
Registration Fee, WA99–100
Republic of Ireland Residents Receiving
Hospital Care in Northern Ireland, WA43–4
Royal Victoria Hospital: MRI Scans, WA97
S2 Certificate Arrangements, WA8, WA48,
WA100
Southern Cross Nursing Homes, WA103
Staff Sick Leave, WA102

Transferring Orthopaedic Consultants and
Nurses, WA42
Ulster Hospital, Dundonald, WA98
Craig Ward, WA98

Ramsey, Mr Pat

Ministerial Statements
Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 45
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
City of Culture 2013, 159
Education
Foyle and Londonderry College and
Ebrington Primary School, 166, 166–7
Employment and Learning
Higher Education Strategy, 226
Private Members' Business
Educational Attainment: Working-Class
Protestants, 58–9, 59
Nursery and Preschool Education, 187–9
Principal Deputy Speaker, 33
Written Answers
Education
Business Education Unit, WA173
Employment and Learning
North West Regional College, WA32
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust:
Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic
Surgeon, WA233
Children with Chronic Orthopaedic Problems,
WA45, WA233
Consultant Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon
in the Western Health and Social Care
Trust, WA9
Electroencephalography (EEG) Machines, WA99
Justice
Agreement Ending Roe House Protest, WA246
Regional Development
SmartPasses, WA257

Ramsey, Ms Sue

Assembly Business
Standing Committees: Chairpersons and
Deputy Chairpersons, 30
Committee Business
Standing Orders, 262–5, 268
Oral Answers
Culture, Arts and Leisure
Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, 161
Education
DE: Procurement, 167
Employment and Learning
Further Education: Inspections, 224

Written Answers

- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
- Investment: Government Funding, WA134

Ritchie, Ms Margaret

Assembly Business

- Appointment of Ministers, 18
- Election of Deputy Speakers, 7
- Election of Speaker, 5
- Minister of Justice, 22
- Standing Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 30
- Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 27, 28, 29

Private Members' Business

- A5 Dual Carriageway, 146

Written Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Fish Stocks, WA135
- Education
 - Ballymote Area of Downpatrick: Youth Services, WA30
 - Nursery School Places, WA158
 - Statutory Youth Service Provision, WA149
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Corporation Tax: Investment, WA200
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Heart and Circulatory Disease, WA234
- Regional Development
 - Private Housing Estates: Unadopted Roads, WA258

Robinson, Mr George

Ministerial Statements

- Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 46

Oral Answers

- Culture, Arts and Leisure
 - North West 200, 160
- Enterprise, Trade and Investment
 - Employment: Socially Disadvantaged Areas, 231

Private Members' Business

- Special Needs: Services for Young People and Adults, 75

Written Answers

- Justice
 - Convicted Sex Offenders, WA111
- Regional Development
 - Coleraine to Londonderry Railway Line, WA15

Robinson, Mr Peter

Assembly Business

- Appointment of Ministers, 17, 18

Election of Speaker, 4–5

First Minister and deputy First Minister:

- Appointment and Pledge of Office, 10, 11
- Standing Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 30, 31
- Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 26, 27, 28, 29

Oral Answers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

- Commissioner for Older People, 124, 125
- Community Relations Week 2011, 121–2, 122
- Corporation Tax, 125, 125–6, 126
- EU Funding, 122–3, 123
- Sexual Orientation Strategy, 120

Written Answers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

- Archived Departmental Documentation, WA134
- Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, WA131
- Community Relations Council, WA134
- Corporation Tax, WA133
- Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill, WA134
- Devolution of Policing and Justice: Radio Advertisement, WA131
- Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland, WA132
- Ethnic Minority Projects, WA131
- External Consultants, WA59–60
- Investment: Government Funding, WA62, WA134
- Legal Advice, WA133
- Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, WA61, WA62
 - Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre, WA61
- Minister of Justice, WA60
- Northern Ireland Friends of Israel, WA59
- Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, WA62
- OFMDFM: Fraud, WA61
- Papal Visit to Northern Ireland, WA1
- Planning Appeals Commission, WA17–18
- Procurement, WA132–3
- Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, WA60, WA61
- Protocols and Guidance: OFMDFM, WA17
- Racial Equality Forum, WA60
- Staff who Develop a Disability, WA59
- Victims and Survivors Service, WA18

Ross, Mr Alastair

Adjournment

- A2: East Antrim, 84–6

Assembly Business
 Standing Committees: Chairpersons and
 Deputy Chairpersons, 30

Oral Answers

Education

Teachers: Employment, 168

Finance and Personnel

Corporation Tax: Block Grant, 290

Written Answers

Regional Development

A2 Upgrade Project in East Antrim, WA14

On-Street Car Parking, WA14

Ruane, Ms Caitriona

Executive Committee Business

Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main
 Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for
 the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 217

Oral Answers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister

Commissioner for Older People, 124

Private Members' Business

Domestic Violence, 95-6, 96-7, 97

Written Answers

Environment

Chapel Road, Mayobridge: Premises, WA94

Mayobridge: Tyre Storage Depot, WA211

Social Development

51 Burren Road, Warrenpoint: Adjacent
 Lands, WA126

Sheehan, Mr Pat

Assembly Business

Standing Committees: Chairpersons and
 Deputy Chairpersons, 31

Private Members' Business

Government Structures, 117-18

Written Answers

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Employment: 16-24 Year-olds, WA202

Environment

Local Government: Review of Public
 Administration, WA210

Office of the First Minister and deputy First
 Minister

OFMDFM: Fraud, WA61

Hay, Mr William

Assembly Business

Election of Speaker, 5

The Speaker (Mr William Hay)

Assembly Business, 15, 41, 50, 53, 203, 261

Appointment of Junior Ministers, 19

Appointment of Ministers, 17, 18, 19

Assembly Commission: Membership, 50

Damages (Asbestos-Related Conditions) Bill, 93

Election of Deputy Speakers, 7, 8, 8-9, 9

Election of Speaker, 4, 6

First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Appointment and Pledge of Office, 9, 10, 11,
 12, 13

Minister of Justice, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25

Public Petition: Down Community Transport, 93

Roll of Membership, 1, 2, 3

Standing Committees: Chairpersons and
 Deputy Chairpersons, 30, 31

Statutory Committees, 26

Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 26,
 27, 28, 29

Suspension of Standing Order 20(1), 16, 54

Suspension of Standing Orders, 41

Committee Business

Business Committee: Membership, 13

Standing Orders, 262, 265, 265-6, 266, 267,
 267-8, 268, 269, 270, 271, 273, 275, 276,
 277, 279, 280

Statutory Committee Membership: Committee
 for Regional Development, 94

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill

Second Stage, 262

Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main
 Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for
 the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 204, 207, 211

Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill (NIA 5/09)/
 Welfare of Animals Bill (NIA 28/09)/Assembly

Members (Independent Financial Review
 and Standards) Bill (NIA 3/10)/Licensing
 and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

(NIA19/09)/Sunbeds Bill (NIA 18/09)/Civil
 Registration Bill (NIA 20/07)/High Hedges

Bill (NIA 15/09)/Housing (Amendment) Bill
 (NIA 32/09)/Clean Neighbourhoods and

Environment Bill (NIA 31/09)/Justice Bill
 (NIA1/10)/Planning Bill (NIA7/10)

Royal Assent, 15-16

Matters of the Day

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh Ninetieth Birthday,
 201, 202

Maghaberry Prison: Aaron Hogg, 39

Mr Brian Lenihan, 199

Dr Garret FitzGerald, 37

Ministerial Statements

Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 41, 42,
 43, 47, 49

Oral Answers

- Agriculture and Rural Development
 - Agriculture: Shared Resources, 128
 - Forests, 133, 134
- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, 120
 - Community Relations Week 2011, 122
 - Corporation Tax, 125
 - EU Funding, 124

Private Members' Business

- Autism Bill (NIA2/10)/Single Use Carrier Bags Bill (NIA 8/10)
 - Royal Assent, 15–16
- Domestic Violence, 94, 96, 97, 99
- Educational Attainment: Working-Class Protestants, 54, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 70
- Government Structures, 116, 118, 119, 120
- Principal Deputy Speaker, 32, 34, 35
- Special Needs: Services for Young People and Adults, 73, 75

Speaker's Business, 93**Spratt, Mr Jimmy****Assembly Business**

- Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 28

Executive Committee Business

- Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 215–17

Oral Answers

- Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
 - Sexual Orientation Strategy, 121

Private Members' Business

- A5 Dual Carriageway, 144–5
- Government Structures, 118, 118–19

Written Answers

- Education
 - Primary Schools: Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street, WA86
- Finance and Personnel
 - Department of Finance and Personnel: Arm's-length Bodies, WA230
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, WA100

Storey, Mr Mervyn**Adjournment**

- A26: Glarryford to Ballycastle, 292–4, 295

Assembly Business

- Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 27

Executive Committee Business

- Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 238–9

Oral Answers**Education**

- Education: Parental Choice, 165

Private Members' Business

- Domestic Violence, 103, 106
- Educational Attainment: Working-class Protestants, 64, 66
- Nursery and Preschool Education, 172, 182, 183

Written Answers**Culture, Arts and Leisure**

- Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, WA77
- Queen Elizabeth: Diamond Jubilee, WA137

Education

- Administration of Medication in School, WA153
- Ballymoney High School: Newbuild, WA25
- Braidside Integrated Primary School, Ballymena, WA171
- Castle Tower Special School, Ballymena: Newbuild, WA25
- Investment Delivery Plan, WA163
- National Association of Schoolmasters/union of Women Teachers, WA150
- Neighbourhood Renewal, WA159
- Newbuilds for Schools, WA2
- School Budgets, WA2
- Schools: Newbuilds, WA159
- South Eastern Education and Library Board, WA183

Employment and Learning

- Stranmillis University College, WA184

Environment

- Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, WA204

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

- Causeway Hospital, Coleraine: Renal Unit, WA101
- North Antrim: Multiple Sclerosis Services, WA102

Regional Development

- Dualling of the A26 Between Ballymena and Ballymoney, WA13
- NI Water, WA256
- On-Street Car Parking Charges, WA256

Social Development

- Disability Living Allowance, WA263, WA264
- Neighbourhood Renewal, WA130
- Social Housing Proposals, WA130

Swann, Mr Robin

Adjournment

A26: Glarryford to Ballycastle, 294–5, 296–7

Oral Answers

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Employment: Socially Disadvantaged Areas, 231

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

EU Funding, 123

Written Answers

Agriculture and Rural Development

Video Image Analysis (VIA) System, WA69

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, WA77

Film Industry, WA143

Libraries NI, WA81

Closures, WA24

Consultation, WA24

Expenditure, WA23

Employment and Learning

Higher Education: Postgraduate Awards, WA190

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Arthur College, Ballymena, WA91–2

Ballycastle to Campbeltown Ferry Service, WA193

Capital Investment, WA142

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

George Sloan Adult Centre, Ballymena, WA45

Regulation and Quality Improvement

Authority, WA44–5

Weir, Mr Peter

Assembly Business

Minister of Justice, 20, 22, 54

Suspension of Standing Order 20(1), 16

Oral Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

2012 Olympics: Torch Relay, 163

Private Members' Business

Educational Attainment: Working-Class

Protestants, 63, 64, 71–2

Government Structures, 111, 116, 136, 136–7, 137

Principal Deputy Speaker, 32

Written Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Elite Facilities Programme Funding, WA1

Yachting, WA23

Education

Admissions to P1 in the Bangor Area, WA4

Bangor Central Integrated Primary School, WA155

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, WA150, WA154, WA160, WA162

Emergency Life Support Skills, WA172

Expenses: Regulations that Govern, WA155

Location of Conferences, WA154

Maintenance for Schools, WA154

North Down Area: Capital Funding for Schools, WA28

Over-Subscription for P1 Primary School Places, WA4

Preparatory Schools: Funding, WA82, WA83

Primary School Admission: Appeals, WA26

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Legislation, WA92

Environment

Beaches: Quality, WA203

Car Exhausts: Noise Levels, WA205

Fly-Posting, WA37

Finance and Personnel

Barnett Consequentials, WA215

Legislation, WA224

Lone Pensioner Allowance, WA230

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Emergency Life Support Skills, WA237

Legislation, WA235

North Down Area: Mental Health Provision, WA44

Southern Cross Healthcare, WA239

Justice

Keeping a Prisoner in Jail: Cost, WA110

Legal Aid, WA243, WA244

Legislation, WA246

Policing Board: Independent Membership, WA112

PSNI: Equal Pay Dispute, WA240

Regional Development

Access for People with Disabilities at Bus and Railway Stations, WA53

Bridge End Railway Station, Belfast: Access for People with Disabilities, WA53

Car Parking Charges in Town Centres, WA116

Door-to-Door Transport Service, WA54

Northern Ireland Water: Customers, WA51

Traffic-Calming Measures, WA121

Social Development

Alcohol: Minimum Pricing, WA126

Bloomfield Area of Bangor: Renovating Properties, WA123

Housing Associations, WA124

Housing Renovation Schemes, WA123

Wells, Mr Jim

Assembly Business
 Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons, 29
 Ministerial Statements
 Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit, 43, 49
 Private Members' Business
 Special Needs: Services for Young People and Adults, 81
 Written Answers
 Culture, Arts and Leisure
 Tollymore National Outdoor Centre, WA80
 Education
 Gaelscoil na mBeann, Kilkeel, WA182
 High School, Ballynahinch, WA84
 Irish Language School in Kilkeel, WA183
 Justice
 Compensation Payments, WA114
 Regional Development
 Taxi Fares for Bus and Train Drivers, WA115

Department Staff, WA217–24
 EU Funding, WA229
 External Consultants, WA214–15
 Fleet Transport, WA226
 Grant Programmes, WA225
 Invest NI: Chief Executive Officer, WA41, WA227
 Legislation, WA224
 Local Banks, WA213, WA226
 Lone Pensioner Allowance, WA230
 Ministerial Cars: Drivers, WA216
 Northern Ireland Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme, WA224, WA224–5
 Procurement Cards, WA226–7
 Rates: Development Sites, WA229
 Rating Revaluation, WA225
 Registering a Newborn Child, WA41
 Unpaid Rates, WA213–14

Wilson, Mr Sammy

Assembly Business
 Appointment of Ministers, 17
 First Minister and deputy First Minister:
 Appointment and Pledge of Office, 9–10
 Executive Committee Business
 Budget (No. 2) Bill
 First Stage, 259
 Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 and Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes, 204–6, 206, 207, 207–8, 252–3, 253, 253–4, 254–5, 255, 255–6, 257, 257–8, 258–9, 259
 Matters of the Day
 Mr Brian Lenihan, 199–200
 Written Answers
 Finance and Personnel
 Ballymena Health and Social Care Centre Business Case, WA227
 Barnett Consequentials, WA215
 Bonus Payments, WA6
 Civil Service
 Sick Leave, WA215
 Sickness Absence, WA230
 Standards of Conduct, WA228
 Corporation Tax, WA216, WA227, WA227–8, WA228–9
 End-year Flexibility, WA228
 Cycle to Work Scheme, WA215
 Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Bill, WA41
 Department of Finance and Personnel:
 Arm's-length Bodies, WA230

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Thursday 12 May 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Notice of First Meeting

In accordance with Standing Order 2(1) the Clerk to the Assembly gave notice that the Assembly will meet, as required by section 31(4) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, in Parliament Buildings on Thursday 12 May 2011 at noon.

The Speaker took the Chair.

2. Roll of Membership

The Speaker outlined the procedure for signing the Roll of Membership. The Speaker signed the Roll of Membership.

Members signed the Roll and indicated a designation of identity.

The following members designated as Nationalist:

Ms Martina Anderson, Mr Alex Attwood, Mr Cathal Boylan, Ms Michaela Boyle, Mr Dominic Bradley, Mr Mickey Brady, Mr Joe Byrne, Mr Willie Clarke, Mr John Dallat, Mr Pat Doherty, Mr Mark H Durkan, Mr Colum Eastwood, Mr Phil Flanagan, Ms Michelle Gildernew, Mrs Dolores Kelly, Mr Gerry Kelly, Mr Seán Lynch, Mr Fra McCann, Ms Jennifer McCann, Mr Raymond Mc Cartney, Mr Conall McDevitt, Dr Alastair McDonnell, Mr Barry McElduff, Mr Patsy McGlone, Mr Martin McGuinness, Mr Daithí McKay, Mrs Karen McKeivitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr Oliver McMullan, Mr Alban Maginness, Mr Alex Maskey, Mr Paul Maskey, Mr Francie Molloy, Mr Conor Murphy, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín, Mr Cathal Ó hOisín, Mr John O'Dowd, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, Mr Pat Ramsey, Ms Sue Ramsey, Ms Margaret Ritchie, Ms Cairtriona Ruane, Mr Pat Sheehan.

The following Members designated as Unionist:

Mr Jim Allister, Mr Sydney Anderson, Mr Roy Beggs, Mr Jonathan Bell, Ms Paula Bradley, Mr Thomas Buchanan, Mr Gregory Campbell, Mr Trevor Clarke, Mr Michael Copeland, Mr Jonathan Craig, Mr Leslie Cree, Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson, Mr Sammy Douglas, Mr Gordon Dunne, Mr Alex Easton, Mr Tom Elliott, Mrs Arlene Foster, Mr Paul Frew, Mr Samuel Gardiner, Mr Paul Girvan, Mr Paul Givan, Mrs Brenda Hale, Mr Simon Hamilton, Mr William Hay, Mr David Hilditch, Mr William Humphrey, Mr Ross Hussey, Mr William Irwin, Mr Danny Kennedy, Mr Danny Kinahan, Mrs Pam Lewis, Mr John McCallister, Mr Nelson McCausland, Mr David McClarty, Mr Basil McCrea, Mr Ian McCrea, Mr Michael McGimpsey, Mr David McIlveen, Miss Michelle McIlveen, Mr David McNarry, Mr Adrian McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Stephen Moutray, Mr Mike Nesbitt, Mr Robin Newton, Mrs Sandra Overend, Mr Edwin Poots, Mr George Robinson, Rt Hon Peter Robinson, Mr Alastair Ross, Mr Jimmy Spratt, Mr Mervyn Storey, Mr Robin Swann, Mr Peter Weir, Mr Jim Wells, Mr Sammy Wilson.

The following Members designated as Other:

Mr Steven Agnew, Mrs Judith Cochrane, Mr Stewart Dickson, Dr Stephen Farry, Mr David Ford, Ms Anna Lo, Mr Trevor Lunn, Mr Chris Lyttle, Mr Kieran McCarthy.

The sitting was suspended at 12.45pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.30pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

The Speaker confirmed that he was satisfied that all Members who have signed the Roll have taken their seats in accordance with Standing Orders.

3. Election of Speaker

As the outgoing Speaker was seeking re-election as Speaker, he left the Chair in accordance with Standing Order 4(2), and the Chair was taken by Mr Samuel Gardiner, the Acting Speaker.

The Acting Speaker, Mr Gardiner, took the Chair.

The Acting Speaker outlined the procedure for the election of a Speaker under Standing Order 4.

Mr Martin McGuinness nominated Mr William Hay as a candidate for the Office of Speaker. The Rt Hon Peter Robinson seconded the nomination. Mr Hay indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support nemine contradicente.

The Speaker took the Chair.

4. Election of Deputy Speakers

The Speaker advised that the procedure for election of Deputy Speakers would be the same as that for the election of the Speaker.

Mr Pat Doherty nominated Mr Francie Molloy as a Deputy Speaker.

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín seconded the nomination. Mr Molloy indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

Mr Tom Elliott nominated Mr Roy Beggs as a Deputy Speaker.

Mr Danny Kennedy seconded the nomination. Mr Roy Beggs indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

Ms Margaret Ritchie nominated Mr John Dallat as a Deputy Speaker.

Mr Patsy McGlone seconded the nomination. Mr Dallat indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Question being put that Mr Francie Molloy be a Deputy Speaker, there was one dissenting voice. Tellers were called for a Division. Two Tellers presented for the Ayes and one for the Noes. In accordance with Standing Order 27(4) the determination of the Assembly was that of the side for which two Tellers had been nominated. The Motion was **carried** with cross-community support.

The Question being put that Mr Roy Beggs be a Deputy Speaker, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support nemine contradicente.

The Question being put that Mr John Dallat be a Deputy Speaker, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support nemine contradicente.

5. Appointment of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Speaker outlined the procedure for the appointment of the First Minister and deputy First Minister as set out in section 16A of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Standing Order 44(1).

Mr Sammy Wilson nominated the Rt Hon Peter Robinson as First Minister. Mr Doherty nominated Mr Martin McGuinness as deputy First Minister.

Rt Hon Peter Robinson affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office contained in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Martin McGuinness affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office contained in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Speaker confirmed that the Rt Hon Peter Robinson and Mr Martin McGuinness had taken up office as First Minister and deputy First Minister respectively.

6. Committee Business

6.1 Motion - Business Committee Membership

Proposed:

That the following shall be appointed to be members of the Business Committee:

The Speaker (Ex officio)

Mr S Dickson

Mr P Maskey

Mr J McCallister

Mr C McDevitt

The Lord Morrow

Ms C Ní Chuilín

Mr P Ramsey

Mr R Swann

Mr P Weir.

The Speaker

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 3.25pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

12 May 2011

Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998

To pledge:

- to discharge in good faith all the duties of office;
- commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means;
- to serve all the people of Northern Ireland equally, and to act in accordance with the general obligations on government to promote equality and prevent discrimination;
- to promote the interests of the whole community represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly towards the goal of a shared future;
- to participate fully in the Executive Committee, the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council;
- to observe the joint nature of the offices of First Minister and deputy First Minister;
- to uphold the rule of law based as it is on the fundamental principles of fairness, impartiality and democratic accountability, including support for policing and the courts as set out in paragraph 6 of the St Andrews Agreement;
- to participate with colleagues in the preparation of a programme for government;
- to operate within the framework of that programme when agreed within the Executive Committee and endorsed by the Assembly;
- to support, and act in accordance with, all decisions of the Executive Committee and Assembly;
- to comply with the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

Paragraph 6 of the St Andrews Agreement says:

'We believe that the essential elements of support for law and order include endorsing fully the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the criminal justice system, actively encouraging everyone in the community to co-operate fully with the PSNI in tackling crime in all areas and actively supporting all the policing and criminal justice institutions, including the Policing Board.'

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 6 - 12 May 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Civil Registration Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Sunbeds Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2011/175 The Road Races (Drumhore Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/176 The Off-Street parking (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/177 The Road Races (Circuit of Ireland International Rally) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/178 The Parking Places (Disabled Persons' Vehicles) (Amendment No.4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/179 The Roads (Speed Limit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/180 The Road Races (Tandragee 100) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/184 The Road Races (Gortin Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Consultation on the Department for Regional Development's Draft Equality Impact Assessment for Sustainable Transport Enabling Measures for Belfast City Centre (DRD)

Consultation on Proposed Changes to the Learner and Restricted Driver Schemes and on Graduated Driver Licensing (DOE)

9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 16 May 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Royal Assent

The Speaker informed Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 29 March 2011 to the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; and the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The Speaker advised Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 3 May 2011 to the Sunbeds Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; the Civil Registration Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; and the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The Speaker also informed Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 4 May 2011 to the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; and the Single Use Carrier Bags Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The Speaker advised Members that Royal Assent had also been signified on 9 May 2011 to the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The Speaker advised Members that the Damages (Asbestos-Related Conditions) Bill had been referred to the Supreme Court by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland.

2.2 Motion - Suspension of Standing Orders

Proposed:

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 16 May 2011.

*Mr P Weir
Ms C Ní Chuilín
Mr J McCallister
Mr P Ramsey
Mr S Dickson*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support nemine contradicente.

3. Appointment of Ministers

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Sammy Wilson to be Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Mr Sammy Wilson affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Sammy Wilson as Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Mr John O'Dowd to be Minister of Education.

Mr John O'Dowd affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr John O'Dowd as Minister of Education.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mrs Arlene Foster to be Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mrs Arlene Foster affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mrs Arlene Foster as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Tom Elliott, the nominating officer for the Ulster Unionist Party, nominated Mr Danny Kennedy to be Minister for Regional Development.

Mr Danny Kennedy affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Danny Kennedy as Minister for Regional Development.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Mrs Michelle O'Neill to be Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mrs Michelle O'Neill affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mrs Michelle O'Neill as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Ms Margaret Ritchie, the nominating officer for the Social Democratic and Labour Party, nominated Mr Alex Attwood to be Minister of the Environment.

Mr Alex Attwood affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Alex Attwood as Minister of the Environment.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Nelson McCausland to be Minister for Social Development.

Mr Nelson McCausland affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Nelson McCausland as Minister for Social Development.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Ms Carál Ní Chuilín to be Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Ms Carál Ní Chuilín as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Edwin Poots to be Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Edwin Poots affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Edwin Poots as Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr David Ford, the nominating officer for the Alliance party, nominated Dr Stephen Farry to be Minister for Employment and Learning.

Dr Stephen Farry affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Dr Stephen Farry as Minister for Employment and Learning.

The Speaker informed the House that he had received correspondence from the First Minister and deputy First Minister advising that, pursuant to the procedure for the appointment of junior Ministers specified in paragraph 3(1) of the determination made by the then First Minister and deputy First Minister on 8 December 1999, as approved by the Assembly on 14 December 1999, Mr Jonathan Bell MLA and Ms Martina Anderson MLA have been appointed as junior Ministers in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Jonathan Bell and Ms Martina Anderson each affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Jonathan Bell and Ms Martina Anderson as junior Ministers.

4. Filling of the Office of Minister of Justice

Democratic Unionist Party Nomination

Mr Peter Weir nominated Mr Paul Givan to be Minister of Justice. Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Nomination was **not approved** (Division 1).

Social Democratic and Labour Party Nomination

Ms Margaret Ritchie nominated Mr Alban Maginness to be Minister of Justice.

The Question being put, the Nomination was **not approved** (Division 2).

Ulster Unionist Party Nomination

Mr Tom Elliott nominated Mr Danny Kinahan to be Minister of Justice.

The Question being put, the Nomination was **not approved** (Division 3).

Alliance Party Nomination

Dr Stephen Farry nominated Mr David Ford to be Minister of Justice. Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Nomination was **approved** by parallel consent (Division 4).

Mr David Ford affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in Schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Speaker confirmed that Mr David Ford has taken up office as Minister of Justice.

The sitting was suspended at 1.30pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.30pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

5. Assembly Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion - Establishment of Statutory Committees

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Orders 46 and 47, this Assembly determines that 12 Statutory Committees shall be established, as follows:

- the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development;
- the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure;
- the Committee for Education;
- the Committee for Employment and Learning;
- the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment;
- the Committee for the Environment;
- the Committee for Finance and Personnel;
- the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety;
- the Committee for Justice;
- the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister;
- the Committee for Regional Development;
- the Committee for Social Development.

Terms of reference, quorum and composition of the Committees shall be as prescribed in Standing Orders 48 and 49.

Mr P Weir

Ms C Ní Chuilín

Mr J McCallister

Mr P Ramsey

Mr S Dickson

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5.2 Appointment of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Statutory Committees

The Speaker outlined the procedure for the appointment of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Statutory Committees.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Paul Givan to be Chairperson of the Committee for Justice. Mr Paul Givan indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Paul Givan as Chairperson of the Committee for Justice.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Mr Conor Murphy to be Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel. Mr Conor Murphy indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Conor Murphy as Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Mervyn Storey to be Chairperson of the Committee for Education. Mr Mervyn Storey indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Mervyn Storey as Chairperson of the Committee for Education.

Mr Tom Elliott, the nominating officer for the Ulster Unionist Party, nominated himself to be Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Mr Tom Elliott indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Tom Elliott as Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Ms Michelle Gildernew to be Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Ms Michelle Gildernew indicated her agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Ms Michelle Gildernew as Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Ms Margaret Ritchie, the nominating officer for the Social Democratic and Labour Party, nominated Mr Alban Maginness to be Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Mr Alban Maginness indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Alban Maginness as Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Paul Frew to be Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. Mr Paul Frew indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Paul Frew as Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Mr Alex Maskey to be Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development. Mr Alex Maskey indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Alex Maskey as Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Miss Michelle McIlveen to be Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. Miss Michelle McIlveen indicated her agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Miss McIlveen as Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Mr David Ford, the nominating officer for the Alliance Party, nominated Ms Anna Lo to be Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment. Ms Anna Lo indicated her agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Ms Anna Lo as Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment.

Mr Tom Elliott, the nominating officer for the Ulster Unionist Party, nominated Mr Basil McCrea to be Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning. Mr Basil McCrea indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Basil McCrea as Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Jimmy Spratt to be Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development. Mr Jimmy Spratt indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Jimmy Spratt as Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Mr Raymond McCartney to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Justice. Mr Raymond McCartney indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Raymond McCartney as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Justice.

Ms Margaret Ritchie, the nominating officer for the Social Democratic and Labour Party, nominated Mrs Dolores Kelly to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. Mrs Dolores Kelly indicated her agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mrs Dolores Kelly as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Simon Hamilton to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment. Mr Simon Hamilton indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Simon Hamilton as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Mr Daithí McKay to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Mr Daithí McKay indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Daithí McKay as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Thomas Buchanan to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning. Mr Thomas Buchanan indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Thomas Buchanan as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Mr Tom Elliott, the nominating officer for the Ulster Unionist Party, nominated Mr David McNarry to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education. Mr David McNarry indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr David McNarry as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Mr Pat Doherty to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development. Mr Pat Doherty indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Pat Doherty as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr William Irwin to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. Mr William Irwin indicated his agreement to accept the nomination via written notification.

The Speaker advised Members that he had received a letter from Mr William Irwin and confirmed his appointment as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Ms Margaret Ritchie, the nominating officer for the Social Democratic and Labour Party, nominated Mr Dominic Bradley as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel. Mr Dominic Bradley indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Dominic Bradley as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Jim Wells to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Mr Jim Wells indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Jim Wells as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Mr Mickey Brady to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development. Mr Mickey Brady indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Mickey Brady as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development.

Mr David Ford, the nominating officer for the Alliance Party, nominated Mr Chris Lyttle to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Mr Chris Lyttle indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Chris Lyttle as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

5.3 Appointment of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Standing Committees

The Speaker outlined the procedure for the appointment of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Standing Committees.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Stephen Moutray to be Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. Mr Stephen Moutray indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Stephen Moutray as Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Mr Paul Maskey to be Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee. Mr Paul Maskey indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Paul Maskey as Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Alastair Ross to be Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. Mr Alastair Ross indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Alastair Ross as Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Mr Tom Elliott, the nominating officer for the Ulster Unionist Party, nominated Mr Danny Kinahan to be Chairperson of the Audit Committee. Mr Danny Kinahan indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Danny Kinahan as Chairperson of the Audit Committee.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Ms Sue Ramsey to be Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures. Ms Sue Ramsey indicated her agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Ms Sue Ramsey as Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures.

Ms Margaret Ritchie, the nominating officer for the Social Democratic and Labour Party, nominated Mr Joe Byrne as Deputy Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee. Mr Joe Byrne indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Joe Byrne as Deputy Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr Trevor Clarke to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures. Mr Trevor Clarke indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Trevor Clarke as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures.

Mr Martin McGuinness, the nominating officer for Sinn Féin, nominated Mr Pat Sheehan to be Deputy Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. Mr Pat Sheehan indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Pat Sheehan as Deputy Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the nominating officer for the Democratic Unionist Party, nominated Mr David Hilditch to be Deputy Chairperson of the Audit Committee. Mr David Hilditch indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr David Hilditch as Deputy Chairperson of the Audit Committee.

Mr David Ford, the nominating officer of the Alliance party, nominated Mr Kieran McCarthy to be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. Mr Kieran McCarthy indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

The Speaker confirmed the appointment of Mr Kieran McCarthy as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

6. Private Members' Business

6.1 Motion - Principal Deputy Speaker

Proposed:

That this Assembly agrees that there shall be a Principal Deputy Speaker and directs the Committee on Procedures, as its first priority, to table the necessary amendments to Standing Orders by 6 June 2011.

Mr P Weir

Ms C Ní Chuilín

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the motion was **carried** (Division 5).

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 3.24pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

16 May 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

16 May 2011

Divisions

Division No. 1

Question put, That Mr Paul Givan be Minister of Justice.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 37

Noes: 51

Ayes

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr S Anderson and Mr G Robinson.

Noes

Nationalist:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Mollooy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Other:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McDevitt and Mr McKay.

Total votes	88	Total Ayes	37	[42.0%]
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Nationalist Votes	42	Nationalist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
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Unionist Votes	37	Unionist Ayes	37	[100.0%]
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Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]
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The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result:

Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McNarry, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

The Nomination was not approved.

Northern Ireland Assembly

16 May 2011

Divisions

Division No. 2

Question put, That Mr Alban Maginness be Minister of Justice.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 42

Noes: 46

Ayes

Nationalist:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr D Bradley and Mr W Clarke.

Noes

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr S Anderson and Mr G Robinson.

Total votes	88	Total Ayes	42	[47.7%]
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Nationalist Votes	42	Nationalist Ayes	42	[100.0%]
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Unionist Votes	37	Unionist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
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Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]
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The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result:

Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McNarry, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

The Nomination was not approved.

Northern Ireland Assembly

16 May 2011

Divisions

Division No. 3

Question put, That Mr Danny Kinahan be Minister of Justice.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 52

Noes: 37

Ayes

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McCallister and Mr B McCrea.

Noes

Nationalist:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McMullan and Mr Molloy.

Total votes	89	Total Ayes	52	[54.8%]
Nationalist Votes	29	Nationalist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Unionist Votes	51	Unionist Ayes	51	[100.0%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	1	[11.1%]

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result:

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McClarty, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

The Nomination was not approved.

Northern Ireland Assembly

16 May 2011

Divisions

Division No. 4

Question put, That Mr David Ford be Minister of Justice.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 73

Noes: 28

Ayes

Nationalist:

Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Dickson and Ms Lo.

Noes

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Other:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Allister and Mr Eastwood.

Total votes	101	Total Ayes	73	[72.3%%]
Nationalist Votes	42	Nationalist Ayes	29	[69.0%]
Unionist Votes	50	Unionist Ayes	36	[72.0%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	8	[88.9%]

The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result: Mr McClarty.

The Nomination was approved by parallel consent.

Northern Ireland Assembly

16 May 2011

Divisions

Division No. 5

Proposed:

That this Assembly agrees that there shall be a Principal Deputy Speaker and directs the Committee on Procedures, as its first priority, to table the necessary amendments to Standing Orders by 6 June 2011.

Mr P Weir

Ms C Ní Chuilín

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 72

Noes: 31

Ayes

Ms M Anderson, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr G Kelly, Mrs Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr S Anderson and Ms Sue Ramsey.

Noes

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Copeland, Mr Dallat, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr A Maginness, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McNarry, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCallister and Mrs McKeivitt.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 13 – 16 May 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
 - Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
 - Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
 - Single Use Carrier Bags Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
 - (The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 23 May 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matters of the Day

2.1 Death of Dr Garret FitzGerald

Mr John Dallat made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the death of Dr Garret FitzGerald. Party representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

2.2 Recent Death in Maghaberry Prison

Mr Raymond McCartney made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the recent death in Maghaberry Prison. Party representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Suspension of Standing Order 20(1)

Proposed:

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 23 May 2011.

Mr P Weir

Mr P Maskey

Mr J McCallister

Mr P Ramsey

Mr S Dickson

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support nemine contradicente.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Statement - Radiotherapy Unit at Altnagelvin Hospital

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement to the Assembly regarding the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Hospital, following which he replied to questions.

5. Assembly Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion - Appointments to the Assembly Commission

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 79, the following shall be appointed to be members of the Assembly Commission:

The Speaker (Ex officio)

Mr P Weir

Mr B McElduff

Mr L Cree

Mr P Ramsey

Mrs J Cochrane

Mr P Weir

Mr P Maskey

Mr J McCallister

Mr P Ramsey

Mr S Dickson

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support nemine contradicente.

5.2 Motion - Membership of Statutory Committees

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 49(3), the membership of the Statutory Committees as detailed in NIA 1/11-15R be approved.

Mr P Weir

Mr P Maskey

Mr J McCallister

Mr P Ramsey

Mr S Dickson

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Membership of the Statutory Committees as detailed in NIA 1/11-15R is as follows:

Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development: Mr Paul Frew (Chairperson); Mrs Dolores Kelly (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Thomas Buchanan; Mr Trevor Clarke; Mr Willie Clarke; Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson; Mr William Irwin; Mr Kieran McCarthy; Mr Conor Murphy; Mr Oliver McMullan; Mr Robin Swann.

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure: Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson); Mr William Irwin (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Dominic Bradley; Mrs Brenda Hale; Mr David Hilditch; Mr Gerry Kelly; Mr Michael McGimpsey; Mrs Karen McKeivitt; Mr Cathal Ó hOisín; Mr Pat Sheehan; Mr Robin Swann.

Committee for Education: Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson); Mr David McNarry (Deputy Chairperson); Ms Michaela Boyle; Mr Jonathan Craig; Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson; Mr Phil Flanagan; Mrs Brenda Hale; Mr Trevor Lunn; Mr Conall McDevitt; Miss Michelle McIlveen; Mr Daithí McKay.

Committee for Employment and Learning: Mr Basil McCrea (Chairperson); Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Jim Allister; Mr Sammy Douglas; Ms Michelle Gildernew; Mr Chris

Lyttle; Mr Barry McElduff; Mr David McIlveen; Mrs Sandra Overend; Mr Pat Ramsey; Mr Alastair Ross.

Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Mr Alban Maginness (Chairperson); Mr Daithí McKay (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Steven Agnew; Mr Gordon Dunne; Mr Phil Flanagan; Mr David McIlveen; Dr Alasdair McDonnell; Mr Stephen Moutray; Mr Mike Nesbitt; Mr Robin Newton; Ms Sue Ramsey.

Committee for the Environment: Ms Anna Lo (Chairperson); Mr Simon Hamilton (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Cathal Boylan; Ms Paula Bradley; Mr Willie Clarke; Mr John Dallat; Mr Danny Kinahan; Mr Patsy McGlone; Mr Francie Molloy; Lord Morrow; Mr Peter Weir.

Committee for Finance and Personnel: Mr Conor Murphy (Chairperson); Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson); Mrs Judith Cochrane; Mr Leslie Cree; Mr Paul Girvan; Mr David Hilditch; Mr William Humphrey; Mr Ross Hussey; Mr Mitchel McLaughlin; Mr Adrian McQuillan; Ms Caitríona Ruane.

Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Ms Michelle Gildernew (Chairperson); Mr Jim Wells (Deputy Chairperson); Ms Michaela Boyle; Ms Paula Bradley; Mr Mickey Brady; Mr Gordon Dunne; Mr Mark H Durkan; Mr Sam Gardiner; Mrs Pam Lewis; Mr John McCallister; Mr Kieran McCarthy.

Committee for Justice: Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson); Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Sydney Anderson; Mr Stewart Dickson; Mr Colum Eastwood; Mr Seán Lynch; Ms Jennifer McCann; Mr Basil McCrea; Mr Alban Maginness; Mr Peter Weir; Mr Jim Wells.

Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Mr Tom Elliott (Chairperson); Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Trevor Clarke; Mr Colum Eastwood; Mr William Humphrey; Mr Alex Maskey; Mr Francie Molloy; Mrs Sandra Overend; Mr George Robinson; Ms Caitríona Ruane; Mr Jimmy Spratt.

Committee for Regional Development: Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairperson); Mr Pat Doherty (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Roy Beggs; Mr Joe Byrne; Mrs Dolores Kelly; Mr Trevor Lunn; Mr Seán Lynch; Mr Ian McCrea; Mr Stephen Moutray; Mr Mike Nesbitt; Mr Cathal Ó hOisín.

Committee for Social Development: Mr Alex Maskey (Chairperson); Mr Mickey Brady (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Gregory Campbell; Mrs Judith Cochrane; Mr Michael Copeland; Mr Sammy Douglas; Mr Mark H Durkan; Mr Alex Easton; Mrs Pam Lewis; Mr Fra McCann; Mr David McClarty.

5.3 Motion - Membership of Standing Committees

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 52(3), the membership of the Standing Committees as detailed in NIA 2/11-15R be approved.

Mr P Weir

Mr P Maskey

Mr J McCallister

Mr P Ramsey

Mr S Dickson

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Membership of the Standing Committees as detailed in NIA 2/11-15R is as follows:

Assembly Executive and Review Committee: Mr Stephen Moutray (Chairperson); Mr Pat Sheehan (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Roy Beggs; Mr Gregory Campbell; Mr Stewart Dickson; Mr Paul Givan; Mr Simon Hamilton; Mr Paul Maskey; Mr Raymond McCartney; Mr Conall McDevitt; Mr Mike Nesbitt.

Audit Committee: Mr Danny Kinahan (Chairperson); Mr David Hilditch (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Paul Maskey; Ms Anna Lo; Ms Margaret Ritchie.

Committee on Procedures: Ms Sue Ramsey (Chairperson); Mr Trevor Clarke (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Jim Allister; Mr Sam Gardiner; Mr Gerry Kelly; Mr Chris Lyttle; Mr Oliver McMullan; Mr Alban Maginness; Lord Morrow; Mr George Robinson; Mr Mervyn Storey.

Committee on Standards and Privileges: Mr Alastair Ross (Chairperson); Mr Kieran McCarthy (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Steven Agnew; Mr Cathal Boylan; Ms Paula Bradley; Mr Jonathan Craig; Mr Michael Copeland; Mr Pat Doherty; Mr Fra McCann; Mr Patsy McGlone; Mr David McIlveen.

Public Accounts Committee: Mr Paul Maskey (Chairperson); Mr Joe Byrne (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Sydney Anderson; Mr Michael Copeland; Mr John Dallat; Mr Alex Easton; Mr Paul Frew; Mr Paul Girvan; Mr Ross Hussey; Mr Mitchel McLaughlin; Ms Jennifer McCann.

5.4 Motion - Membership of the Business Committee

Proposed:

That, Ms Jennifer McCann replace Ms Carál Ní Chuilín as a member of the Business Committee.

Mr P Maskey

Ms J McCann

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 1.14pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

23 May 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 17 - 23 May 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Northern Ireland Social Security Agency Social Fund Account for the year ended 31 March 2007 (NIAO)

Northern Ireland Social Security Agency Social Fund Account for the year ended 31 March 2008 (NIAO)

Revocation of Assignment under Article 4(2)(b) of the Departments (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 (DOE)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2011/189 The Shipquay Place, Londonderry (Footway) (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/206 Dundrod Circuit (Admission Charges) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/207 The A25 Newtown Road, Camlough (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2011/185 The Cycle Routes (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/186 The Colin Road, Belfast (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/187 The Lisburn Road, Ballynahinch (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/188 The Carryduff Road, Temple (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/190 The Private Access at No.168 Dublin Road, Loughbrickland (Stopping-Up) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/191 The Road Races (Bush, Dungannon) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/192 The Road Races (Cairncastle Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)

- S.R. 2011/193 The Parking Places on Roads (Londonderry) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/194 The Prohibition of Waiting (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/195 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Ballymena) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/196 The Parking Places on Roads (Strabane) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/197 The Waiting Restrictions (Bushmills) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/198 The Waiting Restrictions (Newry) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/199 The Parking Places and Loading Bay on Roads (Limavady) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/200 The Cycle Routes (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/201 The Prohibition of Traffic (Dunluce Street, Larne) (Revocation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/202 The Parking Places on Roads (Larne) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/203 The Loading Bays on Roads (Amendment No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/204 The Waiting Restrictions (Larne) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/205 The Taxis (Larne) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

Continuous Improvement Arrangements in the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIAO)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 31 May 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30 am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion - Suspension of Standing Order 20(1)

Proposed:

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 31 May 2011.

Mr P Weir

Mr P Maskey

Mr J McCallister

Mr P Ramsey

Mr S Dickson

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support nemine contradicente.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion - Educational Attainment in Working Class Protestant Areas

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the comparative lack of post-GCSE educational qualifications held by people from working class Protestant communities; expresses concern at the effect this may have on the future employability of young people from such areas; and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to bring forward a strategy to address this matter.

Mr A Easton

Mr S Douglas

Mr P Weir

3.2 Amendment

Proposed:

At end insert:

‘; and further calls on the Minister of Education to address educational underachievement at the earliest stage.’

Mr R Beggs
Mr B McCrea
Mr M Copeland

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

3.2 Motion - Services for Young People and Adults with Special Needs

Proposed:

That this Assembly supports a review of the community services, including respite services, that are currently available for young people and adults with special needs after they leave school.

Ms J McCann
Ms S Ramsey

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.25pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

4. Private Members’ Business (Cont’d)

4.1 Motion - Services for Young People and Adults with Special Needs (Cont’d)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

5. Adjournment

Mr Alastair Ross spoke to his topic on the upgrade of the A2 in East Antrim.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 3.32pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

31 May 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 24 - 31 May 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Salmon and Inland Fisheries Annual Report 2009 (DCAL)
 - Police Service of Northern Ireland Customer Service Inspection Report (DOJ)
 - Disposal of Records Schedule for the Department for Regional Development (DCAL)
 - Disposal of Documents Schedule for Companies House Northern Ireland Dissolved Company Records (DCAL)
 - Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission Annual Report and Accounts 2008/09 (DOJ)
 - Securing Attendance at Court Inspection Report (DOJ)
 - The Annual Report of the Lay Observer for Northern Ireland 2010 - Further Progress (DFP)
 - National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2010 (DCAL)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
 - (The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
 - S.R. 2011/141 Land Registration (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DFP)
 - S.R. 2011/158 Land Registration (Electronic Communications) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DFP)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
 - Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Departments 2009/10 (DFP)

10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 6 June 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 Damages (Asbestos-Related Conditions) Bill

The Speaker informed the House that, following the withdrawal of the reference to the Supreme Court by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland of the Damages (Asbestos-Related Conditions) Bill, he has written to the Secretary of State to advise him of the withdrawal and to request that arrangements are made for the Bill to receive Royal Assent.

2.2 Public Petition - Reduction of Funding for Down Community Transport

Mr Kieran McCarthy was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to the reduction of funding for Down Community Transport.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion - Statutory Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Stewart Dickson replace Mr Trevor Lunn as a member of the Committee for Regional Development.

Mr K McCarthy

Ms Anna Lo

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion - Domestic Violence

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to ensure that addressing domestic violence is a priority for his Department; and that all the agreed processes and protocols in place are focused on protecting those most at risk.

Mrs P Lewis

Ms P Bradley

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4.2 Motion - Reform of Government Structures

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the need to reform its structures, including having a requirement for an official opposition to be in place by 2015 to create greater delivery, flexibility and scrutiny; and supports a review of the number of Departments and MLAs, and a restructuring of arm's-length bodies.

*Mr T Elliott
Mr J McCallister*

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

5. Question Time

5.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson. Junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

6. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Motion - Reform of Government Structures (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** (Division 1).

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.20pm.

**Mr William Hay
The Speaker**

6 June 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

6 June 2011

Divisions

Division No. 1

Reform of Government Structures - Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the need to reform its structures, including having a requirement for an official opposition to be in place by 2015 to create greater delivery, flexibility and scrutiny; and supports a review of the number of Departments and MLAs, and a restructuring of arm's-length bodies.

Mr T Elliott

Mr J McCallister

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 57

Noes: 37

Ayes

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mrs Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Nesbitt and Mr Swann.

Noes

Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McLaughlin and Mr Sheehan.

The Motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 1 - 6 June 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
Retention and Disposal Schedule - Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company
(NITHC) /Translink (DCAL)
5. Assembly Reports
Inquiry into Standing Orders for Principal Deputy Speaker (NIA 3/11-15) (Committee on Procedures)
6. Statutory Rules
(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
 - S.R. 2011/210 The Environmental Liability (Prevention and Remediation) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
 - S.R. 2011/211 Groundwater (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
 - S.R. 2011/212 The Pollution Prevention and Control (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)

For Information Only:

 - S.R. 2011/208 The Rules of the Court of Judicature (Northern Ireland) (Amendment No.2) 2011 (DOJ)
 - S.R. 2011/213 (C.11) The Welfare Reform (2010 Act) (Commencement No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DSD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
Northern Ireland Estimates 2011-12 and Statements of Excesses 2009-10 (DFP)

10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 7 June 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30 am, the Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Private Members' Business

2.1 Motion - A5 Dual Carriageway Project

A valid Petition of Concern was presented in relation to this motion under Standing Order 28, on Monday 6 June.

Proposed:

That this Assembly supports the A5 dual carriageway project; recognises that it is essential to the economic regeneration of the North West region; welcomes the financial commitment made by the Irish Government; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to give an assurance that there will be no dilution of the project, or delay in its completion.

Mr R McCartney

Mr P Doherty

2.2 Amendment

A valid Petition of Concern was presented in relation to this amendment under Standing Order 28, on Monday 6 June.

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'supports' and insert:

'the upgrading of the existing A5; recognises that it is essential to the economic regeneration of the North West region; welcomes the financial commitment made by the Irish Government; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to consider all alternatives to the current proposed scheme'.

Lord Morrow

Mr T Buchanan

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment **fell** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the Motion was **negatived** (Division 2).

The sitting was suspended at 12.36pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

3.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

4. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Motion - Nursery Provision

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that adequate nursery school provision is available for all children; to conduct an immediate review of current provision to ensure that unmet need in areas of high demand is addressed in advance of the next school year; to undertake a wider review to ensure that there is adequate provision in future years, with increased attention to early years education; and to introduce a statutory right to pre-school education.

Mr C McDevitt

4.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'nursery school' and insert:

'and pre-school provision are available for all children; to conduct an immediate review of current provision to ensure that unmet need in areas of high demand is addressed in advance of the next school year; to undertake a wider review to ensure that there is adequate provision in future years, with increased attention to early years education and with a focus within the Review on the educational benefits and financial implications of bringing forward legislation giving a statutory right to pre-school education'.

Mr P Flanagan

Mr D McKay

Ms M Boyle

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

5. Adjournment

Mr Francie Molloy spoke to his topic on the Minor Injuries Unit at Mid Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.27pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

7 June 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

7 June 2011

Divisions

Division No. 1

A5 Dual Carriageway Project - Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'supports' and insert:

'the upgrading of the existing A5; recognises that it is essential to the economic regeneration of the North West region; welcomes the financial commitment made by the Irish Government; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to consider all alternatives to the current proposed scheme'.

Lord Morrow

Mr T Buchanan

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 58

Noes: 38

Ayes

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Other

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Buchanan and Mr G Robinson.

Noes

Nationalist

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lynch and Mr McCartney.

Total votes	96	Total Ayes	58	[60.4%]
Nationalist Votes	38	Nationalist Ayes	0	[0.00%]
Unionist Votes	49	Unionist Ayes	49	[100%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	9	[100%]

The Amendment **fell** on a cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

7 June 2011

Divisions

Division No. 2

A5 Dual Carriageway Project - Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly supports the A5 dual carriageway project; recognises that it is essential to the economic regeneration of the North West region; welcomes the financial commitment made by the Irish Government; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to give an assurance that there will be no dilution of the project or delay in its completion.

Mr R McCartney

Mr P Doherty

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 38

Noes: 58

Ayes

Nationalist

Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lynch and Mr McCartney.

Noes

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mrs Lewis, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Other

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Buchanan and Mr G Robinson.

Total votes	96	Total Ayes	38	[39.6%]
Nationalist Votes	38	Nationalist Ayes	38	[100%%]
Unionist Votes	49	Unionist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

The Motion was **negatived** on a cross-community vote.

Appendix 1

Northern Ireland Assembly

The undersigned Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly presented a petition of concern, in accordance with Standing Order 28, on Monday 6 June in relation to the following amendment.

A5 Dual Carriageway Project - Amendment

Leave out all after 'supports' and insert:

'the upgrading of the existing A5; recognises that it is essential to the economic regeneration of the North West region; welcomes the financial commitment made by the Irish Government; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to consider all alternatives to the current proposed scheme'.

MS SUE RAMSEY

MR RAYMOND MCCARTNEY

MR DAITHÍ MCKAY

MS MARTINA ANDERSON

MR CATHAL BOYLAN

MS MICHAELA BOYLE

MR MICKEY BRADY

MR WILLIE CLARKE

MR PAT DOHERTY

MR PHIL FLANAGAN

MS MICHELLE GILDERNEW

MR SEAN LYNCH

MR ALEX MASKEY

MR FRA MCCANN

MS JENNIFER MCCANN

MR BARRY MCELDUFF

MR MARTIN MCGUINNESS

MR MITCHEL MCLAUGHLIN

MR OLIVER MCMULLAN

MS CARÁL NÍ CHUILÍN

MR CATHAL Ó HOISÍN

MRS MICHELLE O'NEILL

MS CAITRÍONA RUANE

MR PAT SHEEHAN

MS MARGARET RITCHIE

MR PAT RAMSEY

MR PATSY MCGLONE

MR ALBAN MAGINNESS

MR DOMINIC BRADLEY

MR CONALL MCDEVITT

MRS DOLORES KELLY

MR JOE BYRNE

MRS KAREN MCKEVITT

MR JOHN DALLAT

MR MARK H DURKAN

MR COLUM EASTWOOD

DR ALASTAIR MCDONNELL

Appendix 2

Northern Ireland Assembly

The undersigned Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly presented a petition of concern, in accordance with Standing Order 28, on Monday 6 June in relation to the following motion.

A5 Dual Carriageway Project - Motion

That this Assembly supports the A5 dual carriageway project; recognises that it is essential to the economic regeneration of the North West region; welcomes the financial commitment made by the Irish Government; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to give an assurance that there will be no dilution of the project, or delay in its completion.

MR SYDNEY ANDERSON

MR JONATHAN BELL

MS PAULA BRADLEY

MR THOMAS BUCHANAN

MR GREGORY CAMPBELL

MR TREVOR CLARKE

MR JONATHAN CRAIG

MR SAMMY DOUGLAS

MR GORDON DUNNE

MR ALEX EASTON

MRS ARLENE FOSTER

MR PAUL FREW

MR PAUL GIRVAN

MR PAUL GIVAN

MRS BRENDA HALE

MR SIMON HAMILTON

MR DAVID HILDITCH

MR WILLIAM HUMPHREY

MR WILLIAM IRWIN

MRS PAM LEWIS

MR NELSON MCCAUSLAND

MR IAN MCCREA

MR DAVID MCILVEEN

MISS MICHELLE MCILVEEN

MR ADRIAN MCQUILLAN

THE LORD MORROW

MR STEPHEN MOUTRAY

MR ROBIN NEWTON

MR EDWIN POOTS

MR GEORGE ROBINSON

RT HON PETER ROBINSON

MR ALASTAIR ROSS

MR JIMMY SPRATT

MR MERVYN STOREY

MR PETER WEIR

MR JIM WELLS

MR SAMMY WILSON

Marshalled List of Amendments

3 June 2011

Item 3: Order Paper 6/11-15 – 7 June 2011

Private Members' Business - Motions

Motion: A5 Dual Carriageway Project

That this Assembly supports the A5 dual carriageway project; recognises that it is essential to the economic regeneration of the North West region; welcomes the financial commitment made by the Irish Government; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to give an assurance that there will be no dilution of the project or delay in its completion.

Mr R McCartney

Mr P Doherty

The Speaker has selected the following amendment for debate

Amendment 1:

Proposed: Leave out all after 'supports' and insert:

'the upgrading of the existing A5; recognises that it is essential to the economic regeneration of the North West region; welcomes the financial commitment made by the Irish Government; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development to consider all alternatives to the current proposed scheme'.

Lord Morrow

Mr T Buchanan

Motion: Nursery Provision

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that adequate nursery school provision is available for all children; to conduct an immediate review of current provision to ensure that unmet need in areas of high demand is addressed in advance of the next school year; to undertake a wider review to ensure that there is adequate provision in future years, with increased attention to early years education; and to introduce a statutory right to pre-school education.

Mr C McDevitt

The Speaker has selected the following amendment for debate

Amendment 1:

Proposed: Leave out all after 'nursery school' and insert:

'and pre-school provision are available for all children; to conduct an immediate review of current provision to ensure that unmet need in areas of high demand is addressed in advance of the next school year; to undertake a wider review to ensure that there is adequate provision in future years, with increased attention to early years education and with a focus within the Review on the educational benefits and financial implications of bringing forward legislation giving a statutory right to pre-school education'

Mr P Flanagan

Mr D McKay

Ms M Boyle

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 7 June 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 13 June 2011

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matters of the Day

2.1 Death of Mr Brian Lenihan

Mr Patsy McGlone made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the death of Mr Brian Lenihan. Party representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

2.2 90th Birthday of HRH the Duke of Edinburgh

Mr Jim Allister made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the 90th Birthday of HRH the Duke of Edinburgh. Party representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Speaker's Business

The Speaker informed the House that he had received written notification from the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, that as he would be attending the funeral of the former Republic of Ireland Finance Minister Brian Lenihan on Tuesday 14 June, he would be unable to be in the House to move the Second Stage of the Budget (No.2) Bill or attend Question Time. The Speaker advised the House that Minister Foster would respond on behalf of Minister Wilson at Question Time, and that the Bill stage would be rescheduled.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Motion - Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £8,141,695,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2012 and that resources, not exceeding £8,656,468,000, be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2012 as summarised for each Department or other public body in Columns 3 (b) and 3 (a) of Table 1.3 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Estimates 2011-12 that was laid before the Assembly on 6 June 2011.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued on this Motion and the Motion on the Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

5. Question Time

5.1 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

5.2 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

6. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Motion - Supply Resolution for the Northern Ireland Main Estimates 2011-12 (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on both motions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support.

6.2 Motion - Supply Resolution for the 2009-2010 Excess Votes

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £23,278,781.13, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for the year ending 31 March 2010 and that resources, not exceeding £17,836,994.70, be authorised for use by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Education Teachers' Superannuation, for the year ending 31 March 2010, as summarised for each Department in Part II of the 2009-2010 Statement of Excesses that was laid before the Assembly on 6 June 2011.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support.

6.3 First Stage - Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA 1/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, introduced a Bill to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of certain sums for the service of the year ending 31st March 2012; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes; to authorise the Department of Finance and Personnel to borrow on the credit of the appropriated sums; to authorise the use for the public service of certain resources (including accruing resources) for the year ending 31st March 2012; to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of an excess cash sum for the service of the year ending 31st March 2010; to authorise the use for the public service of excess resources for the year ending 31st March 2010; and to repeal certain spent provisions.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed (NIA Bill 1/11-15).

7. Committee Membership

7.1 Motion - Membership of the Business Committee

Proposed:

That Mrs Karen McKeivitt replace Mr Conall McDevitt as a member of the Business Committee.

Mr P Ramsey

Mr J Byrne

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.50pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

13 June 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 8 - 13 June 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA Bill 1/11-15)
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
An Inspection of Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (DOJ)

The North/South Language Body Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2007 (DCAL)

Use of External Consultants by Northern Ireland Departments: Follow-up Report (NIAO)
5. Assembly Reports
Second Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules (NIA 6/11-15)
6. Statutory Rules
(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
 - S.R. 2011/209 Tourist Establishments (Notices, Certificates and Forms) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DETI)
 - S.R. 2011/214 Registered Rents (Increase) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DSD)
 - S.R. 2011/217 The Food Additives (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DHSSPS)

For Information Only:

 - S.R. 2011/215 (C.12) The Wildlife and Natural Environment (2011 Act) (Commencement No.1) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
General Dental Council Annual Report and Accounts 2010 (DHSSPS)

Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults - A Shared Responsibility (DHSSPS)

10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 14 June 2011

The Assembly met at 10.30 am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Second Stage - Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA Bill 1/11-15)

The Second Stage of the Budget (No.2) Bill (NIA Bill 1/11-15) stood on the Order Paper in the name of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson.

The Second Stage was **not moved**.

3. Committee Business

3.1 (c) Motion - Amend Standing Orders

Proposed:

After Standing Order 5 insert -

'5A. Principal Deputy Speaker

(1) Any Member of the Assembly may nominate a Deputy Speaker, who has been elected in accordance with Standing Order 5(1), to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.

(2) Once a nomination under paragraph (1) has been made, no further nomination under that paragraph shall be made, unless the person nominated does not agree to act as Principal Deputy Speaker or the nomination is not approved, in which case a further nomination may be made.

(3) A nomination to act as Principal Deputy Speaker shall not take effect unless the person nominated agrees to act as Principal Deputy Speaker and the nomination is approved by resolution of the Assembly.

(4) Where a nomination has taken effect in accordance with paragraph (3), the person so preferred may be called "Mr Principal Deputy Speaker", "Madam Principal Deputy Speaker", or "Principal Deputy Speaker".

(5) If the Assembly resolves that the person acting as Principal Deputy Speaker should no longer so act, it may, in accordance with the provisions of this Standing Order, nominate another Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.

(6) Where the Principal Deputy Speaker ceases to hold office as a Deputy Speaker, any Member of the Assembly may, in accordance with the provisions of this Standing Order, nominate another Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.

(7) Where a Deputy Speaker is nominated to act as Principal Deputy Speaker under paragraph (1) or a motion is moved for a resolution under paragraph (5), a debate relevant to that nomination or resolution may take place in which no member shall speak more than once.

(8) A resolution under paragraph (3) or (5) shall not be passed without cross-community support.'

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

3.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out paragraphs (1) to (8) and insert-

'The position of Principal Deputy Speaker shall be filled by annual rotation between the Deputy Speakers who have been elected in accordance with Standing Order 5(1). The order of such rotation to be as agreed between the Deputy Speakers, or in the absence of agreement as directed by the Speaker. Throughout the term the Principal Deputy Speaker may be called "Mr Principal Deputy Speaker", "Madam Principal Deputy Speaker" or "Principal Deputy Speaker".'

Mr A Maginness

Mr J Allister

Mr T Elliott

Debate ensued on motions (c), (a) and (b) and the Amendment.

The Question being put, the Amendment **fell** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support (Division 2).

3.3 (a) Motion - Amend Standing Order 1(3)

Proposed:

In Standing Order 1(3) leave out 'may be called "Mr Deputy Speaker", "Madam Deputy Speaker" or "Deputy Speaker" and'.

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The question being put, the motion was **carried** with cross-community support (Division 3).

3.4 (b) Motion - Amend Standing Order 5

Proposed:

After Standing Order 5(3) insert -

'(4) A Deputy Speaker may be called "Mr Deputy Speaker", "Madam Deputy Speaker" or "Deputy Speaker".'

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The question being put, the motion was **carried** with cross-community support (Division 4).

The sitting was suspended at 12.45pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood.

3.2 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster, on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson.

5. Adjournment

Mr Mervyn Storey spoke to his topic on the upgrade of the A26 Glarryford to Ballycastle junction.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 3.54pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

14 June 2011

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 June 2011

Divisions

Division No. 1

Amend Standing Orders - Amendment to motion (c)

Proposed:

Leave out paragraphs (1) to (8) and insert-

'The position of Principal Deputy Speaker shall be filled by annual rotation between the Deputy Speakers who have been elected in accordance with Standing Order 5(1). The order of such rotation to be as agreed between the Deputy Speakers, or in the absence of agreement as directed by the Speaker. Throughout the term the Principal Deputy Speaker may be called "Mr Principal Deputy Speaker", "Madam Principal Deputy Speaker" or "Principal Deputy Speaker".'

Mr A Maginness

Mr J Allister

Mr T Elliott

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 22

Noes: 60

Ayes

Nationalist

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr P Ramsey.

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Allister and Mr Eastwood.

Noes

Nationalist

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Other

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms S Ramsey and Mr G Robinson.

Total votes	82	Total Ayes	22	[26.8%]
Nationalist Vote	32	Nationalist Ayes	10	[31.3%]
Unionist Votes	43	Unionist Ayes	12	[27.9%]
Other Votes	7	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

The Amendment **fell** on a cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 June 2011

Divisions

Division No. 2

Amend Standing Orders - Motion

Proposed:

After Standing Order 5 insert -

'5A. Principal Deputy Speaker

- (1) Any Member of the Assembly may nominate a Deputy Speaker, who has been elected in accordance with Standing Order 5(1), to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.
- (2) Once a nomination under paragraph (1) has been made, no further nomination under that paragraph shall be made, unless the person nominated does not agree to act as Principal Deputy Speaker or the nomination is not approved, in which case a further nomination may be made.
- (3) A nomination to act as Principal Deputy Speaker shall not take effect unless the person nominated agrees to act as Principal Deputy Speaker and the nomination is approved by resolution of the Assembly.
- (4) Where a nomination has taken effect in accordance with paragraph (3), the person so preferred may be called "Mr Principal Deputy Speaker", "Madam Principal Deputy Speaker", or "Principal Deputy Speaker".
- (5) If the Assembly resolves that the person acting as Principal Deputy Speaker should no longer so act, it may, in accordance with the provisions of this Standing Order, nominate another Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.
- (6) Where the Principal Deputy Speaker ceases to hold office as a Deputy Speaker, any Member of the Assembly may, in accordance with the provisions of this Standing Order, nominate another Deputy Speaker to act as Principal Deputy Speaker.
- (7) Where a Deputy Speaker is nominated to act as Principal Deputy Speaker under paragraph (1) or a motion is moved for a resolution under paragraph (5), a debate relevant to that nomination or resolution may take place in which no member shall speak more than once.
- (8) A resolution under paragraph (3) or (5) shall not be passed without cross-community support.'

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 53

Noes: 29

Ayes

Nationalist

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist

Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms S Ramsey and Mr G Robinson.

Noes

Nationalist

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr P Ramsey.

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Swann.

Other

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Mr Swann.

Total votes	82	Total Ayes	53	[64.6%]
Nationalist Votes	32	Nationalist Ayes	22	[68.8%%]
Unionist Votes	43	Unionist Ayes	31	[72.1%]
Other Votes	7	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

The Motion was **carried** on a cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 June 2011

Divisions

Division No. 3

Amend Standing Order 1(3) - Motion

Proposed:

In Standing Order 1(3) leave out 'may be called "Mr Deputy Speaker", "Madam Deputy Speaker" or "Deputy Speaker" and'.

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 52

Noes: 27

Ayes

Nationalist

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist

Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Flanagan and Mr G Robinson.

Noes

Nationalist

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr P Ramsey.

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Swann.

Other

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Lyttle.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Mrs McKeivitt.

Total votes	79	Total Ayes	52	[65.8%]
Nationalist Votes	32	Nationalist Ayes	22	[68.8%%]
Unionist Votes	42	Unionist Ayes	30	[71.4%]
Other Votes	5	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

The Motion was **carried** on a cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 June 2011

Divisions

Division No. 4

Amend Standing Order 5- Motion

Proposed:

After Standing Order 5(3) insert -

'(4) A Deputy Speaker may be called "Mr Deputy Speaker", "Madam Deputy Speaker" or "Deputy Speaker".'

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 52

Noes: 25

Ayes

Nationalist

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Mr Flanagan, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist

Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Flanagan and Mr G Robinson.

Noes

Nationalist

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr P Ramsey.

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Swann.

Other

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Lyttle.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Mrs McKeivitt.

Total votes	77	Total Ayes	52	[67.5%]
Nationalist Votes	32	Nationalist Ayes	22	[68.8%%]
Unionist Votes	42	Unionist Ayes	30	[71.4%]
Other Votes	3	Other Ayes	0	[0.0%]

The Motion was **carried** on a cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 14 June 2011

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)
 - S.R. 2011/134 The Rail Passengers' Rights and Obligations (Exemptions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
Consultation on Litter Guidance (DOE)
9. Departmental Publications
Report by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council on Lung Cancer and Foundry Workers (DSD)
Inspection of Pre-Sentence Reports (DOJ)
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 13 June 2011

2011-2015 Mandate Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Budget (No. 2) Bill NIA Bill 1/11-15	13.06.11							

2011-2015 Mandate Non-Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

