



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

Volume 100

(29 November 2014 to 18 January 2015)

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Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sitings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 1 December 2014

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As with similar motions, this will be treated as a business motion and there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Paul Givan replace Mr Gordon Dunne as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety; that Mr Paul Givan replace Mr Sydney Anderson as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Mr Sydney Anderson replace Mr Alastair Ross as a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning; and that Mr Sammy Douglas replace Mr Paul Givan as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. — [Mr Weir.]

Committee Business

Electricity Policy: Part III — Grid Connections: Review Report

Mr Principal Deputy 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 15 minutes to propose and 15 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members will have five minutes.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on its Review into Electricity Policy: Part III - Grid Connections (NIA 196/11-15); and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in conjunction with Executive colleagues, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the System Operator for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Electricity, to implement, as applicable, the recommendations contained therein.

Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank all those who gave evidence to the Committee during the review: those who provided written submissions; those who corresponded with the Committee; and those who attended the Committee to give oral evidence. In particular, I convey my thanks to the Committee staff, who were very dedicated in compiling the huge range of information and evidence that was given to us in a well-thought-out report.

The motion is about part III of the Committee's review into electricity policy.

Part I was on the security of electricity supply and part II was on electricity prices. Adoption of the recommendations in part III, which is grid connections, can have a positive impact on security of supply and electricity prices.

The structure of the electricity market is highly complex as an overall entity; sometimes one could wonder whether it is deliberately so. Nevertheless, each of its constituent parts is complex in its own right. That includes complexities associated with legislation, policies, strategies, processes, structures, infrastructure, markets, pricing, regulation and relationships between the various stakeholders. Not only is the electricity market complex, it is very dynamic.

Fossil fuel costs for generation fluctuate wildly as world events dictate prices. Changes to legislation, here and

in Europe — the rest of Europe, I should say — impact on our generation mix. Also, the single electricity market across the island is still very much in the development stage. It has taken the Committee time to gain a sound understanding of the interrelationships and interdependencies between the various constituent parts that go to make up a utility that most of us take very much for granted. I think that every Committee member, past and present, would admit that they still have much to learn: I know that I can certainly say that.

Given these complexities, given the uncertainties and given the time it takes to develop a full understanding of the key elements of the electricity market, we expect those who know, those who are the experts and those whose job it is to develop and agree policy for electricity — namely the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment — to have a clear long-term vision and strategy for where they see the electricity market in 10, 15 or 20 years' time, and that this vision and strategy would be widely communicated and agreed with key stakeholders in the electricity market. We expect DETI to constantly monitor that strategy and we also expect it to keep an eye on the horizon and adjust the strategy as required to navigate smoothly around the uncertainties and unexpected barriers that the long-term future will undoubtedly bring.

During the review, it became apparent that there is little, if any, evidence of a clear, agreed, long-term vision and strategy for electricity. A number of key stakeholders informed the Committee that they could see little evidence of a vision. The Committee itself was able to find little evidence, too. Departmental officials told the Committee that they disagreed with this view that there is no long-term vision or strategy for electricity, but the Department provided no evidence to back this up. If the Department has a long-term vision and strategy for electricity, it must now share that with the industry, with electricity consumers and with this House. If it does not have a long-term vision and strategy for electricity, as seems more likely, there is a considerable piece of work to be done, and I hope that the Department recognises the importance and urgency associated with that work.

Of course, the Department may argue that it has the strategic energy framework, and on that it is, of course, correct. The strategic energy framework has the goals of building competitive markets, ensuring security of supply, enhancing sustainability and developing our energy infrastructure. It tells us that DETI will do a lot of ensuring, promoting, encouraging, supporting and working with others. It is not, however, visionary. It ends in just over five years, and it does not tell us what our energy mix will look like in 20, 15, 10 or even five years. It does not tell us how DETI will work in the long term to achieve an appropriate energy mix with fair prices and fair and transparent returns to developers, suppliers and network operators, and it does not tell us how it will achieve security of supply. Neither is it a strategy, as it does not provide a road map for how DETI will achieve a vision for energy in the long term.

Renewable electricity is an important and increasingly essential part of our energy mix. The Department established the sustainable energy interdepartmental working group to ensure a coordinated approach to sustainable energy across government, but despite the increasing importance of renewable electricity and the

need for a more coordinated approach to renewables to ensure our long-term electricity security, this group has not met for some time. Given the growing importance of renewables in our energy mix, it is important that the sustainable energy interdepartmental working group meets regularly and is seen as a valuable contributor to the development, implementation and management of the Department's vision and strategy for electricity.

The two key themes that continuously arose in relation to grid connections were problems associated with the cost of connections and problems associated with delays for developers in getting connected.

Developers complained about the long delays, sometimes running into years, before they got a decision from NIE about the viability of a development. Often when a response does come, it turns out that the cost of connecting the development renders it completely unviable. High costs and long delays are crippling the renewable electricity industry for many developers.

Under current regulatory arrangements, NIE is the only company permitted to construct grid connection assets. Generators must pay NIE to construct assets and connect them to the grid. The cost is dictated by NIE through its regulated statement of charges, and NIE also controls the timescale for making connections. Many developers believe that they could save a considerable amount of time and money if they were permitted to have these assets constructed by other companies.

In the South of Ireland and in Britain, there are more open arrangements, where developers can contest the costs for connections, and, if connections can be provided at a lesser cost, developers can arrange for them to be constructed by a third party. There is wide support for similar contestability arrangements here. The industry wants contestability, and the system operator, SONI, is in favour of it. DETI and the Utility Regulator are content to see it introduced, and NIE informed the Committee that there are no major obstacles to the introduction of contestability. Why, then, is it not happening?

Although the Utility Regulator's work plan contains an objective for contestability, the regulator informed the Committee that the delivery of contestability arrangements would require a two-to-three-year time frame. The Committee fails to see any justification for such a long delay, given the widespread support for its introduction. Indeed, NIE reached an agreement with SSE for the contestable delivery of a large-scale wind farm at Slieve Kirk, so a precedent of workability has already been established. The Committee would like to see NIE developing similar informal arrangements for contestability and will encourage the Utility Regulator to develop formal arrangements in a much shorter time frame than the three years currently proposed.

The Committee recognises that the electricity grid infrastructure needs to be reinforced to maximise the use of renewable electricity. However, this is a long-term plan. In the shorter term, much more needs to be done to take advantage of smart technologies such as micro grids to help to get more renewable electricity connected and to reduce the cost of connections. Little is currently known about micro grids in this country, and the technology seems to be developing very quickly. It is essential that all key stakeholders get to grips with micro grids and

their potential to assist in providing an effective addition to the electricity network. It is also essential that NIE is allocated sufficient resources in the next electricity price determination to fund smart grid solutions, similar to the way in which funding is provided in Britain and the Republic. As a region with ambitions to be a leader in the development of renewable electricity, we should be at the forefront of developing advanced solutions to support those very ambitions.

On transparency and communications, the Committee found that considerable problems are being created for developers because they simply do not know where they stand with NIE. There are perceptions of inconsistencies in NIE's charging. There are perceptions that NIE's charges are higher than they should be, and there are perceptions of reluctance on the part of NIE to provide information to developers. The absence of a clear and transparent strategy in NIE for communicating with developers is contributing to a climate of uncertainty and is leading to considerable problems in the industry. For example, there is evidence that delays and uncertainty about the time frames and costs are leading to withdrawal of investment. The Utility Regulator must ensure that NIE has an appropriate and effective strategy for communicating with developers.

Much of the problem surrounding transparency and communications seems to stem from NIE's policies and processes, which do not seem to provide the most appropriate mechanisms for developers who are seeking grid connections. Processes contribute to delays, and they contribute to the costs being higher than necessary. Compared to Britain, the time taken here to get a project from feasibility to connection is considerably longer, and time frames are much less certain.

Those delays and uncertainties can add considerably to development costs. The Utility Regulator and the system operator must work with NIE to help it to review and improve its policies and processes on grid connections for the benefit of renewable electricity development.

12.15 pm

To finish on a positive note, one of the most frustrating problems for developers that was identified during the review was the lack of detailed information that was provided by NIE to enable developers to make informed investment decisions. The Northern Ireland Renewables Industry Group (NIRIG) informed the Committee that NIE has a heat map that provides information to developers on where grid capacity is available for developers to connect. The problem was that that heat map did not provide enough detail for developers to make an accurate estimation of cost.

The Committee recommended that NIE introduced a revised heat map with more detailed information, and I am happy to report that NIE has implemented that recommendation and that the detailed heat map can be accessed on its website. I can further report that the first indications from NIRIG are that the new system provides much more detailed information and is a much improved tool for developers. It is early days, but the signs are good. The Committee will keep a watching brief to ensure that the new system does what developers need. On that point, NIE is to be commended for its efforts.

The Executive has made a considerable commitment to renewable electricity through the 40% target. To achieve that, we must make a commitment to renewable electricity developers that they will be supported to deliver connections at the least cost within the shortest possible time frame. We must also make a commitment to consumers that we will look after their interests by providing the most appropriate long-term solution to achieve a reliable electricity supply with the lowest possible electricity prices.

To deliver on those commitments, we must have a clear vision of what—

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. I know that the rhetoric of what he is saying sounds great, but will he explain to me how, on one hand, he can say that he wishes to see the promotion of renewables to the extent of 40% of our production being from that source, while at the same time, ensuring that consumers get cheap electricity? Renewable electricity costs about three and half times as much to produce as electricity from gas.

Mr McGlone: Perhaps the Member would want to address that to his party colleague the Minister. That Department introduced the renewables obligation certificate (ROC) system. I thank him for his intervention. That is an anomaly that the Executive would probably need to address if it requires addressing. There are a lot of businesses out there that are highly dependent on the ROC system, and the Executive has made commitments — indeed, the Member may even have been a Minister when the Executive signed up to them.

To emphasise the point, we must also make a commitment to consumers that we will look after their interests by providing the most appropriate long-term solutions to achieve a reliable electricity supply with the lowest possible electricity prices. To deliver on those commitments, we must have a clear vision of what the electricity generation mix and the electricity market will look like in 10, 15 and 20 years.

Go raibh maith agat a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle as ucht an ama. Thanks very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, for affording me the opportunity to present the report.

Mr Dunne: I too welcome the motion and the opportunity to speak on it. It is an important issue that the Committee has looked at extensively. The Committee gathered evidence from a wide range of stakeholders within the renewables sector — from renewable energy providers and generators, NIE, DETI officials and a number of other interest groups.

There have been significant advancements within the renewables sector across Northern Ireland over the last five to 10 years. More and more small-scale wind generators are located across many of our constituencies, and they bring real benefits to users and the environment.

Despite those advances, a number of key issues have been identified relating to the challenges that are faced by those who are developing diverse sources of electricity generation. One major challenge relates to getting connection to the Northern Ireland grid. As we aim to reach the 40% renewables target by 2020, improvements need to be made to assist those who are willing and

capable of helping us to reach those ambitious but significant targets.

There is a need for improved assistance for developers who are trying to identify sites where there may be capacity to connect. Therefore, NIE needs to review and revise the heat map facility urgently to help applicants identify circuits that have capacity for connection to the grid.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that NIE should follow a proper process and that the regulator should deal robustly with long delays that result in huge costs to individual companies, as is seen in my constituency of Lagan Valley today?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Dunne: Yes, I thank the Member for the point she has made. It is important that NIE improve its systems and processes and that it work strictly to them and become more efficient and effective in delivering connection to the customer.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he also accept that, if the connections are to be subsidised, that subsidy will inevitably fall on the bills that go to consumers' households?

Mr Dunne: I thank the Member for the intervention. That is a real challenge of renewables, and one that everyone has to face. We have targets to meet. The directive comes from Europe, and it presents a real challenge. At the end of the day, it is a challenge that the customer has to face. A number of witnesses also commented on how they would like to have more access to the NIE GIS system when trying to identify possible sites.

Planning permission, of course, also remains a challenge for renewable projects. Delays are often a result of NIE being reluctant to get involved in processing the grid connection prior to the planning approvals. Projects here tend to be slow, and that can often lead to frustration with the whole process. We definitely heard clear evidence of that from a number of contributors to the Committee. I understand that the Republic runs such a twin-track approach, but many of those whom we spoke to, although sympathetic, said that that approach can result in a blockage on the availability of sites and that many projects could be committed to but not processed, because they had yet to receive full planning permission. We need more flexibility from NIE to work with developers and to do initial work on projects as planning permission is being progressed. The issue of planning permission extension was also brought to our attention. That should be considered for long-term projects, as the delays with connections can often put at risk the overall project.

We also received clear evidence of developers experiencing delays with connections by NIE, which has the monopoly on the provision of lines here. There seems to be a real problem with communication between developers and NIE. Some developers spoke of delays, some of which ran on for a number of years after being given conditional offers from NIE. In many of the cases, the offers were found to be misleading and unachievable. After work with the Utility Regulator, I understand that such offers have been withdrawn and that only offers that are achievable within a specific time are made.

Many who were involved in our evidence sessions believe that NIE is not delivering as efficiently and effectively as possible. Many would welcome performance standards being introduced for NIE by the Utility Regulator, with penalties or customer compensation where NIE fails to perform. Given the high costs and delays associated with grid connections, contestability for grid connections would certainly bring benefit to those who are seeking to develop a renewable project. That would help to ensure value for money and that NIE works to an improved standard. There is no doubt that the grid is weak and needs considerable investment to allow for improved capacity and capability, particularly in the west of Northern Ireland. Smart grid technology can also play a significant role in supporting increased grid capacity —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Dunne: — and reducing costs for developers. It should be seriously considered as a way forward.

Mr Kinahan: As many on the Committee will know, I am new to the subject. I was amazed to find how complicated our electricity industry is. I was also staggered to find that we have an electric power system that is based on the 1950s and 1960s. That is as old as me, and lots of me is failing already. No comments from the rest of you.

I am also staggered at how slow we seem to be at dealing with matters. When I spoke at our party conference, I called for the need for us to develop a world in which we are agile and make decisions quickly. We just do not seem to do that in this Building. That made me think of my army days when I was working slowly and the colour sergeant told me that I worked at the speed of a stunned slug. Let us make sure that we do not work at the speed of a stunned slug. Let us make sure that we take on board what happens today and work quickly. We need to act with speed so that our economy can thrive, and electricity is very much part of that.

You heard from others today that our grid system is not even up to supporting our renewable target of 40%, that the planning system is slow and that the charging system is inconsistent. There are a lot of other issues to consider, and they are covered in the report. I thank the Ulster Farmers' Union for all its points. That was one of the few sessions that I was there for in my time on the Committee. We heard that the connection quotes are phenomenally expensive and that people are left with matters in limbo. Having paid their money, they still do not know whether they will get on to the grid. We need to resolve all those issues. As of 31 December, I think that 686 single wind turbine applications were all waiting. We need to get a faster planning system. We need to go back to that point about being agile and moving quickly. We need an accurate heat map, open and transparent communication and to work with all the stakeholders all the time.

I am told that the cost of getting to that 40% is £420 million. We also have the cost of the interconnectors and of reinforcing. So, let us look at how Scotland, Wales and all the other countries have looked at raising funds, whether it is public-private funding or levering funding differently. Let us look at how we can do things quickly and finance them and work with everybody so that we have an economic and efficient system.

I was appalled to see the comment in the document under the heading “Vision and Strategy” that said:

“there is little evidence of a long-term vision or plan for the electricity grid.”

Let us make sure that we have one. We have the actions, timelines and targets all put in place and, if necessary, pilot projects, given that our budgets will be struggling over the next few years. Let us find a way of getting forward very quickly indeed so that our businesses know that it is coming and that it will be on board and they can get the connections that they want. I know that it sounds easy to say that, but we must set targets so that we get there.

When we are talking of corporation tax maybe coming to us in the next few days, I think that it is just one of the masses of little things that we have to have in place. If you are going to bring investment into Northern Ireland, businesses have to know that their electricity system will be able to support them. I feel that we have been slow on that as well. There are so many things that we have to have in place to work with corporation tax. So, let us look quickly at what is there. I do not have the name of the American base, but I know that Fort Bragg has its own grid system. Let us look at how they got it and at putting in a pilot project and actually getting something in place. There is masses to be done. I look forward to hearing from the Minister. Let us hope that we can find a quick way of getting this all started and of getting somewhere.

Mr Lunn: I always have to say on these occasions that it is mighty difficult to talk about a report that you have seen only just this morning because you do not have a Committee place. When Mr McGlone moved the motion, he said that Committee members had much to learn. I can tell you that it is 10 times worse when you are not a Committee member. Having looked at the report, I can say that it seems to be highly competent, and I support the recommendations therein, with the caveat that they are complex and require a lot of work to be done very quickly. In fact, I wonder whether some of the recommendations should be prioritised, given the urgency of the situation.

Clearly, something has gone wrong in Northern Ireland. It seems astonishing that, on a windy island, the cost of wind turbines is so high, mainly because the cost of grid connection can be up to 10 times the proportion of the cost in England and five times that in Ireland or Scotland. The variation in the cost of quotations also seems to be unbelievable. Somehow, systems and processes that have been put in place elsewhere have clearly not been put in place in Northern Ireland, and it is hard to disagree with the view implicit in the report and explicit in one recommendation that the Department’s vision and strategy are unclear and somehow lacking.

12.30 pm

Looking on from outside the Committee, it seems to me that one issue is that NIE’s functions have slightly changed, but its processes have not changed to match that. It does not seem to have the right focus on the client and, on occasions, seems almost obstructive. Why, for example, should a developer be able to tee off from an existing line in Great Britain but not in Northern Ireland, and why can a budget estimate not be given at the same time as capacity is reserved? As ever, communication

is essential. Maybe there are good reasons for those problems, but NIE has certainly not declared them.

It is also clear that, while planning applications are now being processed more quickly, our problem remains that planning requirements have changed, but planning processes have not changed with them. I appreciate that the issue is complex and that parallels with elsewhere do not necessarily apply, but I will be interested to hear the outcome of the System Operator for Northern Ireland’s consultation on the so-called hybrid solution. It is good to hear that applications for wind turbines have increased by about 50% in just two years, and, if I understand it correctly, applications for solar panels are also increasing. It is important now to have systems and procedures in place that can deal with what we hope will be an ongoing rising demand for those in the rest of the decade.

I also note that there is a requirement for a longer-term vision, to which Mr Kinahan referred. Much of the grid was constructed in the first place over half a century ago, and that is perhaps the timescale that we need to consider with much of our electricity network policy. Therefore, I very much see why the Department and, indeed, the Executive need to be clear about their long-term vision and strategy.

On the basis of the evidence in the report and that presented in Committee that I have seen, I support all the recommendations, and the recommendation that I support most strongly is the introduction of contestability. It seems to be an appropriate hybrid solution that would introduce greater efficiency to the overall system, and not having it there puts us at a clear disadvantage with the rest of the UK. Indeed, there seems to be no reason at all for delay, and, as someone pointed out, there is a good example in Northern Ireland at Slieve Kirk. I strongly suggest that NIE work with providers to draw up a list of approved companies for contestable delivery of grid connections. I also endorse the recommendation about a heat map that should be updated annually and regularly so that people can have a much clearer idea of where the opportunities arise.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair)

We are up to about 20% generation from renewables, and there are six years to go and an awful lot of applications and interest in the pipeline. If we get the system and the processes right, I certainly hope that the target is doable. I will watch with interest over the next six years. We support the report’s recommendations.

Mr Frew: I welcome the report and its targeted recommendations. It cannot be read in isolation and is part III of the Committee’s wider review of this important issue.

Make no mistake about it, Mr Deputy Speaker and the Assembly, electricity is the blood that runs through the veins of industry in this country. Unless we get it right, I have absolutely no doubt that it will stifle and hurt business. It will hurt our manufacturing base and rural parts of Northern Ireland, probably more than the cities. It is vital that the Committee keeps its eye on where that is going and that the Minister and the Department keep that as their number one priority because, without electricity, we do not have industry, and it is important —

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he also accept that it is very important for the strategies that DETI is pursuing at present in attracting, for example, data

companies, banking etc, which are huge energy users? They need cheap energy and to be sure that there will be an energy supply that they can rely on in the future.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member has an additional minute.

Mr Frew: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I welcome the Member's contribution. He has been very active, even in this debate, which is very encouraging, because he is absolutely right. We need to be on top of it. To me, it is as big an issue as — if not a bigger issue than — the corporation tax debate at present. It is vital, because some businesses will pay so much corporation tax and others will pay none, but they all need electricity to operate and to make things.

It does not just affect our businesses. I have a constituent, who I am working for at the minute, who tried to get a grid connection for their home. Forget about renewable energy. Forget about business. It was for their home, and they were quoted something in the region of £7,000, maybe going up to £10,000. They were told to go and speak to their neighbour to try to achieve a way leave. When they went to their neighbour, they asked the questions: "Would it be OK for us to put this thingy in here to get this thingy here for us to get thingy electricity?" They do not know what they are talking about. Why should the onus be on the householder to do that?

Then, after months, NIE stepped in and, of course, the person who needed to give the way leave did not know what they were talking about or what they wanted. They were scared of the whole proposition. When NIE went back to them, they agreed eventually. That is the problem that householders and other people are facing on a day-to-day basis. Then, when everything was agreed, a year and a half later, the bill went up. It was not £5,000 any more, or even £10,000, which was a rough estimate, but £14,000. It is unacceptable that the same thing can cost so much more a year and a half later. When you look at the figures and scrutinise the work of NIE in that regard, you can see glaring holes. That is what I am currently investigating. That is a personal constituency matter, but it typifies the problem that householders are facing at present.

One thing about the report that I do not necessarily agree with — we debated it in the Committee last time — is with regard to DETI needing a strategy because there is no strategy in place. There has to be a strategy in place, and there is a strategy in place. Indeed, the Minister launched the strategic '2050 Vision' study last year, which the Committee got a copy of. So, there is always a strategy in place. It is about making sure that that strategy moves forward with the times.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. Whilst there might be an overall energy strategy, does he not accept that, specifically for the grid, the current demand-led approach — ie, strengthen when demand comes forward — is unacceptable? We need a strategic approach to the strengthening of the grid.

Mr Frew: Yes, and that strategy will have to come not only from DETI but from the Utility Regulator, NIE, SONI and even the Planning Service, because all of those organisations play a part in that, but you are quite right. I am running out of time, if the Member wants me to give way.

In some of the detail, it is very clear that, whatever strategy we have going forward, it is a balance. We can all crow about investment, strengthening the grid here and putting a micro-grid in there. That is all technology that we need. We can also crow about renewable energy targets, but if they put businesses out of business and if householders cannot cope and cannot afford it, we have to think about that. That is something that I am becoming even more aware of as time goes by, because our businesses are hurting with the cost of electricity at the moment. We cannot place any more burden on those businesses. There is talk about balancing it out. It is very much a balancing act —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Frew: —and it is something that we need to be very careful of moving forward.

Mr Anderson: Up until a few minutes ago, I was a member of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee. Although I have only just stepped down, I want to speak briefly in support of the Committee's motion, which asks the House to approve its third report on its extensive review of electricity policy in Northern Ireland.

Last December, we debated security of supply and, in March this year, presented our second report, this time on pricing. In its third report, the Committee has given detailed consideration to the complex area of grid connections. None of those areas stands alone; all overlap and one impacts on the other. Grid connection is a highly technical issue, and it will take time for interested parties to fully digest the contents and recommendations of the report. I recognise that, as has been mentioned, not everyone has had the opportunity to examine the report in detail. The report and its recommendations are central to the whole area of the development of renewable energy. It is especially important because we have clear and demanding targets to meet by 2020 under the strategic energy framework. In just six years' time, we need to ensure that 40% of our energy is sourced from renewables. We have made some steady progress, and we are doing a lot better than many other countries in growing our renewable energy sector. Also, it is fairly clear that there is no shortage of interest from developers, with 42 large-scale schemes at various stages being taken forward but not yet finalised and many applications from small-scale renewable connections. The interest is there, but there are several challenges and problems, as outlined in the report. There needs to be a holistic, balanced and proactive response from all the key players. At the end of the day, as we stressed when we considered pricing, the needs of the consumer, domestic and business, must be a prime consideration in the development of any strategy.

Our research has highlighted a number of concerns about the problems faced by developers who are keen to connect to the grid. Due to congestion on the grid as a result of the high penetration of renewable energy, connection costs are now two to three times higher than they were in 2012. They are much higher than in the rest of the United Kingdom or in the Irish Republic and there are considerable delays in processing applications.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Member for giving way. Earlier, Mr Agnew made a point about having a strategic approach to the grid; to build it out rather than wait for demand. Does the Member agree that we should build out now in

anticipation? If so, who does he think should pay for that investment?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member has an additional minute.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Member for the intervention. On who should pay, we really have to look at pricing. As my colleague Mr Frew stated, businesses and domestic consumers have to be considered in the mix. There is a lot of work to do and I hope that, as we go forward, all those concerned about connection to the grid, pricing and security of supply will get together and come up with the proper solutions, bearing in mind businesses and consumers.

In light of the high costs and delays, it is vital that progress be made on opening up the market to competition and contestability. I know that the Minister is supportive of the need for contestability; so too are the Utility Regulator and NIE. One of our recommendations is that this should be introduced within an earlier time frame than is currently proposed. Some of the witnesses we took evidence from were unhappy with aspects of NIE's performance. I hope that those concerns will be looked at and addressed where necessary. We recommend that the Utility Regulator ensures that NIE has an appropriate and effective communications strategy in place for developers. That strategy must be open and transparent. The report refers to access to the NIE heat map. That issue might need further consideration by the Committee, but it would be very helpful if NIE could improve and update its heat map and help developers understand how best to use it. The map should be updated regularly. I referred to the Utility Regulator. She and SONI must do all that they can to work with NIE on a range of recommendations contained in the report.

All the key players have responsibility to collaborate and cooperate so that we can meet our 2020 target. The strategic energy framework, to which I referred earlier, is the agreed basis on which we move forward. As the key policymaker in the field of energy, DETI must continue to lead the way. We need to face the challenge of energy supply with a high degree of determination. Security and reliability of supply are vital to us all and fundamental to economic development.

I am sure that the Minister will address some of the issues in the report later in the debate, so I will leave it there and commend the Committee's report to the House.

12.45 pm

Mr McKinney: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to today's debate. I reaffirm the Chairman's remarks on the importance of the Minister and the other relevant bodies implementing the recommendations in the Committee's report. I would like, first, to thank the Committee and, indeed, Sydney Anderson, for its work. I also thank all the contributors for their valuable input, which I hope will prove highly beneficial in our immediate and future approach to energy policy.

It is clear that there is broad consensus that a transformation is needed in our energy system if our society is to meet the challenges of environmental sustainability, security of supply, infrastructural renewal and, as has been reflected here this morning, economic affordability. A key plank of this transformation is obviously

the strengthening of the grid to allow for greater access for renewable energy developers. Of course, as has already been reflected, that would go some way to achieving our 40% target by 2020. Therefore it is unacceptable that, despite the ETI Committee's conducting two previous inquiries into energy policy, along with a long-standing concern over electricity supply, those responsible have failed to take sufficient reasonable measures to ensure that our national grid is properly strengthened and that we have the proper infrastructure in place to guarantee security of supply and to accommodate developers of renewable energy.

There is a lack of long-term vision, policy or strategy and no attempt at a joined-up approach to the development of our network. They say that if it walks like a duck and quacks, then it is a duck. The opposite, of course, applies: if it is not walking and not quacking, it is not there and is not connected, as the Chairman reflects. Those failures have become evident through our Committee investigation. There has been a lacklustre approach to strengthening the grid, and there are significant failures in supporting developers in accessing it. The current approach is adding significant cost and uncertainty and acts as a disincentive to potential investors. As we have heard, significant delays —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKinney: I will.

Mr B McCrea: Can I ask a question similar to the one that I asked Mr Anderson? On the idea of taking a strategic view of building out the grid in advance, would you support the regulator increasing the price to the consumer or to businesses in order to do that in a timely fashion for a long-term vision? Do you think that there is some other way that we can finance the building-out of the grid?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McKinney: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. At the moment there are people who are willing to invest in some of this grid connection, but they cannot. The very processes that we have are a disincentive. As I say, that is adding costs. We have significant fuel poverty here, and these are issues that we need to deal with. Allowing people to connect to the grid through freeing up the processes can work in a positive regard.

Developers have also expressed —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member take an intervention?

Mr McKinney: Go ahead.

Mr Wilson: I am bemused by the logic that, by giving companies cheaper access to the grid — in other words, subsidising them through increased bills for consumers — somehow or other you will deal with fuel poverty. There is only one of two ways of paying for a connection: either the consumer pays for it, or the people who want to pay for the electricity pay for it.

Mr McKinney: Thank you for the intervention. As I understand it, the costs are spread over the national bill network. Therefore it is a small additional contribution on many more bills, and we can get a benefit here.

It has also become clear that planning permission must be reassessed, as developers here are at a serious financial disadvantage in comparison with the Republic. Those

factors create uncertainty, which has the knock-on effect of increasing the risk for investment, especially when we consider that it becomes difficult to predict future financial impact due to the lack of clarity on timescales and costs. As I have reflected, these are putting many projects at risk, which is counterproductive in achieving our overall 2020 targets. In that regard, the Committee report highlights the need to make the process of obtaining grid connections as transparent and as cost-effective as possible and to streamline the process, minimising cost and delay.

The SDLP is committed to the view that we must work closely with all our Departments and with our colleagues in the Republic to ensure the effective and efficient sharing of energy resources with full cross-border interconnection. We must therefore deliver an all-Ireland initiative on energy, so that developers, business and consumers, North and South, can benefit from renewable energy at a competitive price.

Mr Wilson: I wish to emphasise the point that Paul Frew made: this is one of the most important issues that the Assembly needs to deal with, because of the importance of energy to industry, the frequent discussions that there are here about fuel poverty and the need to retain the companies we have at present.

I must say that the more I listen to the arguments made here today, the more I despair of the understanding that there is of the issues. We cannot say that we want secure and cheap energy supplies and yet have Member after Member jumping up to say that we must aim for the most expensive energy that we could have: renewable energy. Indeed, it is significant that the German economy, which is nowhere near 40%, is now turning its back on renewables and is building coal-fired power stations.

I do not want to get into how we generate electricity. This discussion is about grid connections, and there are implications. If we go for more windmills across the countryside in remote areas where there are no power lines at present, we must strengthen the grid. Strengthening the grid requires money to be spent. The question that has been asked, time and again, is this: if we want to go for that target — it seems that the Assembly and the Executive are committed to it — and give planning permissions to renewable energy generation in remote areas, it will require the strengthening of the grid. Who pays for that?

From the discussion we have had so far, it seems that the report is almost an agenda for the renewable energy industry: “We should be allowed to build our turbines in the middle of nowhere, but somebody else should pay for the connection, so that we can then sell electricity to consumers in Northern Ireland”. If that is the case, not only will we find that we are charging people for electricity that costs about three and a half times more than electricity generated from gas, but we are saying that, by the way, consumers will have to pay for the connections into this. That goes on to the bill, and it is not an inconsequential amount of money, as the Member who spoke previously tried to suggest. A huge investment will be required to strengthen the grid in that way. If we are going to reflect the true cost of producing renewable energy, then, if we have to strengthen the grid, the people who want to produce that renewable energy should pay the cost of it.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. I have sympathies for his argument and for the direction in which he is taking the debate. Does he also realise that for homeowners who wish to build a house in the countryside and apply for a connection to the grid the cost is sometimes too much and transparency in the billing is non-existent?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member has an additional minute.

Mr Wilson: Here is the contradiction: somehow or other these huge energy producers, who are subsidised already for the erection of the turbines and the electricity they generate, should be subsidised for the connection, but the ordinary homeowner will have to pay the full economic cost. That is the inequity of the thing.

Let us look at another parallel. If a developer wants to build on a greenfield site — we had this discussion recently in the Social Development Committee — we expect developer contributions for upgrades of roads, improvements to junctions and increasing traffic capacity. If that is the case when it comes to housebuilding, why do we not apply the same principle when it comes to the generation of electricity? I am sure that the member of the Green Party is appalled by what I am saying, because he does not want consumers to know the true cost of green electricity, but I will let him intervene anyway.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. Actually, my question is this: will he be honest with consumers? He talks about the cost of renewable energy, but, as he knows — he is proud to be an economist — the supply of oil and gas is fixed, but demand is rising. The price will only continue to rise. If he does not change his position, he will lock Northern Ireland consumers into ever-rising electricity prices.

Mr Wilson: It is unfortunate that he should make that intervention at this time. The price of gas has never been lower. It is going down. People pay less for their petrol and diesel than they have paid for a couple of years. As a result of fracking, which I know is a bad word for him, we now find that OPEC can no longer use its monopoly in the way in which it did and that the Americans are looking for world markets in which to sell energy. Of course, we have reserves under the ground in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Wilson: If it were not for the Minister of the Environment and the Green Party opposing a cheap form of local energy, people could benefit from that as well.

Mr Allister: There certainly was a headlong rush in Northern Ireland, across the United Kingdom and further afield towards green energy, and perhaps quite unrealistic aspirations and commitments were made and targets set. The flaw in that headlong rush was that there was no forward planning to enable the network to receive that upsurge. Yes, it was encouraged hugely. Indeed, a number of individuals — perhaps I will come back to one later — were so swept along in the belief that all that they had to do was to make the commercial commitment to turbines and they would be welcomed with open arms that only now are they finding that the door is being closed on them. There was a lack of forward planning for a network capable of dealing with the upsurge.

That is compounded by the fact that, in the triangular relationship that oversees energy, we have the Department overseeing policy, we have NIE, SONI and all of that, and then we have the regulator. It is a triangle within which the buck is passed very easily. It becomes very frustrating for those who are trying to deal with the system. Under, I think, article 12 of the Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, NIE has a statutory duty to develop a network in an economic, efficient and co-ordinated manner, yet the problem today is that, in large parts of the Province, there is no network so advanced in that regard.

You then go to the regulator, which is, in truth, not accountable to anyone. It is not accountable to the Department, we are told. It is notionally accountable to the House in some opaque fashion, but it is not really accountable to anyone. Therefore, NIE blames the regulator, the regulator blames whomever it wants and you just go around that triangular arrangement of one blaming the other. Meanwhile, ordinary people out there suffer the consequences of being led up the garden path.

Mr B McCrea: I appreciate the Member giving way. He is learned in legal matters and will be aware of a court case or challenge between the regulator and NIE. Does he think that it would be the right thing for Northern Ireland to put up the prices to consumers and business so that we could build out the grid in advance of demand, or does he think that the regulator was right to restrain NIE's ambitions in that regard?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member will have an additional minute.

Mr Allister: I think that the very first point that I made was that we got ahead of ourselves. We headed down a road without any thought of where we were going and without planning for it. Now we are in this conundrum, where either the consumer pays to upgrade the network or inordinate prices are put on those who want to have turbines etc, and the turbines then become utterly economically unviable. We really are in a conundrum of our own making, by setting targets without planning far enough in advance.

Let me illustrate the point. The Minister will know the company that I am talking about in Ballycastle in my constituency. It is in the food sector. It wanted to build a new line of production. Its energy advice was that it needed to provide a turbine to do that. It was offered a connection charge of £63,000. Then a couple of years later, it was told, "Oh, by the way, instead of £63,000, it's now over a quarter of a million pounds". It was then in a predicament, not knowing what to do. In March this year, NIE told it, "Well, we might allow you an off-grid connection where there is zero exporting". Last month it was told, "No, we can't allow you an off-grid connection". All the while, the DARD grant, which is there to fund the production expansion, will expire in March. That company has been passed from pillar to post, from Department to the Utility Regulator to NIE, and frankly, all the time, its business is going down the tube.

1.00 pm

One of the fundamental problems is that the Ballycastle substation has not been upgraded, so it cannot take a bidirectional flow of power — it cannot allow power to flow in a reverse fashion back to the substation. Because of the failure to prepare the network in accordance with what

would have been necessary if you were going to embrace this upsurge in green energy, we now have a situation where people who are willing, eager and anxious to go down that road have been led up the garden path. The people in this case expended £30,000 on professional fees and put their business on hold in anticipation of getting the connection, but now with everyone walking away from them, they are told, "Sorry, we can't provide you the connection. We can't allow you off grid. We can't really allow you to do anything. It's just tough". That is the product of an ill-thought-out policy such as we have seen with the surge of desire to embrace green energy without any thought of how we will cope with it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Allister: We incentivised it, but we failed to provide the basic infrastructure. Unless and until that is addressed, this will become one sorry tale —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is up.

Mr Allister: — after another, as far as I can see.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I call Mr Steven Agnew, who may speak for three minutes and should take no interventions.

Mr Agnew: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the direction and the opportunity to speak.

When we sit together as a Committee and address the issue, an assumption is made that we want to reach our 40% target and that, whilst that should not be at all costs, it should be the direction of travel. It is unfortunate that we then get to the Chamber and get interventions that take us off that track. It is interesting to look at the distance between Mr Wilson and the Minister in terms of where they sit, because I think that that highlights the differences in their positions.

Mr Wilson: Of course, there is a good grid connection between us. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Agnew: Yes. The fact that Mr Wilson is on the fringe of his party on the issue highlights the fact that he is on the fringe of expert opinion.

As I pointed out, the fact is that the prices of oil and gas will continue to rise. Mr Wilson points to a current dip in the prices, but the trend is upwards. As he put it to me, if he learnt a wee bit of economics, he would know, as he knows fine rightly, that, when you have fixed supply and rising demand, only one thing will happen to costs: they will rise. He is tutting, because it is not fixed. I know that Mr Wilson might live in the short term; I live in the long term. The fact is that, unless we are going really long-term — we are talking about millions and billions of years — we are not going to produce more oil and gas. We might extract some more in the short term, which might give dips in price, but the reality is that the prices are only going to rise.

Renewables are our only option. It is right that the report, the Committee and, indeed, the Department's strategy make the assumption that we need to increase our deployment of renewables and take the benefits that come with that through the increased indigenous supply of energy, the jobs it creates, the carbon savings and the contribution that we can make to tackling climate change.

Members spoke about cheap energy and electricity, but we have to be honest with consumers, whether business or domestic, that there will not be a cheap electricity solution. What we can get is the best solution at the cheapest price, but it will not be cheap and will not solve fuel poverty. In the first instance, we have to look at energy efficiency and a reduction in the energy we use, but we must also get the best solutions for the medium to long term.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Agnew: It is not just a quick fix to get us over the line but what is in our best interest, which is why I spoke about a strategic approach to grid investment and energy generation.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to what has been a very good debate, insofar as there have been challenges and not everyone has gone in the same direction. It is good to have that discussion on the Floor. In one sense, the debate has arisen due to the success in increasing the amount of renewable electricity we generate and consume. Before I go into the contents of the report, let me say that I am familiar with the issues raised today and highlighted by the report. Indeed, I have had numerous meetings with and many items of correspondence from renewable developers of all sizes who want to connect to the grid, including farmers.

The message I take from the Committee's report and recommendations is that there are no quick and easy solutions and there is certainly no solution that will not ultimately have an impact on consumer bills. A number of Members mentioned that, if you are going to do x, you have to pay for it by putting up people's bills. We should always have that at the back of our mind. Mr McKinney referred to upgrading the grid, but we should remember that the costs of the grid are paid for by Northern Ireland consumers — not UK consumers or the island of Ireland, but Northern Ireland consumers. We should keep that to the front of our mind.

The Committee quite rightly considered that area as part of its overall review. It fits in well with the other two documents that I received from the Committee on security of supply and pricing. We now have part III of the report — grid connection — and all three areas are linked, which the Committee Chair referred to. All three are dependent on each other and cannot be looked at in isolation, and it is important that the recommendations are framed accordingly.

Given the limited opportunity to consider the Committee's report — Mr Lunn made that point — I do not propose to go through the recommendations in any detail now. As I said in the energy pricing debate, it is puzzling that an important debate must take place so soon after the report has been published, as it leaves very little time for a considered response. However, I assure the Committee and Members that I will provide a full written response in due course.

Many of the issues raised during the Committee's evidence gathering fall outside the control of my Department, a point that Mr Allister made with some frustration. I sometimes share his frustration. The Utility Regulator is an independent body, and it must be independent if it is to protect the consumer in the face of what was an NIE

monopoly and is now moving to more competition. It is sometimes frustrating, because everything is linked and different parts of the system are responsible for different parts of policy, regulation or delivery. However, many of the issues raised are not the responsibility of the Department. I am not saying that to avoid responsibility but because it is fact. I note that many of the report's recommendations fall partly or entirely to the Utility Regulator, and, if some of the solutions require investment, it is right that the regulator has the authority to determine the costs for the consumer.

I said that I had met a lot of developers who are frustrated by delays or by costs to the grid, but it is easy to get carried away and not to look at where we have come from. In just under 10 years, the contribution from renewables to the grid has increased from 3% to just under 20%, and the 20% target, as you may recall, was to be met by 2015, so we are very much on target.

As the report notes, renewables growth on the entire island of Ireland is faster than in many other parts of the world. We have a challenging target, which was set in the strategic energy framework, of 40% by 2020. It is sensible that we review that target at this stage in terms of costs and benefits as we approach the mid-point of the 10-year strategy. We are looking at that at the moment and will review it next year. I hope to publish the Department's conclusions in relation to that 40% target next year.

Strategic decisions flowing from that will be informed by that work. I cannot pre-empt the outcome and what will come forward, but there has been a lot of discussion today about strengthening the grid and how we should go ahead and strengthen it. Of course, if we did that, Northern Ireland consumers would have to pay for it. We have been looking to see whether we can access any European funding to strengthen the grid. At the moment, we are looking at funding that may be available under thematic objective 4, which could well tie in with our commitment on our renewable energy mix by 2020. We are working with the regulator, the transmission system operator — SONI — and NIE to identify potential grid-strengthening projects that could avail themselves of that funding. So, we are trying to think of other ways to strengthen the grid rather than putting it on —

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for giving way. We have heard calls from Members today that we should just advance, expand and invest in our grid. There are a couple of things there. First of all, when you invest in anything, someone pays for it. Secondly, where do we advance the grid? Whilst there is pressure on Ballycastle substation and Kells substation, there will also be pressure on other substations. Where do we put that advancement in? Surely that is where a demand-led side of things must come in.

Mrs Foster: It is probably a mixture of the two. Obviously, the regulator would not allow it in any event. If we said to NIE, "You must strengthen the grid in this part of the country", it would go to the regulator to allow that to happen. The regulator would have to assess what that would cost consumers in Northern Ireland. If it felt that it was excessive, it would not allow it to happen. We are trying to look at other ways of strengthening the grid as well as putting the burden onto the consumer.

I do not agree with the Committee's observation that there is no vision or strategy for the electricity grid. We have a strategic energy framework, and we are looking at

reviewing it next year. We also have the strategic vision, which I recall discussing with Committee members. It was completed last year, and the Committee received a copy. It sets out views on the potential direction of the energy policy and energy mix scenarios. However, I have to say that we are talking a long way ahead of ourselves. Goodness knows what else will come into the energy mix at that time.

We are looking very much at integrating — I had a discussion about this with the SEM committee in Dublin last week — the systems in Great Britain, the island of Ireland and, indeed, France and improving our interconnection between all the parts. Let me say this: Mr Agnew commented that renewables was the only option for the future, but that is not entirely true. If he is totally open, particularly in the context of integration with Great Britain, nuclear is an option as well. Nuclear is the part of the scene in Great Britain. Therefore, we will be interconnected with that and using nuclear energy in the future.

It is all very well to call for a vision for 2050, but I do not have a crystal ball to know what will happen anywhere, never mind in Northern Ireland, in terms of the energy mix moving forward to 2050. We can have a vision, and we have that. We have the strategic vision for 2050 —

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I am grateful to my colleagues on the Committee for doing all the heavy lifting on this. The strategy around renewables can, of course, be a job creation strategy as well. As regards Mr Wilson's friends in Germany, there are 38,000 people in Germany working on wind energy. I presume, Minister, that a key part of Invest NI's work is looking at how renewables can be an economic driver.

Mrs Foster: That has very much been part of our work. Indeed, the Member will be familiar with the DONG energy plant in the Titanic Quarter, which has been a tremendous piece of work.

1.15 pm

We need to look at this in the wider sphere. This is not about just Northern Ireland or the island of Ireland. We are moving into a system whereby we will be connected to Great Britain and, indeed, further afield. We need to bear that in mind.

The vision is there, so I disagree with that recommendation. The strategy is very much there as well, so I am a little bemused by some comments that were made in relation to that.

The report calls for the reconvening of the sustainable energy interdepartmental working group (SEIDWG) as a matter of urgency. I received similar requests from NIE and NIRIG, and I will be chairing that meeting on 15 January next year. SONI, NIE and NIRIG have been invited to attend and present to the group.

On competition and contestability, I reiterate my Department's support for seeing contestability introduced in Northern Ireland. That is important. The regulator is processing that, and I look forward to seeing it conclude in a timely manner.

I have some concerns regarding the recommendation that DETI, SONI and the regulator should strongly encourage NIE to voluntarily work with appropriate providers to draw up a list of approved companies for contestable delivery of grid connections and transmission at distribution levels. I remind Members that unbundling obligations arising from European Union directives and regulations required the separation of SONI from NIE ownership, and there is no role for SONI in this matter. That equally applies to the recommendation suggesting that the Utility Regulator and SONI must work with NIE to review and improve NIE's policies and processes relating to grid connections. Similarly, the Department has no role in how a commercial company should conduct its business.

While my Department has no direct role, I agree that NIE needs to look hard at some of its practices in terms of customer service. We have all had people come to our offices to complain about the way in which they were treated by NIE. I made that clear to NIE in a letter I sent as an MLA as recently as this month in relation to connection charges. So, it does need to look at the way in which it works with consumers on the ground. I understand that NIE cannot wave a magic wand and solve every connection problem, but improvements may be possible in timescales for response, clarity and transparency in connection charging. I am hopeful that NIE's Project 40 work can produce technical and commercial solutions for the renewable industries.

I welcome and support innovation and development of new technologies where it is in the interests of customers. A very good example of that was seen at an event hosted by Mr McCrea in relation to storage at which I spoke recently. I thought that was an excellent example of how we can use new and innovative ways to make a difference. I hope we can move that forward.

There is no silver bullet. Good policy remains very much a case of trying to balance costs against security of supply and environmental issues. I welcome the fact that there has been such good engagement in the debate. I hope that it is indicative of the fact that many more Members are taking an interest in this issue and not just Committee members.

I pay tribute to Mr Anderson, who is leaving the Committee. I wish him well in his new post. I look forward to working with Mr Givan when he comes into position.

My Department will respond in detail to the recommendations. I thank the Committee for bringing this report to the House.

Mr Flanagan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am glad to have the opportunity to wind up the debate on electricity policy. I thought we were beyond winding up things to get a bit of electricity but maybe that is the way we are going in future.

I thank the Members who took part in the debate for their contributions and interest in this important topic. As Members said, this is a complex issue and it takes time to get to grips with some of the complexities of electricity policy, particularly around grid connections. It is a huge issue for consumers and businesses, particularly those involved in the renewable electricity sector.

I think it was Mr Frew or Mr Wilson who made the comment that the Assembly needs to keep this to the fore, and I think the Assembly certainly has. This is the third report that we have published as part of our now concluded inquiry into electricity policy. I am sure that other members of the Committee will be glad that we can talk about other things now apart from electricity policy, because, apart from Mr Frew, an awful lot of them do not have a pile of interest in it. A lot of us would prefer to talk about people as opposed to electricity policy.

This is the third and final report of the Committee's inquiry. I thank the Committee staff, who have done an excellent job in helping us, as lay people, to get our heads around an extremely complicated process. I also thank all of those who have provided evidence and expert advice to the Committee on this issue.

The inquiry started nearly two years ago as a result of the substantially higher prices that large energy users here pay compared with those in most other parts of Europe. Our blushes were largely spared by Italy, whose costs were the highest in Europe, closely followed by ours: we managed to come in second place all the time.

Running through the inquiry were five main themes: the need for a clear vision and a strategy; the need for contestability arrangements to be put in place; the need for smart-grid solutions, including microgrids; the need for NIE to be more transparent and communicate better with developers; and the need for NIE to improve its policies and processes to better meet the needs of developers.

The absence of a clearly communicated vision and strategy for electricity has been covered in detail by other Members, including the Chairman in his opening remarks. There are a lot of objectives that the Department wants to see implemented, such as the 40% target, reforming the electricity market and improving competition. Those objectives are mostly a reaction to events, rather than things that have arisen from an overall vision and strategy.

Sydney Anderson will be missed on the Committee. He played a key role in the formulation of the report: maybe he can put that in his next Assembly manifesto. He told us that all the key stakeholders should be involved in developing a vision. Danny Kinahan agreed that we need to act quickly to develop the strategy that we need, along with the development of pilot projects. As Trevor Lunn said, it is a complex matter, but it is an extremely important one and needs to be acted on quickly.

Paul Frew told us that electricity is the blood that runs through the veins of business, and that is how important it is. However, he disagreed with the view that there is no vision or strategy. Is the report that he referred to a strategy, a vision or an analysis of what the electricity sector will look like in 2050? That is something that is completely different.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will, Basil, because the next two words I have down here are, "Basil's question". So, fair play to you, Basil: you must have quare eyesight. *[Laughter.]*

Mr B McCrea: Far be it from me to interrupt when you are going to quote me.

I was disappointed that I was not able to take part in the debate, because it is an area that we have looked at in the

all-party group. The key issue the Minister raised was that, if we are going to enhance the grid, which there seems to be some benefit from, somebody has to pay. That could be the consumer or industry, or the Minister raised the point about other funds from Europe or wherever. Did the Committee consider at any time who should pay for enhancing the grid?

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for his question. I am a bit disappointed that he changed it, because he has asked the same question three times, although it is the same question in essence.

It is important for us to clarify where phase III of the inquiry came from. It started after we had been inundated with complaints from people who wanted to connect to the grid. There were people who wanted to connect a single wind turbine and were being quoted figures of up to £1 million and experienced never-ending delays. That was the logic behind our looking at the whole issue of grid connection. We were going to stick it on as an addendum to phase II, which was on other aspects of electricity policy, but we thought that this issue needed a specific report.

The question of who pays for it is an important one, because somebody has to. If somebody wants to put up a single wind turbine, is it worth them spending £1 million to connect it to the grid? It certainly is not: they would be better off not connecting it to the grid and using it to generate their own power in their house, farm business or wherever. Larger projects pay for their own connection, because it makes economic sense for them to do so. Speaking personally — I am stepping away from speaking on behalf of the Committee — there needs to be a policy where the connections that have an overall economic benefit, help our economy and move towards reduced prices and more sustainable energy need to be prioritised, instead of running about putting a wind turbine up on the top of every hill. So I hope, Basil, that answers your question somewhat.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. I take it that this is a personal view of a strategic outlook. I am sure that he will know his party's position that the North/South interconnector is vitally and strategically important for keeping bills down and preventing customers from spending a lot of money on electricity. How does he respond?

Mr Flanagan: I hear you, Paul, and I will say the same thing that I have said every other time. I am mandated by successive Sinn Féin ardfheiseanna to tell you at every available opportunity, through the Chair, that we are opposed to the construction of an overhead North/South interconnector, and at our most recent ardfheis we approved a motion calling for the North/South interconnector to be built underground as part of the A5/N2 project, which is going to happen. There is no reason why it cannot be built as part of that project, through underground ducts, and I hope that we move to that process.

Somebody used the phrase, "the understanding of the issues". I think it was Mr Wilson, and I want to respond to a number of issues. He talked about ROCs, and ROCs are a huge issue. There is an issue around the over-subsidisation of some forms of renewable electricity. However, ROCs are funded through a Westminster scheme, so they actually provide more benefit here for

electricity customers than they cost. It comes back to “the understanding of the issues”. Maybe, Mr Wilson would like to know that windmills are used for milling flour and wind turbines are used for generating electricity — a fundamental difference.

In terms of vision and a strategy, the Minister told us that a vision document was published in July 2013. The Committee was presented with a copy of that, but we have heard nothing on it since. Through our deliberations on this most recent phase of the inquiry, it has not been raised once by the Department. So, the Committee would be keen to follow that up with the Department to see what is happening with that vision document that was launched last year.

Contestability was an issue that caused us an awful lot of bewilderment. As there is no contestability — because NIE has to do the work — we presumed that there would be objection somewhere. But, week after week, people came in and said, “We have no issue with contestability”. Then NIE came in and said, “We have no issue with contestability”, and we really could not understand why it has not happened yet. Everybody wants to see it happening. It is happening in Britain and in the South, and those two existing models seem to be working.

One of the big frustrations that people who are trying to connect have is that they are given one price from NIE. There is no transparency with it, and they cannot go somewhere else to get a competing price. We think that NIE should just implement this straight away. I do not think that there is any need for three years’ delay, because it is causing serious frustration for people. It can bring benefits, and, as Trevor Lunn said, there is no reason for long delays. Sydney Anderson even said that the Minister supports contestability. So, there is no logic for it not happening. I think we need to see progress on this a lot sooner.

In terms of smart grids and micro grids, it seems that micro grids, if properly developed, can bring real benefits to communities, developers and renewable electricity generators. If we have an agreed vision for clean, green affordable electricity, micro grids can be part of a strategy to achieve that vision and can help put us in the forefront of new technology with the economic benefits that that can bring, as my colleague Máirtín alluded to.

However, in the absence of a vision, smart technologies are merely one more issue to be considered in the plethora of issues that compete for the limited attention and resources in the Department and other agencies that are trying to implement the Department’s policies.

In terms of transparency, it is good to see that NIE has revised and developed its heat map. That is to be welcomed. It is good to see that there has been an initial positive response from the industry —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member’s time is almost up.

Mr Flanagan: This can only be a first step along the road to increased transparency in NIE. From all our evidence, there is deep frustration with NIE, and hopefully it will take that on and try to sort out the deep problems it has.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on its Review into Electricity Policy: Part III - Grid Connections (NIA 196/11-15); and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in conjunction with Executive colleagues, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the System Operator for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Electricity, to implement, as applicable, the recommendations contained therein.

1.30 pm

Pensions Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Mr Brady (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 26 March 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Pensions Bill (NIA 42/11-16).

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Committee Stage of the Pensions Bill began on 19 November and is due to conclude on 20 January 2015. The Committee issued a call for evidence on 25 November, and that is due to end on 16 December. The Committee gave a commitment to conclude its consideration of the Bill within the 30-working-day time frame. To achieve that, it will take oral evidence tomorrow and hopes to hear from other witnesses before Christmas recess. It is nevertheless vital that the Committee scrutinise the Bill and do so effectively — to a standard that the House would consider adequate and that the public would expect. The Committee has already heard that there are potentially winners and losers in the new Pensions Bill, and we must give the issues closer scrutiny and examine just what we can do to minimise the impact of the Bill on those for whom it is not likely to be favourable. We may not have much room for flexibility, but that does not mean that we should simply rubber-stamp the legislation.

There is no way of knowing how many responses from stakeholders will be received before 16 December or how many sessions will be required to hear oral evidence from witnesses in the new year. With all that in mind, although the Committee will seek to complete its consideration within the 30-day time frame and hopes very much to do so, members agreed that it was important to build in sufficient time to address those unknowns. In seeking an extension, the Committee is, in effect, taking a precautionary approach. The Committee therefore agreed a motion to ask the Assembly for an extension to the Committee Stage until 26 March 2015, with the understanding that it intends to complete Consideration Stage much sooner than that. On behalf of the Committee, I ask the House to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 26 March 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Pensions Bill (NIA 42/11-16).

Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 30 January 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill (NIA 40/11-16). — [Mr Clarke (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development).]

Motion not moved.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The motion was not moved, so the Committee Stage has not been extended.

Private Members' Business

Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims)

Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I call Lord Morrow to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill.

Moved.—[Lord Morrow.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in the provisional grouping of amendments selected list. There are three groups of amendments, and we will debate the amendments in each group in turn. The first debate will be on amendment Nos 1 to 3, 31 to 43 and 47 to 61, which deal with technical issues and commencement. The second debate will be on amendment Nos 4, 15 to 30 and 44 to 46, which deal with issues relating to the protection of victims. The third debate will be on amendments Nos 5 to 14, which deal with paying for sexual services and support for exiting prostitution.

I remind Members who are intending to speak that they should address all the amendments in each group on which they wish to comment. Once the debate on each group has been completed, any further amendments in the group will be moved formally as we go through the Bill and the Question on each will be put without further debate. I also remind Members that, at Further Consideration Stage, debate is restricted to the further amendments to the Bill. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Clause 7 (Minimum sentence for offence under section 1 or 2)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): We now come to the first group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 2 and 3, amendment Nos 31 to 43 and amendment Nos 47 to 61. Those amendments deal with technical and commencement matters.

Members will note that amendment Nos 32 to 43 are consequential to amendment No 31 and that amendment Nos 49 to 55 are consequential to amendment No 48. I call the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, to move amendment No 1 and to address the other amendments in the group.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I beg to move amendment No 1: In page 6, line 28, at end insert "and for "that paragraph" substitute "that provision";".

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In page 6, line 41, at end insert "(za) in Article 4(2) (interpretation) omit the "and" at the end of sub-paragraph (c) and after paragraph (d) add—

"(e) a sentence falls to be imposed under section 7(2) of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 if it is required by that provision and the court is not of the opinion there mentioned;".— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 3: In page 7, line 7, leave out subsection (9).— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 31: In clause 24, page 17, line 5, leave out "victim" and insert "complainant".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 32: In clause 24, page 17, line 8, leave out "victim" and insert "complainant".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 33: In clause 24, page 17, line 11, leave out "victim" and insert "complainant".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 34: In clause 24, page 17, line 13, leave out "victim's" and insert "complainant's".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 35: In clause 24, page 17, line 14, leave out "victim" and insert "complainant".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 36: In clause 24, page 17, line 15, leave out "victim" and insert "complainant".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 37: In clause 24, page 17, line 17, leave out "victim" and insert "complainant".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 38: In clause 24, page 17, line 19, leave out "victim" and insert "complainant".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 39: In clause 24, page 17, line 22, leave out "victim" and insert "complainant".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 40: In clause 24, page 17, line 23, leave out "victim" and insert "complainant".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 41: In clause 24, page 17, line 26, leave out "victim" and insert "complainant".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 42: In clause 24, page 17, line 26, leave out "victim's" and insert "complainant's".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 43: In clause 24, page 17, line 28, at end insert

"(2) In this section—

"the accused" means a person who is alleged to have committed, or has committed, an offence under section 1 or 2;

"complainant" means a person against or in relation to whom an offence under section 1 or 2 is alleged to have been committed, or has been committed."— [Lord Morrow.]

No 47: In clause 30, page 20, line 24, leave out subsection (2) and insert

"(2) Except as provided by the following subsections, this Act comes into operation on the day after Royal Assent.

(3) The following provisions come into operation on such day or days as the Department may by order appoint—

(a) section 11 (with Schedule 3);

(b) section 13.

(4) Sections 12 and 21 come into operation one month after Royal Assent.

(5) Section 15(1) to (4) and (6) comes into operation on 1 June 2015.

(6) Section 22(1) to (3) and (5) to (11) comes into operation 10 months after Royal Assent."— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 48: In schedule 3, page 38, line 22, leave out head (c).— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

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No 49: In schedule 3, page 38, line 23, leave out “, the Secretary of State or the Commissioners” and insert “or the Secretary of State”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 50: In schedule 3, page 38, line 30, leave out “, the Secretary of State or the Commissioners” and insert “or the Secretary of State”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 51: In schedule 3, page 38, line 31, leave out “, the Secretary of State or the Commissioners’ and insert ‘or the Secretary of State’.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 52: In schedule 3, page 39, leave out lines 4 and 5.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 53: In schedule 3, page 39, leave out line 21.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 54: In schedule 3, page 39, line 28, leave out “(c) the Commissioners,”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 55: In schedule 3, page 39, line 31, leave out “, the Secretary of State or the Commissioners” and insert “or the Secretary of State”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 56: In schedule 3, page 39, line 37, after “may” insert “, subject to paragraph (3A),”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 57: In schedule 3, page 39, line 42, at end insert

“(3A) The information must be destroyed no later than the date on which the offender ceases to be subject to notification requirements.”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 58: In schedule 4, page 44, line 12, at end insert

“THE SEXUAL OFFENCES (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 2008 (NI 2)

7A.—(1) In Article 22(2)(b) (meeting child following sexual grooming, etc.) for paragraph (ii) substitute—

“(ii) an offence under section 2 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (human trafficking) committed with a view to exploitation that consists of or includes behaviour within section 3(3) of that Act (sexual exploitation), or”.

(2) In Article 58(7) for “Articles 59 to 60” substitute “Article 60”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 58: In schedule 4, page 44, line 12, at end insert

“THE SEXUAL OFFENCES (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 2008 (NI 2)

7A.—(1) In Article 22(2)(b) (meeting child following sexual grooming, etc.) for paragraph (ii) substitute—

“(ii) an offence under section 2 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (human trafficking) committed with a view to exploitation that consists of or includes behaviour within section 3(3) of that Act (sexual exploitation), or”.

(2) In Article 58(7) for “Articles 59 to 60” substitute “Article 60”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 59: In schedule 5, page 47, line 4, column 2, at beginning insert

“

	Article 59.
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”— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 60: In schedule 5, page 47, line 11, at end insert

“

The Policing and Crime Act 2009 (c. 26)	Section 15.
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”— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 61: In the long title, leave out from “offences” to end and insert

“, slavery and other forms of exploitation, including measures to prevent and combat such exploitation and to provide support for victims of such exploitation; and for connected purposes.”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr Ford: I welcome the opportunity to open the Further Consideration Stage debate and to speak to the amendments in the first group. In doing so, I will take a moment or two to thank Lord Morrow for the spirit of partnership with which he has continued to work with me and my team to identify the further amendments that are necessary to achieve the Bill’s desired effect. I emphasise the importance of the Bill in changing and strengthening how we respond to the unacceptable crimes of trafficking, and I pay tribute to the determination and commitment that Lord Morrow has shown in driving the Bill forward.

Indeed, I noticed that, in a recent discussion on the Modern Slavery Bill in the House of Lords, not only did a number of noble Lords praise Lord Morrow for his contribution to legislation in Northern Ireland but some of them even included the Minister of Justice in their tributes. A number certainly pointed out that we are in a better place than England and Wales on the basis of the legislation that we are putting through.

I thank my team and the Office of the Legislative Counsel (OLC), which also played a large part in the Bill. I also thank Lord Morrow’s team, particularly Mark Baillie, for the significant work that has been done over many months. I believe that it leaves the Bill in a much better place, although it is undoubtedly still entirely true to Lord Morrow’s original intentions.

The amendments in this group are largely technical in nature and are needed to ensure that the provisions in the Bill have the intended effect that the Assembly has agreed and are appropriately aligned within the existing legislative framework. I am pleased that, as was the case at Consideration Stage, the overwhelming majority of the amendments have been agreed between Lord Morrow and me.

Amendment Nos 1 to 3 to clause 7, which are tabled in my name and supported by Lord Morrow, are consequential to clause 7, and are needed to ensure that the minimum sentence provision made under that clause is embedded within the sentencing framework provided for within existing legislation.

The amendments are pretty technical. Amendment No 1 amends article 2 of the Criminal Justice (Northern

Ireland) Order 1996 so that the article includes appropriate terminology. Amendment No 2 amends article 4 of the Criminal Justice Order to include clause 7 in the relevant interpretation provisions in that order. Amendment No 3 removes subsection 9 from clause 7, because the revised commencement arrangements under amendment No 47 make provision for clauses 1 and 2, and the respective offences under those clauses, to come into effect on Royal Assent. Therefore, subsection 9 is no longer needed.

Amendment Nos 31 to 43, all of which are to clause 24, have been tabled by Lord Morrow. Again, those amendments are technical in nature and, collectively, would have the effect of replacing the word "victim" with the word "complainant" throughout the clause, as well as defining what is meant by the word "complainant" and the words "the accused".

Whilst I have no strong concerns about the effect of those amendments, I have been advised that they are not necessary. What is meant by "complainant" and "the accused" is well established and does not need further definition. Furthermore, since clause 24 makes provision on police interviews, that is, before criminal proceedings commence, I believe that the term "victim" is more appropriate. That is why I have not added my name to these amendments.

I understand that Lord Morrow is keen to reflect the terminology of the equivalent legislation in England and Wales, and there are certainly some suggestions that there are potential benefits of having a consistent approach. As such, I do not intend to push these amendments to a vote

Amendment Nos 48 to 57 to schedule 3 are tabled in my name and supported by Lord Morrow. Once more, those are technical amendments that are intended to correct and refine the earlier provisions agreed by the Assembly at Consideration Stage. Members will be aware that, together, clause 11 and schedule 3 make provision for the introduction of slavery and trafficking prevention orders (STPOs). In particular, part 2 of schedule 3 makes provision for the notification requirements that will apply to individuals subject to an STPO, and part 3 makes supplementary provision. In that context, paragraphs 18 and 19 of schedule 3 make provision for the supply of information between the Chief Constable and certain bodies and persons in order to verify information that has been provided under the notification requirements. Those bodies currently include Her Majesty's Commissioners for Revenue and Customs. Amendment Nos 48 to 55 will simply remove HMRC from that list as further legal advice has confirmed that this function is already available under section 19 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 and is supported by a memorandum of understanding between HMRC and the Association of Chief Police Officers. I am content, therefore, that the power already exists, and I have tabled these amendments in order to avoid duplication.

Amendment Nos 56 and 57 make provision for the destruction of any information shared with the Chief Constable under paragraph 19 once the STPO ceases to have effect and the individual is no longer subject to the associated notification requirements. These amendments ensure that the same arrangements are in place for the retention and destruction of information under paragraph 19 of schedule 3 as for fingerprint and photographic data under paragraph 15 of schedule 3.

Amendment Nos 58 to 60 to schedules 4 and 5 are also tabled in my name and supported by Lord Morrow. Together, they make further consequential provision and repeals.

Amendment No 47 to clause 30 has been tabled in my name. I am grateful for the support of Lord Morrow and the Chair of the Justice Committee in bringing that amendment. Members will recall that, during Consideration Stage, I undertook to look again at what commencement provisions should apply, with a view to ensuring that the Bill was commenced as early as possible. The effect of amendment No 47 is that the vast majority of measures in the Bill, with the exception of a very few specified provisions, will come into effect on the day after Royal Assent.

Members will be aware that some of the provisions will require preparatory work in respect of guidance or strategies. So, in some cases, the provisions are to be commenced automatically within a fixed period after Royal Assent. Clauses 12 and 21, which relate to a human trafficking and slavery strategy, and guidance as to compensation for victims, will commence one month after Royal Assent, and clause 22, which makes provision for independent guardians, will commence 10 months after Royal Assent. I know that many Members will be interested in the commencement arrangements for clause 15, or as it was, clause 6. That provision will come into effect on 1 June 2015. It will probably be about four months after Royal Assent rather than the six months that were seen as desirable by the justice agencies.

Some provisions will require secondary legislation. In implementing a number of measures, we will also need to take cognisance of equivalent developments in the other UK jurisdictions. In order to accommodate that work, amendment No 47 makes provision for clause 11 and schedule 3 relating to STPOs, and clause 13 in respect of the duty to report suspected victims of trafficking and slavery, to be commenced by order of the Department. I trust that the proposed commencement arrangements, which have been agreed with Lord Morrow and the Justice Committee, will demonstrate my practical commitment to the full commencement of the Bill as early as possible and that the Assembly will support amendment No 47.

Finally, in this section, Mr Deputy Speaker, amendment No 61, in the name of Lord Morrow, would amend the long title to reflect more accurately the additional provisions that were inserted into the Bill at Consideration Stage.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): As the Minister indicated, this group of amendments is largely technical in nature and is intended to tidy up the wording of the clauses and schedules to ensure consistency. I will, therefore, concentrate my remarks on amendment No 47 to clause 30, which relates to the commencement of the provisions in the Bill and to which the Committee has put its name in support.

The Committee first considered the commencement powers during Committee Stage and decided that the provision enabling the Bill to come into force by order of the Department needed to be changed so that commencement did not require action by the Department. The reason for that was to avoid placing the Department in the position of having to decide when to commence provisions with which it was not in policy agreement, particularly clause 15, which relates to the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services, which the Minister

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opposed at Consideration Stage, but the Assembly clearly supported by a majority of 81 votes in favour to only 10 against.

1.45 pm

The Committee discussed the matter, and members were of the view that it would be preferable to remove the requirement to commence the Bill from the Department of Justice. Having considered several options, the Committee agreed that the preferred approach would be to build in some time between the Bill receiving Royal Assent and its commencement to enable Departments and organisations that will be responsible for the implementation of the provisions in the Bill to develop the necessary measures and procedures, particularly in relation to support services and training.

As outlined at Consideration Stage, the Committee initially agreed to bring forward an amendment to commence the Bill three months after it received Royal Assent. Following representations by Lord Morrow that, to provide the necessary time to put in place effective measures to support those who wish to exit from prostitution, a longer time frame for commencement would be helpful. The Committee agreed to extend the timescale in its initial amendment to six months.

As the Minister had already tabled an amendment to the commencement provision to bring certain clauses of the Bill into operation on the day after Royal Assent, the Committee brought forward an amendment to his amendment to ensure that all the provisions in the Bill came into effect six months after Royal Assent if they had not already been commenced. The Committee adopted the approach of amending the Minister's amendment as it enabled him to commence those provisions in the Bill that he wished within six months, thus providing flexibility but also achieving our aim of ensuring that the commencement of the rest of the clauses did not sit within the gift of the Department.

At Consideration Stage, the Minister chose not to move his amendment and, therefore, the Committee amendment was not called. In not moving it, the Minister indicated that he shares the wish of the Committee and Lord Morrow to see the Bill commenced in its entirety as soon as possible after Royal Assent. However, given the difference in approach between him and the Committee and the complexity of the amendments passed, in his view, it was better to take the time before Further Consideration Stage to see whether the issues could be resolved and agreement reached on the commencement of the Bill.

While disappointed not to have the opportunity for the Assembly to consider the Committee's amendment, I indicated at the time that I hoped that an amendment that satisfied everyone could be agreed, otherwise the Committee would again table an amendment at Further Consideration Stage. The Committee received information on the Minister's proposal for the commencement of the Bill and the wording of the amendment just in time to enable us to consider it prior to and during our meeting last Wednesday.

Noting that the proposals — the details of which the Minister has outlined — have the support of the Bill sponsor, Lord Morrow, and achieve the intent of the Committee to remove the requirement for the Department

to commence provisions with which it is not in policy agreement, the Committee agreed to support the proposed amendment rather than bring forward one of its own.

The Justice Committee welcomes the fact that, with the amendment, the vast majority of the provisions in the Bill will come into effect either on Royal Assent or within six months of it, and the Committee commends support for it to the Assembly.

Speaking briefly in my capacity as a Member of the House, I want to place on record my thanks to Lord Morrow and the Minister for the constructive way in which they engaged around this particular issue. It was something that the Committee wanted to press in respect of commencement, and the agreement that was reached with Lord Morrow and the Minister is much more preferable to the Committee having to put forward its own amendment.

We support the amendment that has been placed before us. It is not that I do not trust the Minister to respect the will of the Assembly, but, in my view, it is better to take a belt-and-braces approach to the issue. It has been well documented since the commencement of the process that the Minister and the Alliance Party were very much opposed to clause 6, which is now clause 15. In order to ensure that the will of the Assembly will be implemented, it is better for the powers to be put into the Bill through the Assembly rather than leaving it in the hands of the Minister who, based on his word, we would need to trust to put it into effect.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree with the Justice Minister when he said earlier that the fullest cooperation between his Department and Lord Morrow is exactly where we are at today, and it should be welcomed by everyone?

Mr Givan: I welcome the fact that Lord Morrow, through his tenacity, has been able to put through this legislation, despite the vast resources thrown against him by the Minister and his departmental officials, who campaigned extensively against one aspect of the Bill, namely clause 6. I appreciate the cooperation that has existed on every other aspect of the Bill and the support on that, but the Minister and the Alliance Party have been very much against the criminalisation of the purchasing of sexual services. We have now reached the position where the Minister has to respect the will of the Assembly because of the vote that was passed by 81 votes in favour to only 10 against and every Alliance Member was one of those 10. It is not unreasonable therefore to not put the Minister in the invidious position where he would need to put in place an order that would go against the way in which he and his colleagues voted. Therefore, the Assembly is able to save the Minister that embarrassment. I appreciate the fact that we have got to that position today.

Mr Ford: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. That is presumably why I co-signed all but one of the amendments before us today relating to clause 15. I accept that that is group 3; I will not push that point.

Mr Givan: Again, I welcome how the Minister has been brought to the table on the issue to the point where he has had to support it.

The debate has been very constructive and good, but, on a point of principle, I certainly felt that it was important that the commencement provision around what has been the most controversial aspect of it was not left in the gift

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of the Department to bring in through an order. I do not want to go over a previous occasion, but the Assembly voted in the past on a particular issue and the Minister has not implemented the will of the Assembly in respect of that issue. So, rather than have that repeated and being alert to what has happened in the past, I was keen to have the amendment through the Committee. I got Committee support for it, and, today, having had the Minister support the amendment, we will be able to pass it through the Assembly.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I call Mr Tom Elliott. I must advise the Member that I may have to interrupt him for Question Time. It depends entirely on how loquacious he is.

Mr Elliott: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I can assure you that you will not have to interrupt me. Well, I cannot guarantee that, but you will not have to interrupt me because of time.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the amendments to this important Bill further. The Committee Chair outlined how important he feels it is, not only for himself but for the Committee, and how important the cooperation through the Committee and with the Department has been. I put on record my thanks to the Department and the Committee staff for their help and support.

I want to briefly deal with amendment No 47, which is the one that there is most interest in, because all the amendments in this group are, as they say, technical. The Minister and the Department appear to have been forced into this somewhat by the role of the Committee in bringing forward the earlier amendment on the timescale. I think that the Minister may have been resistant to a timescale at all in that respect, but, thankfully, he has come to see that it is probably positive to bring in that timescale to ensure that there is no slippage and that the clause is enacted in a way that the majority of the House, Lord Morrow and the Committee want it to be enacted. It is just a matter of having that security. I feel that is important, and I welcome it. While the Minister may have been pressurised or forced into it somewhat, he seems to now be at a stage at which he is willing to ensure that it is implemented.

Deputy Speaker, I hope that was brief enough for you and the team. That is all I need to say on that group.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I call Mr Stewart Dickson. I give him the same useful advice.

Mr Dickson: I hope to be relatively quick as well, Deputy Speaker.

I also welcome the positive engagement between Lord Morrow and the Justice Minister to identify further amendments that will ultimately strengthen the legislation. Although, as has been said in the Chamber already, we have some disagreements on parts of the Bill, I genuinely commend Lord Morrow for the efforts that he has put into progressing the Bill to this stage with the Minister and the Justice Department.

As Members have said, the amendments in this group are mostly technical, designed to make sure that the Bill works as smoothly as possible within the existing framework. However, I would just like to point out again, following the Minister's contribution, that we consider amendment Nos 31 and 41 to be necessary, and we believe that "victim" would be a more appropriate term to use in clause 24, as it

makes provision in respect of police interviews before the commencement of criminal proceedings. As the Minister has explained, however, we understand Lord Morrow's motivation behind those changes and do not intend to push those matters to a vote, but perhaps Lord Morrow can outline to the House to what extent he considers the use of different terminology from England and Wales in that clause to be detrimental, given that the intention of the Bill is to provide greater support to victims.

However, as I said, the intention of the amendments in this group is to tidy the Bill. I see no reason to oppose them, and look forward to the discussion of the next group.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Lord Morrow.

The debate stood suspended.

2.00 pm

*(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker
[Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair)*

Oral Answers to Questions

Employment and Learning

Department for Employment and Learning: Abolition

1. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, following the announcement in January 2012 that his Department was to be abolished, to outline the discussions he has had with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding the arrangements to divide his departmental functions between the Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. (AQO 7158/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

In July 2012, the First Minister and deputy First Minister announced that they wished to await the outcome of engagement with party leaders on the number of Departments before making any decision on the future of DEL. The matter is on the agenda of the ongoing all-party talks.

I believe that the number of Departments should be rationalised from 12 to eight from the start of the next mandate of the Assembly. However, any reallocation of functions should be based around the creation of what are essentially new Departments, rather than existing Departments subsuming new functions into existing organisational structures and corporate plans.

My Department may have been created as an amalgamation of functions from different Departments. However, today, it is a coherent organisation based around a unified agenda of promoting and addressing the skill needs of the people of Northern Ireland and helping them to find and sustain employment.

Much of the current synergy in DEL would be lost in the event that its functions were dispersed. Indeed, there would be a very real danger that the Executive's ability to grow and transform the economy at a time of critical importance would be substantially damaged. For those reasons, I consider that virtually all the functions of the Department should remain together, either in a single Department or as part of a wider Department of the economy. While there may be a superficially attractive option to have a single Department addressing education, from nursery to higher education, the more compelling requirement is to ensure that further education and higher education are directly meeting the needs of the economy. The present interface between DEL and DE is managed and can continue to be managed under any future arrangements.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his answer. This seems to be yet another example of OFMDFM promising what it cannot deliver. The Minister referred to the talks' proposals to take a more strategic approach to reducing the number of Departments. Will he outline any lessons that have been

learned in the process of his Department being looked at to make sure that, if we do make this strategic decision, we can actually deliver on it?

Dr Farry: I do not agree that this is something that has been forgotten by OFMDFM. The correct decision has been taken to view it as part of a wider consideration of Departments. That process is very much alive today. Members will be aware that that item is being discussed actively in the current round of talks. There may well be a positive outcome in that regard.

We want to avoid the situation where Departments are carved up for political ends, which was the danger in 2012. Today, we have the opportunity to do this as part of a wider reform of government structures, which is more about servicing the people and businesses of Northern Ireland in as efficient and effective a way as possible.

We can certainly learn lessons from the discussions in 2012, when all stakeholders — universities, colleges, business organisations and students themselves — saw the benefit of a single Department of the economy rather than my Department being split between two Departments.

We can also look to experiences elsewhere in these islands. For example, universities are part of the Department with responsibility for business in the London setting, which gives them a certain profile. By contrast, in the Republic of Ireland, they are part of a wider Department of Education and Skills and, frankly, tend to get lost in discussions around primary and secondary education in that jurisdiction.

Mr Ross: I tend to agree with the Minister that what we want to see, ultimately, is a Department for the economy that would include some of the powers that his Department currently has. Will the Minister explain the benefits of seeing colleges and universities as economic drivers and how a Department for the economy would help, not only in the work that Invest Northern Ireland does to attract companies to invest in Northern Ireland but in training young people in economically relevant areas?

Dr Farry: I tend to concur with the Member. Just to be clear, I see virtually all my Department going into a Department of the economy alongside virtually all of DETI. There may well be other functions across Departments that could be consolidated in such a manner. It is very clear that the further education sector and universities are a key part of the economic narrative in Northern Ireland. Look, for example, to what Invest Northern Ireland is doing in reaching out to companies overseas. Universities are central to that narrative.

Our colleges' relevance to the economy has come on in leaps and bounds in the past decade. At the tip of the spear, they are offering programmes through our shared skills scheme, whereby they will provide the ready-made employees that companies require. We have been able to attract companies to Northern Ireland based on a very innovative approach that is not available in competing jurisdictions for what are often mobile international investments.

Moreover, the curriculum in our colleges and universities is heavily determined by the needs of the economy. Frankly, that is why we are investing public money in colleges and universities: to ensure that they are providing the skilled workers of the future to meet the demands of the economy.

We know that we will need more and more higher-level skills in the years to come, and our colleges and universities are the key delivery partner in that regard.

Mr Elliott: Given that the Minister has indicated that his Department is supportive of a single Department for the economy, what areas in his Department does he suggest go to other Departments, and to which of the other Departments?

Dr Farry: I hesitate, since the views that I am expressing are my personal views on the matter and those of my political party. I would not speak on behalf of individual members of staff in the Department. However, it is interesting to note that when the Employment and Learning Committee did an exercise in that regard in the spring of 2012, the views that came across strongly from employees in the Department were that they saw themselves as part of a single Department of the economy. They understood the economic relevance of what they were doing, and that is why they were motivated to fulfil the service functions that we ask of them.

To reiterate on Mr Elliott's question, I envisage virtually all the functions of my Department being part of a single Department of the economy. My Department is a coherent, unified Department based around skills and employability. All the different divisions are pushing in the one direction. I believe that they should be transferred en bloc to the new architecture, and I believe that that view is supported by virtually all the stakeholders in wider society.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Oliver McMullan is not in his place.

FE Colleges: Budget

3. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what impact the reduction to his departmental spending in the draft Budget 2015-16 will have on further education colleges. (AQO 7160/11-15)

Dr Farry: Considering the scale of budget cuts facing my Department — 10·8% — there will undoubtedly be detrimental impact on further education colleges, including their provision of front-line services. Officials from my Department are working with colleges to consider different options for reducing spend, and that will require making difficult decisions over the coming weeks. The colleges have been advised that, in the event that they are faced with cuts of 10·8%, it will mean 500 fewer staff and 16,000 fewer student enrolments. I assure the Assembly that my Department will strive to mitigate the worst impact of the cuts. However, it is clear that even core front-line services will be affected.

Mr Beggs: As the Executive and, indeed, the Assembly debate the Budget and try to ensure that adequate funding is provided to further education, will the Minister assure me and my constituents that constituencies such as East Antrim, where there is no effective centre of further education, will not be further marginalised and that there will be adequate outreach into local communities? At present, the Northern Regional College recognises that parts of Carrickfergus, Larne and, indeed, Moyle are not adequately provided with FE opportunities.

Dr Farry: I can give the Member an assurance, in the sense that we are not planning any major revisions of the FE estate outside what is envisaged in the weighted

business case for redevelopment in the Northern Regional College area. However, we are not expecting any major changes in the southern part of its jurisdictional area.

As for community outreach, I have a very strong commitment that we will seek to ensure that we are providing skills, including to the most vulnerable in our society. However, at this stage, it is very difficult to give any guarantees, because we are still bottoming out with the colleges how they will approach this. Until we get an indication of a more favourable financial settlement, it is very difficult to give any assurance that any particular service area will be entirely immune from cuts. However, I am not taking a salami-slicing approach to what the further education sector is doing. We will approach community outreach in a considered, strategic manner, with a view to what is most important for the economy and how we ensure that we continue to engage with those most marginalised from the economy.

Mr Rogers: Many young people at age 16 decide to further their education in their local further education college rather than stay on in school. How will you ensure that they are not negatively impacted upon, as opposed to what may have been the case had they stayed in school?

Dr Farry: My answer is similar to that which I gave to Mr Beggs a few minutes ago. We will be as strategic as we can in the approach that we take. The Member will be aware that some acknowledgement was given in the draft Budget to the role of further education and, indeed, that of my Department in a wider sense through training organisations for 16- to 19-year-olds. Bluntly, if we have a situation where disproportionate protection is given to the Department of Education for further education and training, there will be a major inequity in our support. To put it very bluntly again, we will end up with a situation where predominantly middle-class children who are availing themselves of a grammar school education will get a greater degree of protection than those who are in the further education and training sector. The demographics in that are sometimes different to what we would see for those who stay on in secondary-level education.

Ms Lo: The proposed cuts to the Minister's Department are really severe. If he needs to make cuts in the further education sector, what difficulties will he face?

Dr Farry: It is worth referencing that the further education sector has been run on a very efficient basis over the past number of years. There has not been an increase in funding for further education in real terms since 2007, so in its actual related spend, it has been surviving on an ever-decreasing budget. That means that it has been pushing efficiencies over the past number of years.

The sector has also been consolidated to a great extent. We are now down to six colleges across Northern Ireland. Before that, we were well into the teens, and before that, there were well over 20 different colleges across Northern Ireland. So, there has already been a considerable consolidation in the FE sector. That does not preclude us doing more on that, and one of the areas that we are looking at is whether there is scope for a shared service delivery across the sector. I am pleased that all the colleges are very much up for looking at solutions in that regard. I need to make it clear that it is very difficult to see where the FE sector can make savings that are genuine

efficiencies, as opposed to what are, very sadly, going to be cuts in provision.

Belfast Metropolitan College: Montgomery Road

4. Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the redevelopment of the Belfast Metropolitan College's Montgomery Road campus. (AQO 7161/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Belfast Metropolitan College is preparing a comprehensive estates strategy for all its campuses. Following significant recent investment in new facilities in Titanic Quarter and Springvale, the college is considering its needs for the remainder of its estates infrastructure.

Included in that is a strategic outline case for the redevelopment of the Castlereagh campus on Montgomery Road. That will consider, at a high level, the accommodation that is required to meet the current and future curriculum and business demands for the area. The college has advised that a strategic outline case will be submitted to my Department in the new year.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Is he prepared to think in the new year about the development of the site in a three-phase strategy? As such, the vocational units that are proposed to be on the site would be taken as one phase; the potential for Belfast City Council to provide a leisure centre on the site would be taken as a second; and the college itself may be taken as a third. That might not happen in any particular order, I might add, but such phasing might allow for something to actually happen on the site in what is a constrained financial situation.

Dr Farry: I am very much open to what the Member says, and we are happy to look at how we can develop our estate in as creative a manner as we possibly can. However, without that degree of creativity, particularly in how we can generate additional capital, it is unlikely that we are going to be able to progress this in the short- or medium-term future. There are quite a lot of works on further education in the pipeline. The Member will know that a number of schemes have been approved in the southern region, and we are awaiting decisions on the Northern Regional College area.

Both those areas have had underinvestment relative to the other four college areas in recent years. Whether it is because of the economics or the justice of the situation, those two areas need to be given priority in new capital funding.

2.15 pm

There are also proposals on a new shared facility for the South West College on the old Erne Hospital site in Enniskillen. In that context, we are willing to receive the case from BMC. If there is a different way to slice this up, that may make the situation somewhat easier. All I can say to the colleges is that the more quickly business cases are received, the more quickly we can process them. We can make bids to draw that money down as and when capital funds become available.

NEETs: European Funding

5. Mr Maskey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his Department's efforts to draw down European funding to improve the opportunities for young people who are not in education, employment or training. (AQO 7162/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has been developing the 2014-2020 European social fund (ESF) programme and consulted on its proposed content in summer 2013. The draft operational programme was submitted to the European Commission for approval in July 2014. Since then, the public expenditure climate has worsened considerably. The draft Budget for 2015-16 provides for a net 10.8% cash reduction in the Department's baseline of £756 million, which equates to a cut of £82 million. On top of that, £35 million of funding in addition to the baseline, which my Department spends largely on the provision for young people, comes to an end at the end of the current financial year.

The total ESF allocation for 2014-2020 is approximately £165 million. As part of developing the programme, I have ensured that young people aged between 16 and 24 years who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are a key priority group for support from the fund. Approximately £20 million of the European social fund budget will be made available to support young people in this age bracket. It is hoped that 25,000 NEET participants will avail themselves of training. In addition, around £8 million of ESF funding is being directed to finance the community family support programme, which targets young people and their families. It is expected that 12,600 NEET participants aged 16 and over will be supported under this programme.

It should be noted that, to enable the Department fully to avail itself of this European funding, a departmental contribution of 25% — some £17 million — must be secured, with an additional 35% — £24 million — match funding being required from other public or private sources.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Minister for his response. I appreciate the budgetary problems that he and others in the Executive face at this time. Will he elaborate on whether he is in a position to engage further with the EU Commission to look at other ways in which to maximise the drawdown of funds for such programmes?

Dr Farry: We are privileged in Northern Ireland through our membership of the European Union — long may that be the case — in that we have access to the European social fund. It allows us to access resources that would simply not be available through our domestic budget. It is a huge opportunity for us. We have received a larger European social fund pot for the forthcoming period than we did for the outgoing one, so we already have an improved situation. That said, there are more pressures on the European social fund, given the cuts in funding that are coming to us.

Rather than getting a different ESF allocation, there could be more productive discussions on whether Northern Ireland could make applications to any new funds that are produced by the European Commission over the coming months. I am certainly more than up for that. I know that the MEPs will be eager to scope out such opportunities

directly in Brussels, as will the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels. We will certainly keep an open mind on that.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his answers to date. I recently met Start360 and Barnardo's in Ballymena, which are funded under the social investment fund (SIF). They have been directed to apply for ESF funding, which will be a complicated change of direction for them. Will the Minister tell us what advice his departmental officials give to voluntary and community organisations that are being redirected to ESF for the first time? Will he also undertake to visit Start360 and Barnardo's in Ballymena to see the work that they do?

Dr Farry: One needs to be slightly careful about direct engagement with organisations, given that we are part of a competitive process in the allocation of those funds. It is important that that process is seen to be open and transparent.

Members of our ESF team have been engaged in a series of roadshows across Northern Ireland to provide information to anyone who is interested. We have been pleased by the degree of engagement that we have had in that regard. Indeed, there has been an event in each of the new 11 district councils. That is the best way to get information across on the nature of the process in a fair and open manner. I certainly wish all the organisations well in that regard. I assure them that we will give every bid we receive due consideration. We will see how far the money goes in meeting the projects that come forward. However, I stress that we are in a competitive process with a fixed amount of money, so Members need to be aware that we will not be able to support everything in due course.

Mr Campbell: When deploying the resources from the ESF, will the Minister ensure that young people, not only those not in education or training, who live in hard-to-reach areas are particularly targeted? They appear, by and large, to have been missed by many of the schemes in the past.

Dr Farry: Yes. The Member makes a useful point in that regard. At times, when you have a process where bids come in on a competitive basis, the resultant distribution of funds can be more of a reflection of the capacity of organisations to make bids than of the need on the ground. That is why we have gone for a much more strategic approach. We are trying to identify need at a grass-roots level to ensure that there is better coverage in that regard.

It is also important to stress that, in terms of the most vulnerable young people, it is not simply those in the NEET category whom the fund will be of relevance to. We will be able to support young people with disabilities. The fund will have a particular focus on level 1 attainment, which will be the trigger point for accessing some of our mainstream level 2 programmes, such as the forthcoming new system of youth training, which will revolutionise what we do in training for those leaving school at 16. In addition, the European social fund can support what we do in that scheme and in apprenticeships.

Undergraduate Places: Cuts

6. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given the possible cuts in undergraduate places

at Queen's University and the University of Ulster, for his assessment of the likely impact this will have on the local economy. (AQO 7163/11-15)

Dr Farry: Northern Ireland's higher education providers play a vital role in meeting the skill needs of the local economy not only by providing a supply of highly skilled graduates but by reskilling and upskilling the existing workforce. The Northern Ireland skills strategy identifies the skills issues that need to be addressed to reduce the productivity gap between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK by 2020. The strategy recognises the need for upskilling the current workforce and achieving a higher proportion of individual workers with higher-level skills — in the region of 80% by 2020. Our approach has been commended by the OECD following worldwide research that it has carried out. It regards the current education and training system in Northern Ireland as having some of the best international practice and aspects that are world-class.

Skills are the foundation for delivering improved productivity and growth. They provide the platform for successful innovation and export-led growth, and they are the most important factor for attracting inward investment to Northern Ireland. The need to develop the Northern Ireland skills base further, particularly in higher-level skills, in our higher education sector is recognised in the Executive's Programme for Government and supporting strategies. The role of the universities is critical in driving sustainable economic prosperity through high-quality and internationally excellent research and translating that research into successful innovation through knowledge transfer. Those are all central planks of the Northern Ireland economic strategy and the Executive's recently published innovation strategy. Indeed, university income from business and community engagement reached some £92 million in 2012-13. Recent job announcements, including those by Citi, are concrete examples of how high-level skills can drive our economy forward. The cuts proposed for my Department will have a very significant and unavoidable impact on our higher education institutions, affecting their capacity to provide the high-level skills and qualifications necessary to grow our economy.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for that response. Does he accept that, if places are cut in our universities, it will make it even more difficult for Invest NI to attract high-quality jobs to Northern Ireland?

Dr Farry: Absolutely. That, amongst other reasons, is why I am so concerned about the impact of cuts on my departmental budget. Some 70% of my budget is allocated to our universities and colleges, so absorbing 10·8% cuts as a Department without touching the front line in our universities and colleges is extremely difficult. I am determined to work with the institutions to see how far we can mitigate the impact of cuts on the front line, as there may well be things that we can do, but, ultimately, we need a more responsible approach across the board to setting the Budget in Northern Ireland. We have to understand that our universities are an investment in the future. This is not money that we are wasting; this is an investment in the future of our economy and the future of our young people. We need to have a fundamental reassessment of where we are going. One thing that I am loath to do is simply stretch our budgets ever further and dilute the quality of

what is offered by our universities. That is not in anyone's interest.

It is worth noting that, depending on which funding band you are talking about, there is already a funding gap of between £1,000 and £2,500 per place in Northern Ireland relative to Great Britain. That is an existing structural problem, and the current budget is only compounding it. There are major decisions that we will have to take over the coming weeks, both at Executive level and in my Department, on how we can try to mitigate this. If we cut back on the scale of our universities and colleges, that will send out a very negative message to the rest of the world, as well as to our young people locally.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí. I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware that a rally organised by FE and HE students against the cuts to colleges and universities is due to take place tomorrow. Does the Minister accept that we all need to work together to present a united approach to the British Government and send them a clear message that the cuts that they are trying to impose on the block grant are seriously damaging the Executive's ability to deliver core, front-line services?

Dr Farry: There is some work for parties to do in making a common approach to Westminster and seeing what funding packages we can secure, but trying to wipe the slate clean and forgetting about things like welfare reform is not a realistic strategy. The pathway before us in that regard is clear. If the Member is concerned about the looming cuts to further and higher education, he and his party colleagues have it in their power — they have, not the British Government — to make difficult but responsible decisions about putting the funding of the Northern Ireland Budget back on a sustainable footing and beginning to address the problems that we face across a range of Departments.

Mrs McKeivitt: In his previous answer, the Minister talked about the front line and how important that was. If things do not work out for this Budget, can he give us the projected job losses in higher and further education?

Dr Farry: on the basis of the level of cuts, we are talking about several hundred job losses in the higher education sector. That is a serious state of play for the individuals concerned as well as the universities. I am concerned by what the Member says about things not working out for the Budget. We cannot sit back in the Assembly waiting for something to drop from the sky as if it is beyond our control. I stress to the Member that her party has a major role to play in acting more responsibly around budgets. We must be prepared to take difficult decisions, whether by raising revenue or by recognising that welfare reform is inescapable. No one wants to go down that route, but it is a reality that we face as a devolved region. The solutions lie in our hands. It is not a case of sitting back, waiting for a solution; we are part of the problem. Let us sort it out ourselves.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to 15 minutes of topical questions. Question number 8 has been withdrawn.

North West Regional College: Strabane Campus

T1. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what proposals his Department has to use a new build to meet the accommodation needs at the Strabane campus of the North West Regional College. (AQT 1821/11-15)

Dr Farry: At this stage, there is nothing in the pipeline. There is a potential redevelopment of the Springtown campus of the North West Regional College, but there is no capital spend on the radar for Strabane.

2.30 pm

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's answer. However, it raises a further question. Given that Strabane has suffered so much unemployment in the past and we are trying to get some economic development in the area, does he agree that a business case for a new build would be an advisable opportunity to take for the future?

Dr Farry: Yes, in theory. The provision of a revised FE campus will be an economic activity generator. The issue, however, is how far we can stretch budgets in terms of the investments that we are making at present. There is a host of other projects that we are currently committed to. I also stress that the economic future of Strabane does not depend on an FE college being redeveloped in the town. There are a host of other things that we can do, including working with people directly and their skills through existing provision and what we can do to attract jobs into the area. I am certainly happy to play my role in that regard.

Young People: Protection from Cutbacks

T2. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he has taken to ensure that the most vulnerable young people, usually those who are furthest away from the labour market, are protected and will not be affected by the cutbacks, austerity moves and whatnot that his Department is in the throes of. (AQT 1822/11-15)

Dr Farry: At this stage, I cannot give the Member a cast-iron guarantee in that regard, nor tell him the full details of how we are going to try to go about protecting those young people who are most vulnerable. However, I can give the Member an assurance that there are two guiding principles that I am adopting in how we go about looking at the challenge of the cuts facing us. The first one is to try to prioritise those areas of activity that are most relevant to the economy. I stress that virtually everything that we do is relevant to the economy, but we will prioritise those areas that are most relevant to the economy. The assured skills programme, where we work directly with investors on putting people straight into jobs, is an example in that regard.

Secondly, we have a commitment to try to protect those young people who are most vulnerable. I fully understand why that question is being asked. However, in terms of the scale of cuts that we are facing, it is next to impossible to give any guarantee that we will have 100% protection for any area of the work of the Department.

Mr Dallat: The Minister's answer is somewhat disappointing. Since we have made reference to that marginal line called the border, can I ask the Minister what discussions he has had with the Irish Government

to ensure that those people on both sides of the border are protected, because they are often the people who are furthest away from the labour market?

Dr Farry: First of all, I am slightly confused as to why the Member is a bit disappointed with my answer. This is where the wheels begin to come off budgets. We have been warning all along that putting all the eggs into the basket of protecting the current welfare budget will have implications elsewhere for how we help those other people in society who are most vulnerable. The investment that we can make in skills and employability is the means by which we give people the opportunity to secure a job and move out of the welfare situation. That is the trade-off that we, as an Assembly, are now making because of the decisions that certain people have chosen to make. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Dr Farry: On cooperation and discussions that we have been having with Ministers in the Republic of Ireland, the answer is very simple: I want a cheque from my colleagues in the Republic of Ireland. We are currently educating about 3,500 people from the Republic of Ireland in FE colleges in Northern Ireland, because there is not an adequate provision there. That is particularly the case in County Donegal, for which North West Regional College is becoming the main provider of education and training at level 2. It amounts to something like £7 million that is going out of the Northern Ireland block grant to train students from the Republic of Ireland.

I am more than happy that we see students moving in both directions across the border, with certain courses provided on one side of the border and other courses provided on the other side of the border. That is the natural way that this situation should be. However, in further education, it is currently one-way traffic from the South into the North, particularly in the Donegal-to-Derry corridor. That has a massively disproportionate impact upon our budgets. It is a structural problem that we have to resolve on a North/South basis. We are up for doing it, but my colleagues in the Republic of Ireland are not prepared to face up to this reality at present.

Engineering: Women

T3. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he is supporting women into engineering through sector attractiveness and retention. *(AQT 1823/11-15)*

Dr Farry: I concur that gender balance in engineering as well as in other key areas of our economy is crucial. We have a heavily skewed workforce. Frankly, without a proper equal opportunities approach, the sector, and the economy as a whole, will miss out on a lot of talent that is available.

We have worked to develop an engineering action plan as part of a wider working group that I established in 2012. Gender considerations are part and parcel of that. The Equality Commission has, with the STEM business coordinator, devised a charter of best practice for business, which will, hopefully, also be effective in attracting women into the sector.

The issue is not purely about attraction into the sector. It is also about retention and progression within work, and

there are barriers in that regard that we also need to turn our minds to.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for his answer. You spoke earlier about how high-level skills drive our economy, so would you agree that funding appropriate programmes to deliver and support expansion of the advanced manufacturing and engineering sector would send the right message to not only women but to the industry as a whole?

Dr Farry: We are very happy to do promotional work in this area because whether there is a key equal opportunities rationale or a key economics rationale, there is a strong imperative for us to seek to maximise participation in these areas.

Again, I stress that as we look to the areas that are set to grow most over the coming years, they are, at present, heavily male dominated. By contrast, the areas under most pressure, most notably the public sector, tend to be disproportionately female. So there is a major structural problem here that will be only exacerbated in the coming years unless we take action to correct this and ensure that we have a strong pipeline with both genders in key sectors such as engineering.

Budget 2015-16: Vulnerable People

T4. **Ms McCorley** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he is protecting the most vulnerable people when preparing for his budget for 2015-16. *(AQT 1824/11-15)*

Ms McCorley: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí. An dtig liom iarraidh ar an Aire caidé mar atá sé ag cosaint na ndaoine is laige, agus é ag ullmhú dá bhuiséad don bhliain 2015-16?

Dr Farry: That tends to follow on from the question asked by Mr Dallat. I am trying to be as responsible as I can in that regard. It is a key determinant in my deciding where cuts are, sadly, going to have to be made.

Regarding equal opportunities, let me say to the Member for Sinn Féin what I said to the SDLP: if we continue with a single-minded approach to trying to protect the vulnerable through not facing up to difficult decisions around the welfare budget, there will simply be less money available to help those who are most vulnerable to get a foot on the ladder, to invest in their employability skills and enable them to find and sustain employment.

Choices have to be made in that regard. There is no point in the Member talking about what I am doing to protect the vulnerable when the policies that are being adopted by default, through the blockages from her party, are having an adverse effect on our ability to help the most vulnerable.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat. Does the Minister accept that if there were to be a reduction in student places, or an increase in tuition fees, that would nevertheless impact most greatly on those from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Dr Farry: Indeed, that may well be the case. If we end up with, for example, fewer places locally, it will mean that people are forced to look for a place in Great Britain or, by default, they will have nowhere to go in terms of higher or further education.

Again, it comes down to this point: what are we going to do differently in order to have a sustainable Budget settlement? There is no point coming into the Chamber and talking about how we are going to carve things up and how I am going to stop something from happening that is, sadly, an inevitable consequence of the Budget settlement that pertains in Northern Ireland. Unless we change direction, we will have these circular arguments incessantly for the coming months and years.

Apprenticeships: United Youth

T5. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many of the 100 apprenticeships announced by junior Minister Bell some 18 months ago under the Together: Building a United Community strategy have been provided by his Department. (AQT 1825/11-15)

Dr Farry: We are waiting to see what money will be available for the United Youth programme in the 2015-16 Budget. We are at an advanced stage in the co-design process for United Youth, and we have put out the call for a number of projects. Although I have £1 million in my budget this year to proceed with the programme, until we have some degree of certainty about having any budget in 2015-16 to take the programme forward, it would be irresponsible to press the "go" button. Therefore, while there is no core funding in my Department's budget for United Youth, I am optimistic that we will be able to secure some funding to enable us to expand the programme over the coming months.

Mrs D Kelly: In essence, Minister, 18 months on you are telling us that not one apprenticeship place has been provided. Will you give a commitment, to me and to the House, that you will tell us, if there are to be any such places, how the resources will be targeted across the North?

Dr Farry: I am not going to stand here and take any points on what we are spending or not spending until other parties in the Chamber adopt a more responsible approach to this —

Mrs D Kelly: You are not delivering.

Dr Farry: There is no point in the Member heckling from the sidelines that we are not delivering. Until her party adopts a more responsible attitude to funding in Northern Ireland, we are going to be going around and around in circles — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Dr Farry: This may well be news to the SDLP, but most people in the outside world recognise that you cannot deliver if you do not have a budget. That is a simple fact of life.

Northern Regional College, Coleraine: Future

T6. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the future of the Northern Regional College in Coleraine. (AQT 1826/11-15)

Dr Farry: We are awaiting receipt of a final business case, hopefully in the next few weeks, on the capital investment in the Northern Regional College. As I commented earlier, there are a number of different aspects to it. One is the redevelopment of a site in Ballymena as a consolidated

site and a redevelopment in the northern part of the jurisdiction, which may be in Coleraine or Ballymoney. I am not going to say anything further in case I upset somebody. Decisions will be taken in that regard.

Compared with some other areas in Northern Ireland, there has been historical capital underfunding in the Northern Regional College area. Therefore, I am happy to give it priority, and we will seek to find the money, if and when available, to facilitate those matters proceeding as quickly as possible.

Mr Campbell: The Minister will be aware that the premises in which the staff in the Coleraine campus operate are not good. I was in them recently. Will he endeavour to come to that conclusion in order that the staff there can deliver a state-of-the-art service for the entire community on the Causeway Coast?

Dr Farry: I am keen that we make such decisions as quickly as we possibly can. The issue has been hanging around for quite some time. I am not going to stand here and argue that the accommodation in Coleraine is of sufficient quality. We need to bottom out precisely what curriculum provision will be required, because that is the key to determining the estate that we require. The case for redevelopment is beyond question. The issue is exactly what we provide, where we provide it and how quickly we provide it, all of which will be determined by money.

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 4, 7 and 15 have been withdrawn, within the agreed procedures.

Sandwich Sector: Upper Bann

1. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support her Department and its agencies can provide to the sandwich sector in Upper Bann. (AQO 7173/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Businesses in the sandwich sector can avail themselves of a range of advisory assistance and free workshops from Invest Northern Ireland on a number of topics, including design, finance and exporting. A wide range of information is also available through www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk.

Invest NI conducted a study of the highly competitive sandwich sector in 2012, and an update of that study has just been completed. The study found that overcapacity is an issue in the sector and that the risk of displacement must be considered carefully by Invest NI.

Sandwich sector projects that apply for financial assistance will continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, and the potential for displacement will be rigorously challenged, in line with the study's recommendations.

2.45 pm

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be aware that I have written to her on behalf of a company in my constituency that has concerns about the displacement of jobs and investment, following Invest NI's support to the industry. Is it her view that displacement

has occurred? Will she agree to meet, alongside me, representatives of the company to discuss its concerns?

Mrs Foster: I am certainly happy to meet the Member with the company that she speaks of. Indeed, I hope that that company will continue to engage with Invest Northern Ireland to discuss and explore other options. I very much hope that displacement has not occurred in the sector, although it has been pointed out that there is a risk of displacement because there is overcapacity in the sector. Certainly, if she wants that meeting, we will have that discussion, and I will bring with me officials from Invest Northern Ireland who will be able to talk her through the other awards that were made, in particular to the sandwich sector.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. What support and assistance does her Department give to the food processors in the agrifood sector in Upper Bann, such as Moy Park and other major employers in the area?

Mrs Foster: Moy Park continues to be one of our exemplar companies, particularly in the agrifood sector. Back in July, I had the pleasure of making an announcement with Moy Park of 628 new jobs across its three sites in Dungannon, Craigavon and Ballymena. It continues to invest in the local community. It continues to invest in the workforce, in its processes and in innovation, and therefore we will continue to support it. I am particularly pleased that it continues to provide so much employment for people outside Belfast. It is certainly a company that goes from strength to strength.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, can I broaden the discussion to the level of VAT and ask whether you have had any success, through talking to your Executive colleagues or, indeed, to Westminster, in gaining the ability to reduce the level across the hospitality sector?

Mrs Foster: That is something that the hospitality sector has been lobbying quite hard on, and I support it in that, because I believe that hotels, particularly those in border regions, are having a very difficult time with their pricing structure, given the nature of VAT in the Republic of Ireland. Of course, it is a matter for the Westminster Government. We will continue to raise the issues in all that, and I hope that we will have support for that right across the House.

Air Connectivity Study

2. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the air connectivity study. (AQO 7174/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The main focus of the air connectivity study has been an assessment of the economic impact on Northern Ireland of short-haul air passenger duty, which the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy carried out. I anticipate receipt of the report early this month, after which I shall discuss the findings with the Finance Minister and arrange for publication.

To support our airports in improving air access, I have tasked Invest Northern Ireland with taking a lead role in working with the airports on new air route opportunities. Invest Northern Ireland's business expertise is already proving to be a valuable asset that the airports, in conjunction with Tourism Ireland, can draw upon.

Changes introduced earlier this year to state aid rules for airlines also provide an opportunity for government to provide start-up aid to incentivise new routes. We have been calling for that for some time. My Department will work closely with Northern Ireland's airports to support any bids for new routes to the UK regional air connectivity fund, which the Department for Transport launched in November.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Given that Belfast International Airport employs a large number of people in my constituency, what work is your Department doing to encourage new routes into Northern Ireland to sustain and grow employment in the future?

Mrs Foster: It will come as no surprise to the Member or, indeed, to the House that that is something that I have been talking about for some time. We very much need to increase the number of direct access flights into all airports in Northern Ireland. To that end, as I indicated, Invest Northern Ireland has become more strategically involved with the airports. Indeed, it attended the World Routes conference in Chicago in September this year, alongside Belfast International and Belfast City airports. They do that to give an economic background to those airports when they are lobbying companies to try to get them to put a flight into Northern Ireland. That is working very well, and the airports appreciate the work that Invest is engaged in.

We are also working with the airports to see what we can achieve from the UK regional air connectivity fund. That is a competitive fund, so we will have to compete with other regions of the UK, but that does not put me off. We are well placed to put forward a strong case for access to the fund, but that is done in conjunction with the airports.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Will she join me in welcoming the ambition shown by the new managing director of Belfast International Airport, Graham Keddie, who has spoken about new transatlantic links, in the first instance to our cousins in Canada?

Mrs Foster: Absolutely. We have been working closely with Belfast International Airport on that. I want that route to be back in place. If I were asked where that is on my list of routes, I would say that it is probably first or second. I believe that that route would be viable and sustainable in the longer term, and it is just about trying to find a suitable partner to bring their aircraft in. Indeed, we have had a number of meetings with air carriers from Canada and outside Canada to see whether they will take a route back into Canada from Belfast International Airport. I absolutely agree that Graham Keddie seems to be very focused on Canada, and I will do all that I can to support him.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Will she support my call for an enterprise zone at Belfast International Airport, because that would make it even more of a reason to connect flights to that airport?

Mrs Foster: Mr Keddie has put together an interesting proposal on the industrial land that surrounds the airport. Obviously, we are still trying to secure the first enterprise zone for Northern Ireland in Coleraine, which was announced some time ago, and we hope that progress will be made there. I will certainly support Mr Keddie in his vision for Belfast International Airport in trying to make

more use of the ground that the airport owns around the runway so that he can make it a more viable project.

Small Business Support: East Antrim

3. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support she plans to make available to small businesses in east Antrim. (AQO 7175/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland provides a wide range of support to small businesses across Northern Ireland, including in east Antrim. Indeed, during 2013-14, 81% of Invest NI offers were to local small businesses. This support covers help to create jobs, research and development and skills and exporting. In east Antrim, for example, Invest Northern Ireland provided over £230,000 to Yelo Ltd, ultimately to create 15 new jobs and to assist projects aimed at research and development and developing trade activities. In addition to financial support, Invest NI provides help to start a business through the regional start initiative, advice and guidance through its wide range of free workshops and seminars on topics such as exports, design, finance and information through nibusinessinfo.co.uk. Over the last five years, 556 locally owned business starts offered support, with an estimated 318 jobs.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for her answer. Excellent work has been done by two enterprise agencies, Carrickfergus and Larne. How will you guarantee that that work will continue once the local authorities are merged into one?

Mrs Foster: I very much hope that the enterprise agencies will see this as an opportunity for a renewal of their vision for their areas. I was with LEDCOM, the Larne Enterprise Development Company, recently to celebrate the Advance programme, which had been run in conjunction with the Department for Employment and Learning. It was an absolutely tremendous programme, whereby 100% of those young people achieved jobs at the end of it. I thought that that was very good value for money, and, more than that, it was using a social enterprise model to try to get these young people involved. So I very much hope that Larne, Carrick and all the enterprise units across Northern Ireland will see this as a new opportunity. They can learn from their colleagues across Northern Ireland about best practice and then use it in a meaningful way to help people. I congratulate LEDCOM in particular.

Mr Ross: I also congratulate the work that Ken Nelson and his team do at LEDCOM. One of the Department's priorities is to encourage entrepreneurship and people to start their own business. Will the Minister advise the House on what specific support there is for those in our community who may consider starting their own business?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Many times, you will have young people who want to start their own business. In many cases, you will have people who are entrepreneurs of necessity; in other words, they have been made redundant and have to find a new way. We have a range of programmes to help all those people. We have the regional start initiative, which provides support at a very basic level for individuals who want to start their own businesses. Sometimes that is not needed; sometimes, it very much is needed. We also operate the Go for It brand, which provides programmes and initiatives to try to stimulate enterprise, particularly with under-represented groups, whether they are women, young

people or people with a disability. We provide a range of support to people who want to export, whether that tries to give them help with trade initiatives, skills or innovation. So, Invest Northern Ireland has a wide range of initiatives available. However, importantly, there is also a range of initiatives that we funded through the councils. I have seen some very good examples across Northern Ireland of the use of the European regional development fund (ERDF) in that respect.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I also join in the congratulations for LEDCOM and the wonderful work it does.

Minister, I ask you to look at the dispersed rural areas in east Antrim, such as Glenarm, Carnlough and the glens area, where young people find it difficult to get to work in small businesses because of the lack of transport. What help is there for small businesses in those areas?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. The initiatives that I have just mentioned that try to support entrepreneurs are also very much available to those who live in rural areas. Indeed, some of our best artisan producers live in rural areas, and I am sure that he will know of some in the glens who are working very hard to provide niche products for the home and export markets. We have seen them grow, and some of them are in his area. For example, the way in which Glenarm Salmon has grown its exports and has been able to become a global player in salmon production has been a tremendous exemplar for everybody else. So, I very much say to the Member that the range of supports are available right across Northern Ireland.

Mr Beggs: The Minister will be aware of the high regard in which the Larne Enterprise Development Company and Carrickfergus Enterprise are held as a result of their innovation, flexible rental terms and training and support. Will the Minister indicate how, when companies want to develop in the future, Invest NI will step in and link well with the new councils so that companies will be able to grow further? Will she also assure me that the information on the NI Business Info site will continue to be updated centrally and will be available to all business in Northern Ireland that need it?

Mrs Foster: In relation to the Member's last point, I want to very much confirm that that will be the case. The website nibusinessinfo.co.uk will be there for the whole of the business base. We very much want that to remain the case despite the fact that some powers from Invest Northern Ireland will go to councils.

The new arrangements will only work if there is a partnership ethos, and I hope that the councils will see it as such. Invest Northern Ireland certainly stands ready to assist with the transition of the powers that are going to councils, but it will also give a strategic lead for Northern Ireland. I hope that the councils will work with it on where we want to see Northern Ireland in general. We will also support them in their particular areas.

EU Funding

5. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her Department's efforts to draw down EU funding. (AQO 7177/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since 2007, when the current EU programming period commenced, over £250 million of European funding has been drawn down through the work of my Department. Some £167 million of that has come from the ERDF sustainable competitiveness programme, £40 million from the framework programme 7, £44 million from INTERREG IVa programme and £500,000 from the competitiveness and innovation programme.

3.00 pm

We have ambitious plans to build on that success going forward. We are on track to draw down a further £33.3 million ERDF from the current competitiveness programme and are in the final stages of negotiating a new package of ERDF funding under the investment for growth and jobs programme, which will be worth over £240 million up to 2020.

Invest NI has also recently secured £165,000 per annum, until 2020, from the competitiveness of SMEs (COSME) programme to run the Enterprise Europe Network, which provides invaluable advice and guidance to SMEs. In addition, the Executive's innovation strategy sets a target to draw down €145 million — £114 million at current exchange rates — from Horizon 2020, and we have put in place a network of 12 research experts to help us achieve that.

Mr Lynch: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her answer; there were some fairly positive figures in it. However, it is widely accepted that there is a lack of investment in innovation in regions along the border. Has the Minister any recommendations on how EU funding could be better used to support border businesses and Ireland-wide trade?

Mrs Foster: Ideas have to come forward for them to be developed into applications, so, I encourage border businesses to look at all the programmes available — my goodness, there is a wealth of them — to try to help their particular businesses. However, the businesses must do that in connection with an academic institution. The further education colleges and universities have to be very much involved.

I am looking forward to jointly opening the Collaborate to Innovate conference on Wednesday of this week. It will be very much focused on Horizon 2020 and on how we can make the most of it for all of Northern Ireland. I look forward to ideas coming forward from that conference on how we can do things better. We can always do things better in the next round. So, let us learn the lessons from FP7 and try to ensure that we get even more funding drawn down from Horizon 2020.

Mr Campbell: The Minister just mentioned Horizon 2020. Can she outline how firms and individuals who believe they may qualify could qualify for it and how they could take advantage of such a significant possible investment?

Mrs Foster: Absolutely. The £80 billion — that is £80 billion — of funding that is available for countries across Europe under Horizon 2020 presents a huge opportunity for Northern Ireland companies and research organisations, not just in terms of securing funding, but the collaborative networks that can be drawn together. We took the view that we needed to up our game with regard to funding from Horizon 2020, and we have put in place those 12 contact points in particular sectors. So, if a company in that sector believes that it may have an idea

that could benefit from funding, it can get in touch with the relevant sector contact point and move forward.

Initial figures just received from the Commission, which are still being processed, show that we have won €6.5 million in the first six months of Horizon 2020 calls in 2014. That is to be welcomed, but I hope that there will be other opportunities to draw down even more funding.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her answers. Given the fact that we have a huge fund of €80 billion in Horizon 2020, and that there is other extensive funding, does the Minister agree that there needs to be a review, perhaps not immediately, but, say, mid-term, of our funding targets so as to maximise the European funding at large that is available to industry and business, and to people in Northern Ireland generally?

Mrs Foster: I certainly do not think we should be reviewing our target just yet. We have only set the Horizon 2020 target. It is quite a stretching target, if you look at where we were in terms of FP7. There are certainly a number of programmes that we could be accessing, including, as I said in my substantive answer, the COSME programme, which we have not really taken advantage of to date and which we are now plugged into. It is all about knowing what is coming down the track and what is available for our particular sectors. It is about the knowledge and getting into the European system and trying to work together to make sure that we get as much drawdown as possible. That is why I am looking forward to the conference on Wednesday, which, I hope, will provide us with the opportunity of networking.

Mr McCallister: In the Minister's substantive answer, one of the funds that I did not notice being mentioned was the joint European resources for micro to medium enterprises. I am sure that the Minister will be aware of the considerable difficulties faced by business in accessing finance. The Welsh drew down £75 million of the fund, and the north of England drew down over £300 million. Why has Northern Ireland not drawn down any in the first tranche? Are there any plans for the Minister to draw down in the second tranche, which runs to 2020?

Mrs Foster: I am not aware of any plans to draw down any funding. I think that the Member will recognise that we have quite an exhaustive suite of access to finance provisions put forward by Invest Northern Ireland. Indeed, we have loan provisions put down for different sectors, but if there is something in particular that the Member feels has not been financed that he thinks should have been financed by that fund, I will be very interested to hear about it, and we can have that conversation.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Gordon Dunne I remind people that the cameras work in this place. You need to pay attention when the Minister is on her feet. I call Mr Gordon Dunne.

Mrs Foster: What is happening behind me?

Mr Dunne: Trevor Clarke.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Sorry, I beg your pardon. Gordon, you have distracted me as well. I call Trevor Clarke.

Mr Clarke: I hope that I do not look like Gordon Dunne.

Tourism Ireland

6. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to review Tourism Ireland. (AQO 7178/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would like to know what is going on behind me, but anyway. Tourism Ireland was set up under the framework of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and is jointly funded by the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government. Any review would, therefore, have to be undertaken within that context. However, as part of the approval process for Tourism Ireland's three-year corporate plan and annual business plan, my officials review Tourism Ireland's performance and ensure our key priorities are included.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for that answer. Minister, you will not be surprised by Belfast International Airport's disappointment in Tourism Ireland. Indeed, I share that disappointment as a representative from that area, given that it promotes Ireland as a whole and describes the gateway being through Dublin. Given the amount of money that your Department puts into that department, what can you do to try to make it market Northern Ireland much better?

Mrs Foster: To be honest, in the past, the relationship between the airport and Tourism Ireland has not been too good, but I hope that it has improved. I believe that it should have improved. I hope that Tourism Ireland will continue to market Belfast International as a hub, as well as Dublin, but we need to get more flights into Belfast International. That is the critical point. I hope that Tourism Ireland will work very hard alongside Invest Northern Ireland to make sure that that becomes a reality.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thought that the Minister had to keep an eye on what was in front of her, but now she has to keep an eye on what is behind her too. Does the Minister accept that there is considerable merit in island-wide promotion here, particularly in areas such as Fermanagh, which could greatly benefit from some of the 750,000 people who fly into Knock airport annually coming further up the North towards Fermanagh, Donegal and Leitrim through increased cross-border promotion?

Mrs Foster: I take the view that direct access anywhere into somewhere that is close to Northern Ireland is of benefit. Indeed, I said to Destination Fermanagh that it should interact with Knock airport to see if it could get some of those people up who flew into Knock airport, but we definitely need to have more direct access flights into Belfast so that people can make this their first stop. If they want to travel, that is very good. We encourage that and we would like them to do that, but we need to have more direct access into Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister: Is delivering the Northern Ireland Tourist Board from the dead hand of Tourism Ireland a red line issue for the Minister in the current political talks, or is it an issue at all?

Mrs Foster: It is not an issue at all, because the Northern Ireland Tourist Board stands on its own two feet. It is there, according to the Belfast Agreement, to market Northern Ireland within the island of Ireland, and it will continue to do so. It also welcomes a lot of familiarisation trips to Northern Ireland and helps people to familiarise

themselves with Northern Ireland. So, that has not come up as an issue at all, and I hope that he is not suggesting that political opponents will raise it as an issue, because they have not done so thus far.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister give a commitment that, if she gets the opportunity to contribute to the tourism strategy, she will ensure that the new, revitalised Exploris in Portaferry is in the promotional material, so that we can encourage visitors to that constituency?

Mrs Foster: I very much hope that I will have something to do with the tourism strategy moving forward given that I set the policy for tourism in Northern Ireland. As far as marketing Exploris outside Northern Ireland and, indeed, throughout Northern Ireland is concerned, I hope that the new, invigorated Exploris takes the opportunity to do just that and to make sure that it draws visitors down to that beautiful part of the world to have an experience. It is somewhere that I think has been oversold in the past and I hope will be sold very heavily in the future.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Gordon Dunne; sorry for keeping you.

Job Promotion: North Down

8. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs have been promoted by Invest NI in North Down since 2012. (AQO 7180/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2014, Invest Northern Ireland promoted 287 jobs in the North Down constituency area. For example, in 2011-12, Invest NI provided £1.5 million of support to Munster Simms Engineering, which will lead to the creation of 59 new jobs in the area. Other companies in the area that have received support from Invest NI include Mango Direct Marketing and Teleperformance.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answers and her ongoing support for North Down. Indeed, we need it, and we look forward to her next visit to the constituency. Having said that, will the Minister give us some indication as to how many jobs have been promoted and created in North Down since the jobs fund was set up in 2011?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his warm invitation. I am looking forward to going back to North Down, and, when I do, he always has a full agenda packed in for me. Since its inception in April 2011 in North Down, the jobs fund has promoted 201 jobs, and 100 jobs have been created up to September 2014.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for her answer and thank the Member for bringing the question. Will the Minister outline why, given the overall picture, such little investment is going into North Down from Invest NI, especially given that we have the South Eastern Regional College and a great guild space in the constituency?

Mrs Foster: A better question to ask me — and I do not have the answer in front of me at the moment — may be this: "How many applications were made for funding in North Down by different companies?", because I or Invest Northern Ireland cannot just go in and make awards of grants and funding; they have to be applied for. So, if the Member would like me to investigate that point, I am certainly happy to do so.

Corporation Tax

9. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department and Invest NI are preparing for the anticipated devolution of corporation tax varying powers. (AQO 7181/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My officials have been working alongside those in Her Majesty's Treasury and HMRC for some time in preparation for the potential devolution of corporation tax to help shape how the regime could work in practice.

To inform future FDI strategy, my Department has already carried out research on our competitiveness in key sectors in order to prepare for low corporation tax. Invest Northern Ireland has also begun to look at how its sales proposition and existing business solutions might need to change alongside corporation tax. Work has been ongoing with the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy to update estimates of the economic impact in advance of the decision. Initial results demonstrate that there is still a very strong economic case, both in terms of job creation and economic growth.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Apologies, Mr Elliott. That is the end of the time for listed questions. We must now move on to topical questions. Question 1 has been withdrawn within the appropriate time frame.

Agrifood Strategy: Financial Commitment

T2. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what financial commitment has been secured to deliver on the agrifood strategy, albeit that that is something for which she has joint responsibility with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. (AQT 1832/11-15)

Mrs Foster: That is a difficult one because DARD will have particular routes through which it will want to draw down funding, including the rural development funding, which I understand has gone to the Commission for approval. We tend to support companies directly, such as in the Moy Park example I gave earlier or, indeed, we work with the overall group in terms of a marketing body, which is something that we are coming very close to making a decision on.

I cannot therefore give you a specific figure for overall funding, but we have worked and will continue to work with the agrifood companies right across Northern Ireland.

3.15 pm

Mrs D Kelly: This again might be across both remits, but you may have noticed that Minister Simon Coveney recently signed an agreement in China for dried milk products. Have any such overtures been made by your Department, alongside DARD, for our dairy farmers?

Mrs Foster: We closely watch what is happening with milk, particularly given the ongoing price volatility. I actually had an opportunity to speak to Simon Coveney about that very issue a couple of weeks ago when we were at a conference on the future of the agrifood sector. I was a little disappointed because — I do not know whether it was that trade mission on which he signed up to that milk programme — I understand that some Northern Ireland companies expressed a desire to go on the trade mission and were not able to. That is something that we will follow

up on. There is a good working relationship there. We are in collaboration on some occasions and in competition on other occasions, but we work closely to make sure that we know what is happening.

Tourism Potential: Upper Bann

T3. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to explain what support her Department has given to boost the tourism potential in the Upper Bann constituency, following the earlier question about supporting business growth in that area. (AQT 1833/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As I said in response to Mr Agnew's question about the funding that has gone to his area, we have to have the applications come forward for support. I was pleased by the way in which Armagh city — I know that it is just outside her constituency — positioned itself for the event held last Saturday. I thought that that went very well. If people come forward with proposals, we will of course try to work with them, as we will with the nine destinations right across Northern Ireland.

Mrs Dobson: Specifically for Upper Bann, does the Minister agree that the short answer is "precious little"? You will be aware that each year in Scarva we have the second largest tourism event in Northern Ireland and massive tourist potential, yet, in Upper Bann in the past three years, the only tourism development scheme that received funding was, ironically, the relocation of the tourist information centre in Banbridge. Why have you chosen to centralise funding and not strategically target investment — [Interruption.]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Come to a question, please.

Mrs Dobson: — in tourism across Northern Ireland? Sorry, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, but, with the hecklers to my left, it is very hard to ask a question.

Mrs Foster: I fundamentally do not agree with the Member about Scarva, for example. I have been to Scarva on every occasion. I have been there with visitors to promote Scarva. I have been to the house and done everything that I can to promote Scarva. It is a huge event and is completely under-reported by our media here — very disappointingly, I have to say.

I will continue to work. I have not had any requests from the Member to meet her in the Assembly on the subject of tourism. I look forward to her coming forward with requests to meet alongside tourist bodies. She will then realise that I have worked with a number of tourist bodies in Upper Bann.

Mr Clarke: She would not want to —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Listen, folks, this Minister in particular does not need a chorus of support; she can answer the questions herself. Let us hear the questions and the answers, please.

Social Enterprises: DETI Assistance

T4. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance her Department is offering to the establishment of social enterprises. (AQT 1834/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have long been a supporter of the social enterprise sector. Indeed, as I indicated, I had the opportunity to be at a very successful social enterprise

initiative at the Larne Enterprise Development Company (LEDCOM) just recently. I welcome the opportunity to attend social enterprise initiatives. Another one that I was at recently related to C S Lewis. I am delighted to see the way in which that has been developed in east Belfast. The social enterprise model works well in a range of sectors, and we underestimate it at our peril. As we rebalance the Northern Ireland economy away from the public sector and towards the private sector, the social enterprise model is a very good one to get involved in.

Mr Easton: As the economy has improved, have the Minister and her Department noticed an increase in the number of social enterprises that have been established across Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: The then Minister for Social Development and I undertook a mapping exercise to find out. Until then, we did not really have a register of the number of social enterprises in existence in Northern Ireland. The mapping exercise finished, I think, last year. We will know when we look at this year whether there has been an increase. Unfortunately, I cannot tell him over a period of time, but, now that the mapping exercise has been completed, we will be able to see whether we are in growth mode, as, I suspect, we are, or whether we are falling back. If he asks me next year, we might have a clearer indication.

Enterprise Zone: Coleraine

T5. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the first enterprise zone, which it is hoped will soon be located in Coleraine. (AQT 1835/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. I had a useful meeting with him, the council and the University of Ulster to try to sort out the remaining difficulty about land. I understand that we are tantalisingly close to having the matter sorted out. We can then move forward with the enterprise zone for Coleraine.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for that useful and helpful information. Will she outline just once again for the House and the wider community the tangible benefits that will flow from companies that may want to take advantage of locating in the enterprise zone?

Mrs Foster: I hope that it will help to market the area in a very progressive way. It means that they will be able to avail themselves of enhanced capital allowances, so it suits companies that are capital-intensive as opposed to job-intensive. I know that there is a view on the new tenant of the first enterprise zone in Northern Ireland. I wish them well and hope that, once this little barrier has been got over, we can move forward.

Curry Yogurt and Profanities

T6. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she agrees that, between “curry yogurt” and Members of the House who swear, her job has been made particularly difficult. (AQT 1836/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Thankfully, both of those who swore are no longer Members of the House, and I welcome that. We need to look to the great potential that we have. This week in particular, I hope that we do not lose our focus. If we get the announcement that we think we are going to get,

I hope that we realise the potential for us all and will be positive about it.

Mr Dickson: I appreciate that and the focus that is required. Therefore, does the Minister agree with me that this week’s damaging exposure on ‘Spotlight’ of Members’ scandalous expenses further detracts from that focus?

Mrs Foster: I certainly believe that, if anyone has been engaged in wrongdoing involving the expenses of this place, they should be brought before the appropriate authority — absolutely.

Corporation Tax: Update

T7. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the devolution of corporation tax. (AQT 1837/11-15)

Mrs Foster: We hope that there will be some indications, this week or next, on whether the power to devolve corporation tax will come to the Northern Ireland Assembly. I suppose that the real debate will begin then. For my part, I believe that it will bring huge benefits to Northern Ireland. I do not just say that; we have had independent work carried out on what it will mean for the economy. Unfortunately, some commentators seem to think that it will be of benefit just to large companies: that is not the case. It will help the whole economy in Northern Ireland. If we are going to have more jobs, people will have money to spend in our restaurants and shops, the level of our economy will rise, and smaller companies will be able to become involved in the supply chain for larger companies. I think that it will be a tremendous good news story for Northern Ireland. I very much hope that we get a positive announcement in the next few days.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she discuss the comment made by Bro McFerran from Allstate, which sent out a very mixed message on the benefits that corporation tax would bring to the Northern Ireland economy?

Mrs Foster: I was disappointed to hear what Bro had to say. I do not think that that view is shared by the rest of his business colleagues and certainly not by the other commentator who was on the programme on which he made the comments.

I am also a little bit surprised, given that his company, Allstate, has been the recipient of a lot of money from Invest Northern Ireland. We have striven to work with Allstate; it has a tremendously positive influence not just in Belfast but in Strabane and Londonderry, and I hope that that relationship continues. However, as I say, I am disappointed with those comments.

Dairy Processors: DETI Contact

T8. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether, given the current difficult export markets, due in part to the Russian import ban, she has had any contact with local dairy processors. (AQT 1838/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I certainly have had conversations on price volatility and the Russian ban, which I hope will be reviewed next year, as we were just starting to grow our agrifood sector exports into the Russian area. We will work

alongside the sector and use all our good offices here, in Westminster and in Europe to help in whatever way we can.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her reply. Will she give a commitment that she will continue to work with local processors to try to find new markets for their products?

Mrs Foster: We absolutely will continue to try to find new markets. I often say that, when I started this job, I spent a lot of my time in the United States of America looking at the market there. I have spent quite a lot of time recently in markets that are further away, such as the Far East and the Middle East, as we are looking for new markets not just for the agri-sector but for all the sectors that we work very hard to support.

Industrial Land: Omagh

T9. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on Invest Northern Ireland's progress in identifying and obtaining industrial land for Omagh. (AQT 1839/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This is turning into a bit of a story, as the Member will know. We very much want to have more industrial land in Omagh, and we put out a call for interested landowners to come forward. About five or six did so, but some of the land was not suitable, as the Member will appreciate. We are still hopeful that we will be able to have more industrial land in Omagh because we are aware that it is very much needed.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for her response. Given the difficulty that lands were not available, does she have any timescale as to when this may be brought to a close? There is a real need for this type of development land in the area.

Mrs Foster: I do not have an actual timescale. However, all I will say to the Member, and I hope that it will reassure him, is that this is probably at the top of Invest Northern Ireland's property portfolio agenda at this time. I will go back to Invest and ask whether it has a timescale for resolving the issue, and I will write to the Member when I have that information.

Corporation Tax: Benefits

T10. **Mr Ó Muilleoir** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she believes we are doing enough to sell the benefits of the devolution of corporation tax to the community and to business. (AQT 1840/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I suppose that that is not for me to answer; it is for somebody else. I hope that all colleagues in the Executive will take a very positive role in trying — assuming that the power is devolved to us — to debunk the theory that it is just about big business and banks. It is not; it is fundamentally about jobs, as far as I am concerned. It is about getting people across Northern Ireland into employment, so that argument should be put very strongly.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Thank you, Minister. When you spoke earlier in that regard, the terminology that you used was almost that of a new era of job creation. In that new era, do you think that it may be possible to start targeting jobs at certain locations, not only Fermanagh but west of the Bann and west and north Belfast?

Mrs Foster: The Member knows that he will always get brownie points when he mentions Fermanagh. This will become a self-fulfilling prophecy for the skills that will be available in particular areas, so people will look to those areas for those skills. I hope that we can work in partnership with local enterprise and council agencies so that we can put together a portfolio of the skills that are available in a particular area.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. I note that we do not often work our way through the entire list of topical questions, so well done.

3.30 pm

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

BBC 'Spotlight' Programme: Assembly Expense

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Jim Allister has given notice of a question for urgent oral answer to the Assembly Commission. I remind Members that, if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they should rise continually in their places. The Member who tabled the question will be called automatically to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission what steps it proposes in light of the BBC 'Spotlight' revelations about the abuse by some MLAs of Assembly expenses.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mrs Judith Cochrane to answer on behalf of the Assembly Commission.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Member for his question.

The Assembly Commission takes its responsibilities for the proper management of public funds seriously. Since the restoration of the Assembly in 2007, the Commission has introduced a wide range of measures to improve the framework of financial support for Members and to be transparent about the use of public funds. Those measures include the full publication of Members' expenses for office cost expenditure (OCE) claims going back to 2003-04, which is essentially for the past 10 years; placing restrictions on the employment of family members; introducing a requirement for evaluation to be carried out by independent valuers of all constituency offices, unlike other parliamentary institutions where a valuation is only required in certain circumstances; bringing forward legislation to establish the independent financial review panel to determine the level of expenditure that can be claimed to reimburse Members for costs incurred in carrying out their Assembly duties; and an annual audit, undertaken to the highest professional auditing standards, in line with the public-sector internal audit standards, to cover the expenditure claims made by a random selection of 25% of all Members, in addition to the audit of the Commission's expenditure by the Comptroller and Auditor General every year.

A number of the issues raised in the programme have already been addressed through the measures that I have outlined, and, in addition, the Assembly's accounting officer had referred two matters to the PSNI in advance of the broadcast of the programmes. Furthermore, the Commission has already met to consider some of the issues that were raised and has tasked officials with bringing a paper of options to consider models for administering expenses. The Commission is due to meet again at the conclusion of this item of plenary business.

The Assembly Commission's commitment to good governance and the prudent use of public money is steadfast, and appropriate action will be taken to address any substantive issues. The Commission will seek to continually strengthen and improve its systems and processes.

Mr Allister: If the Assembly Commission has been doing its job, why did it take a television programme to expose the near-industrial-scale abuse of expenses going on, it seems, right under the Commission's nose; and, if the PSNI comes asking questions about bogus cultural societies or a bogus research company, can the Member assure us that, this time, they will not be told, "Move on, nothing to see here" and, this time, the Assembly Commission will open its books entirely in a totally transparent way?

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Member for his question. I understand that he has already written to the Assembly's accounting officer to address a couple of those matters. Assembly officials met with the PSNI, back in 2009, regarding a complaint that had been made. At that meeting, they advised the PSNI that no evidence of activities of a criminal nature had been brought to their attention, nor had any evidence of criminality been identified through the annual programme of audits that is carried out by the Assembly.

Of course, if there is any issue that the PSNI comes forward with, the Commission will review all aspects of the allegations and will indeed liaise with, and give whatever assistance it can to, the PSNI.

Mr Ross: The Member has outlined the rule changes that have taken place over the last number of years, and I am sure that she would agree that we have a system where, if there has been a misuse or an allegation of a misuse of Assembly allowances, that can be investigated, first, by the independent Commissioner for Standards and, in more serious cases, perhaps by the Police Service of Northern Ireland. However, given the spotlight that is on Members' allowances, does she believe that it is now time for the Commission to give consideration to a new independent body, not only to determine allowances and salaries for Members but to administer allowances to Members? That body would sit outside the existing structures.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Member for his question. As I outlined, the Commission has requested a paper to be brought forward with some options. We will meet again straight after this meeting to review the content of the broadcasts. We will assess whether there were any substantive issues that have not already been resolved through the current process and whether further improvements could be made to the current administration of Members' claims in the existing Independent Financial Review Panel (IFRP) determination. We will consider the various models that are available for an overall system to see whether that needs to be changed or alternatively identify any other issues that we might want the IFRP to consider as part of its next determination.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Given some of the allegations, can the Commission member advise the House of how the Commission intends to deal with the question of unregulated family employment, of which there seems to have been quite a number of incidents, and how that squares with fair employment legislation?

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Member for his question. I stated some of the measures that have been put in place to restrict the employment of family members to one per Member, although those who were already in post obviously were not sacked as a result of that

determination. This is something that the Commission can look at going forward as a means to tighten up the issue.

Mr Eastwood: The Member has hinted at change to come. She sort of said that on the back of Mr Ross's question. Will there be any independent investigation or inquiry into the allegations that were made in the programme?

Mrs Cochrane: As I said, the Commission will look into the issues in more detail that were raised. If there are any substantive issues that have not been resolved or are not in the process of being resolved, an independent investigation may be the way forward. That is something that the Commission will discuss. It may be by means of new powers being given to the IFRP or a completely separate body being set up to look at this.

Mr Swann: What reassurances can the commissioner give this House that neither the Commission nor any single member of it will hamper the investigation by the PSNI or any other body?

Mrs Cochrane: At the end of the day, we as Commission members form part of a corporate body. Therefore, we are there not to act on behalf of our parties but in the best interests. All of what we want to look at will be to ensure the full openness and transparency of all Members' claims.

Mr Lunn: Again, on the back of Mr Ross's question, in which he seemed to suggest that there could be a brand new body to oversee these matters, the fact is that we have the Independent Financial Review Panel. The problem is that it is a bit short on teeth. Does the Member agree that perhaps an expansion of that panel's powers to include investigative powers and the ability to issue more than one determination in a mandate might be the way forward?

Mrs Cochrane: The current system allows assurance of all expenses undergoing a review. At the moment, all original invoices etc have to be put in place along with an assessment of their admissibility. I said in my answers to two other Members that, yes, the Commission will meet after this meeting. I understand that we already have a number of items in a paper to consider a way forward. Yes, perhaps one way to do that would be to strengthen the role of the current panel.

Mr Campbell: In supporting the concept of the creation of a body in the style of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), does the Commission member agree that those issues that have not been dealt with yet and were mentioned in the programme need to be rooted out for the future, but that it would strengthen everyone's hand if a publicly funded body like the BBC were equally open and transparent about the wages, salaries, overheads and expenses that it incurs as the rest of us are?

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Member for his points. I am not going to comment on the BBC at the moment. Some Members have stated that wrong claims were made against them. The Commission will certainly assess the entirety of those claims. If it is clear that some of them were not factual in nature, I imagine that the Commission will want to raise that with the BBC.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Commission set out clearly the rules relating to the rental of constituency offices and the requirements placed on elected Members

so that the public can get a full understanding of the precise nature of those rules?

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Member for his question. There are clear rules in place and the Commission takes the view that the regime is clear. They are set out in paragraph 9 sub-paragraphs (11) to (14) of the IFRP determination. A Member cannot claim for the cost of office rentals if the office is leased from a family member or from a person with whom the Member has a connection under certain sections of the Companies Act 2006, or a person from whom the Member, or his or her family members, derives a financial benefit. The Commission may ask the panel to consider whether further measures need to be adopted to ensure a more open and transparent approach is available to landlords of constituency offices. The IFRP rule on the maximum amount a Member can reclaim for office rent is also set out in the IFRP determination.

Mr Agnew: I hold open competition, including interviews, for all my roles with all my staff. I do that in spite of the rules rather than because of them. Is the Commission supportive of introducing at least some basic rules to reflect the fact that those roles are paid out of the public purse and also to ensure that Members get the best quality staff?

Mrs Cochrane: The employment of individual staff from OCE is a matter for individual Members. Members often work in different ways. Some people focus more on constituency and casework issues as opposed to research, so different Members will have different requirements. Speaking in a personal capacity, my hiring of staff is done in an open and transparent manner as well. It is certainly something that the Commission will discuss, as will whether there are best practice guidelines that can be put in place.

Mr McNarry: I ask the Commission to ensure that there will be no similarities to the investigation into the Northern Ireland Events Company, which was about a £1 million loss that cost over £1 million to investigate. After seven years, there has been no report and no sight of any PSNI involvement. Will the Commission give assurance to the Assembly that it will not be hooked on delays awaiting a report that could take longer than this Assembly's remit? Will she give an answer as to the timescale in which this Assembly will be presented with a factual and concluding report?

Mrs Cochrane: I am not entirely clear about the relationship he made between that investigation and what we are talking about here. The Commission will review all aspects of the allegations that have been made. If it transpires that there are matters that have to go to the PSNI, HMRC, the Charities Commission or whoever, that will be the case. I cannot speak for those bodies to say exactly how long it will take for them to finish their investigation.

Mr Irwin: I was one of the Members highlighted in the programme; it was stated that I bought an office desk at £1,725. Of course, a picture of that desk was put in the programme. I totally refute the allegation made in the 'Spotlight' programme. Indeed, this was a complete built-in unit with an office counter, cupboards and an office desk all in one. I am quite happy for the Assembly Commission to look at my desk. I am quite happy for the BBC 'Spotlight'

programme to take a picture and put it in a programme to clear the air on that one.

What can be done to protect Members who are falsely accused?

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Member for his question. As I have stated, while I am not keen to comment on parts of the programme in relation to individual Members, the Commission will review all aspects of it in a measured way. If it feels that there are issues of factual inaccuracy that require clarification with the BBC, the Commission will consider whether to do that and in what manner.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes this item of business. I thank Ms Cochrane for taking the questions from Members.

3.45 pm

Assembly Business

Extension of Sitting

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. I have received notification from the Business Committee of a motion to extend the sitting past 7:00pm under Standing Order 10(3A).

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 1 December 2014 be extended to no later than 10.00pm. — [Mr Weir.]

Private Members' Business

Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Clause 7 (Minimum sentence for offence under section 1 or 2)

Debate resumed on amendment No 1, which amendment was:

In page 6, line 28, at end insert "and for "that paragraph" substitute "that provision";".— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List: Nos 2, 3, 31 to 43 and 47 to 61.

Lord Morrow: Before I turn to the amendments in group 1, as I said at Consideration Stage, I am grateful to all those who have had an input into the development of the Bill. In particular, I want to thank the Minister and officials of the Department of Justice, the Department of Health and the Attorney General and his officials for their work between Consideration Stage on 20 October and today. There are others who are worthy of mention, but I have decided to refrain until Final Stage in the not-too-distant future — hopefully, I am not being presumptuous.

I am grateful to the Minister for setting out the detail of the technical amendments in group 1. He set out the detail of amendment Nos 1 to 3 to clause 7, the clause introducing a minimum sentence, and I urge Members in the House to support them.

The amendments I have tabled to clause 24 are technical amendments replacing the term "victim" with "complainant". This change brings the clause into line with existing legislation on special measures for victims acting as witnesses, namely the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

Amendment No 43 also introduces a new section 24(2) to clarify the definitions of the terms "the accused" and "complainant" used in the clause. The amendments help to clarify how the clause will be applied in practice. Although the amendments are not co-signed by the Minister, I have discussed them with him, and he has indicated that he is not opposed to them.

I welcome amendment No 47 on commencement, tabled by the Minister and the Chair of the Justice Committee. I support the amendment for the reasons already outlined by the Minister and the Committee Chair.

Amendment Nos 48 to 60 to schedules 3, 4 and 5 in the name of the Minister of Justice and co-signed by me are technical amendments that he has already eloquently explained.

The last amendment in this group, amendment No 61, tabled in my name, will extend the long title of the Bill. The amendment results from the additions to the Bill that were made at Consideration Stage and ensures that the long title of the Bill reflects this wider scope. I hope that Members will support this change and the rest of the amendments in the group.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I am grateful to those who have contributed to this short debate on the first group, particularly to the Chair for his usual constructive comments. I am not sure whether I could say quite the same thing about Mr Elliott's contribution, but he seemed to be in vaguely the same area. I am also grateful to Mr Dickson and most particularly to Lord Morrow, recognising the good work that has been done in partnership. I commend this group of amendments to the Assembly and trust that they will be supported.

Amendment No 1 agreed to.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Amendment No 2 has already been debated.

Amendment No 2 made: In page 6, line 41, at end insert "(za) in Article 4(2) (interpretation) omit the "and" at the end of sub-paragraph (c) and after paragraph (d) add—

"(e) a sentence falls to be imposed under section 7(2) of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 if it is required by that provision and the court is not of the opinion there mentioned;"".— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Amendment No 3 made: In page 7, line 7, leave out subsection (9).— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Clause 13 (Duty to notify National Crime Agency about suspected victims of offences under section 1 or 2)

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We now come to the second group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 4, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 15 to 30 and 44 to 46. The amendments relate to proposed changes to the arrangements for protecting victims. Specifically, they address a power to change the body to be notified under clause 13; a name change for the independent legal guardian; the definition of "separated child"; additions to the statutory defence clause; and the removal from the Bill of clause 26, which provides for a Northern Ireland rapporteur. Members will note that amendment Nos 17 to 24, 26 to 28 and 46 are consequential to amendment No 15 and that amendment No 45 is consequential to amendment No 4.

Mr Ford: I beg to move amendment No 4: In page 8, line 36, at end insert

"(5A) The Department may by order substitute for the reference to the National Crime Agency in subsection (1) a reference to such other body or person as may be specified in the order."

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 15: In clause 22, page 13, line 31, leave out "Independent Legal Guardian" and insert "independent guardian".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 16: In clause 22, page 14, line 2, leave out from "or" to end of line 4 and insert

"(2A) This section also applies to a child who appears to the Regional Health and Social Care Board to be a separated child."— [Lord Morrow.]

No 17: In clause 22, page 14, line 8, leave out "Independent Legal Guardian" and insert "independent guardian".— [Lord Morrow.]

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No 18: In clause 22, page 14, line 15, leave out "Independent Legal Guardian" and insert "independent guardian".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 19: In clause 22, page 14, line 22, leave out "Independent Legal Guardian" and insert "independent guardian".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 20: In clause 22, page 14, line 27, leave out "Independent Legal Guardian" and insert "independent guardian".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 21: In clause 22, page 14, line 34, leave out "Independent Legal Guardian" and insert "independent guardian".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 22: In clause 22, page 14, line 35, leave out "Independent Legal Guardian" and insert "independent guardian".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 23: In clause 22, page 14, line 37, leave out "Independent Legal Guardian" and insert "independent guardian".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 24: In clause 22, page 14, Line 39, leave out "Independent Legal Guardian" and insert "independent guardian".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 25: In clause 22, page 14, line 41, after "ascertaining" insert "and communicating".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 26: In clause 22, page 15, line 18, leave out "Independent Legal Guardian" and insert "independent guardian".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 27: In clause 22, page 15, line 24, leave out "Independent Legal Guardians" and insert "independent guardians".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 28: In clause 22, page 15, line 25, leave out "Independent Legal Guardian" and insert "independent guardian".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 29: In clause 22, page 15, line 36, leave out from "who" to end of line 41 and insert

"who—

(a) is not ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland;

(b) is separated from all persons who—

(i) have parental responsibility for the child; or

(ii) before the child's arrival in Northern Ireland, were responsible for the child whether by law or custom; and

(c) because of that separation, may be at risk of harm.

(11) A reference in any other statutory provision to the guardian of a child does not include a reference to an independent guardian appointed under this section."—

[Lord Morrow.]

No 30: In clause 23, page 16, line 37, leave out from "any of the following offences" to end of line 1 on page 17 and insert

"—

(a) an offence under—

(i) section 4(2) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 committed in respect of a Class B or Class C drug;

(ii) section 5(2) of that Act committed in respect of a Class B drug;

(iii) section 6(2) of that Act;

(b) an offence under section 26A(3)(a), (b), (d), (e), (f) or (g) of the Immigration Act 1971;

(c) an offence under section 1, 2, 3 or 4 of the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981;

(d) an offence under section 106 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999;

(e) an offence under section 4 of the Identity Documents Act 2010."— [Lord Morrow.]

No 44: In clause 26, page 18, leave out clause 26.— [Lord Morrow.]

No 45: In clause 29, page 20, line 3, at end insert "(za) an order under section 13(5A) (power to amend body to be notified about suspected victims);".— [Lord Morrow.]

No 46: In clause 29, page 20, line 15, leave out from "child" to "order" on line 16 and insert

"independent guardians) shall not be made unless a draft of the regulations".— [Lord Morrow.]

Mr Ford: I emphasise that amendment No 4 is also supported by Lord Morrow.

Members will know that clause 13 is intended to improve our understanding of and response to human trafficking and slavery-type offences as they occur in Northern Ireland by placing a duty on specified public authorities to report suspected cases of trafficking and slavery to the National Crime Agency. Amendment No 4 maintains that effect but is intended to future-proof the Bill against any potential structural changes in the reporting arrangements, particularly in the light of the recently published review of the national referral mechanism, which suggested the possible establishment of a new modern slavery intelligence hub situated in the Home Office. Amendment No 4 provides an order-making power to amend the reference to the NCA, in the event that the responsibility for collating reports of suspected cases should pass to another body. Amendment No 45 is consequential to amendment No 4 and ensures that the new order-making power is included in the general provision on orders and regulations under clause 29.

Amendments to clause 22 relating to independent guardians are covered by amendments Nos 15 to 29. They were tabled by Lord Morrow and are intended to ensure that the intentions of the clause with regard to separated children are deliverable in practice. Amendment Nos 15,17 to 24 and 26 to 28 are purely technical in nature. Their effect is to change the title of the guardian throughout clause 22 from "Independent Legal Guardian" to "independent guardian". That was necessary to remove any potential confusion with other guardian roles, including parental responsibility and statutory guardian roles, such as the guardian ad litem. Amendment No 29 inserts new subsection (11) for further clarification. Amendment No 16 inserts new subsection (2A), which removes the connection between a separated child and the national referral mechanism and clarifies that the Health and Social Care Board shall determine who is a separated child. Amendment No 25 introduces the requirement for the guardian to communicate the views of the child. This is to ensure that the child's views are heard unfiltered by those making decisions regarding them. As well as inserting a new subsection (11), amendment No 29 amends subsection (10), which provides a revised definition of "separated child" to ensure that children are not brought

into scope unnecessarily and to give effect to the policy intention.

Given the time pressures between Bill stages, the Executive have not yet had an opportunity to consider formally and agree the proposed changes under amendment Nos 16, 25 and 29. However, I understand that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, who would be responsible for implementing them, is supportive of them and that officials from his Department have worked with the Office of the Legislative Counsel and Lord Morrow to ensure that the provisions of clause 22 are deliverable in practice, particularly on the definition of a separated child. I cannot therefore formally endorse those amendments without Executive approval, but I will certainly not oppose them. I trust that the House will take the suitable hint.

The definition proposed at Consideration Stage would have included all children arriving in Northern Ireland in groups, such as those with school trips or voluntary groups, even where there was no risk of harm to children and where they travelled with their parents' consent in the company of other responsible adults.

The new proposed definition under amendment No 29 uses the phrase "ordinarily resident", which is the phrase that is used in the Health and Personal Social Services Order 1972. The revised definition also includes a harm test, which will allow discretion to be exercised and prevent children from being deemed as separated unnecessarily.

Amendment No 46 to clause 29 is consequential upon these changes to the guardian's title provided for by the amendments to clause 22 and is similarly technical in nature.

Amendment No 30 to clause 23 was tabled by Lord Morrow and supported by me. Members will recall that clause 23 creates a defence for slavery and trafficking victims who have been compelled to commit certain offences as a direct result of being a victim of slavery or relevant exploitation. The defence does not apply to offences attracting a maximum sentence of five years or more, except in a small number of specified offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which are particularly relevant to victims of human trafficking.

Amendment No 30 adds to the list of offences that the clause 23 defence will cover and has been informed by the EU directive on trafficking in human beings, which recommends that victims should be protected from prosecution for criminal activities involving the use of false documents.

As such, amendment No 30 makes provision for a number of offences relating to false documentation to be covered by the defence. Those include the following: an offence under section 4 of the Identity Documents Act 2010 relating to the possession of false identity documents with improper intention; offences under section 26A of the Immigration Act 1971 relating to registration cards; and an offence under section 106 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 relating to dishonest representations. It also includes offences under sections of the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981 relating to forgery, copying a false document and using a false instrument or document. Those are section 1, dealing with forgery; section 2, which is on copying a false instrument; section 3, dealing with using a false instrument; and section 4, which deals with using a copy of a false instrument.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair)

Members will agree that human trafficking victims would be particularly vulnerable to criminal exploitation through those offences. I am supportive of the amendment and believe it is consistent with the Modern Slavery Bill and the EU directive.

I am grateful to Lord Morrow for tabling the final amendment in this group, amendment 44, which would remove the existing provision for a Northern Ireland rapporteur under clause 26.

Members will be aware that I have laid a legislative consent memorandum before the House seeking the extension to Northern Ireland of the UK-wide Independent anti-slavery commissioner under the Westminster Modern Slavery Bill. I expect that, before long, I shall be standing here again to debate that motion.

It is my firm view that a commissioner operating across the entire UK provides a better oversight model than the local rapporteur under clause 26. I do not need to labour my reasons for that, as Members will be aware of them. They touch on accountability, greater oversight, wider opportunities to identify best practice and learn from other jurisdictions, and greater economies of scale.

Members may be aware that Kevin Hyland, a former head of the Metropolitan Police service's human trafficking unit, has now been appointed as the commissioner designate. My Department participated in the appointment process, and I lobbied the Home Secretary to ensure that the commissioner could operate in a very robust way that is helpful to Northern Ireland. I am grateful that she changed her initial proposals as a result of the lobbying in support of the proposals that Lord Morrow and I had.

I welcome Mr Hyland's early appointment, which will allow the important work to commence. I have spoken to him on a number of occasions, and he has agreed to participate in a cross-border conference on forced labour that my Department will co-host with the Department of Justice and Equality next month. I hope that Members will be reassured, therefore, that Mr Hyland is already demonstrating his commitment towards Northern Ireland as one of his priorities. My Department and I look forward to working closely with him over the coming months.

Lord Morrow quite rightly emphasised in earlier debates that he wanted to see the Home Secretary's plan before withdrawing the proposal for a local rapporteur. I am grateful that he has now agreed that the independent anti-slavery commissioner's role is an alternative to the Northern Ireland rapporteur that provides all the cover that we need in this jurisdiction. I trust that Members will support this amendment to remove clause 26 from the Bill.

I commend these amendments to the House.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. In this group of amendments, I want to focus on amendment No 44, which would remove from the Bill the provision for the Northern Ireland rapporteur.

4.00 pm

When the Justice Committee considered this clause during Committee Stage, there was clear support for the concept of an independent oversight mechanism to provide

effective monitoring and accountability arrangements. The key issue was whether a Northern Ireland rapporteur or a UK-wide anti-slavery commissioner was more appropriate.

While a UK-wide commissioner was attractive, given the clear international nature of and dimension to human trafficking and the fact that such a commissioner could look comprehensively at the actions of all the organisations and agencies involved in tackling trafficking in Northern Ireland, including the Home Office, the UK Human Trafficking Centre and the Gangmasters Licensing Authority, which a Northern Ireland rapporteur would not be able to do, there were concerns that a UK-wide commissioner might not consider the specific needs of Northern Ireland and its particular challenges, including the land border with the Republic of Ireland.

There was also concern that, as initially drafted in the Modern Slavery Bill, the UK-wide commissioner would consider only law enforcement and not areas such as victim support, which the Northern Ireland rapporteur was intended to have the power to do.

To inform our consideration of the issue, when the Committee visited Sweden, members met the Swedish national rapporteur and discussed her role and remit and the benefits of having such an appointment. The Committee subsequently agreed to support the principle of having an independent body to monitor and report on the response to human trafficking in Northern Ireland. While noting that the remit of the anti-slavery commissioner, which would be created by the Modern Slavery Bill, could be extended to Northern Ireland, in the absence of further information regarding how the commissioner would operate and the extent to which the post would meet the particular needs and requirements of Northern Ireland, the Committee agreed to support the provision in the Bill for a Northern Ireland rapporteur. It also agreed that it would consider the matter further once clarity on the remit and responsibilities of the UK-wide anti-slavery commissioner was available.

More recently, the Committee considered further information provided by the Department of Justice on the independent UK-wide anti-slavery commissioner and has considered a proposed legislative consent motion that would extend the remit of the commissioner to Northern Ireland.

The Committee noted that agreement had been reached on a range of issues to ensure the interests of Northern Ireland would be fully covered by the commissioner, including a requirement for the Home Secretary to consult devolved Ministers, including the Minister of Justice, on the appointment of the commissioner; a duty on the Home Secretary to consult devolved Ministers before agreeing the strategic plan or annual report; and a power for the Northern Ireland Minister to be able to request ad hoc reports on Northern Ireland matters. In addition, it noted that reports by the commissioner will be jointly submitted to the Home Secretary and devolved Ministers and that there will be a statutory duty on the Northern Ireland Minister to lay reports before the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Committee then agreed that it was content to support extending the remit of the anti-slavery commissioner to Northern Ireland rather than having a separate Northern Ireland rapporteur. The Committee, therefore, supports amendment No 44.

As an MLA, I support all the amendments in the name of my colleague the Lord Morrow.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We support all the amendments bar amendment No 44. The provision in amendment No 44 extends beyond the role and remit of a rapporteur.

We have all heard that this is unique legislation. As mentioned in today's debate and previous debates, it has created interest elsewhere, particularly in Leinster House, where an Oireachtas Committee is discussing the same type of issues. Obviously, Lord Morrow's Bill has been mentioned at Westminster, and he has received praise for his work.

Given that the Bill is more than just about trafficking — there are other aspects on prostitution — it is necessary and desirable for it to be scrutinised when it becomes an Act to see how it performs. That would not have to be an ongoing process; it could be time bound, or it could be every two years. If, as expected, the Bill is approved by the Assembly and becomes an Act, that would allow us to have some measure and debate on the impact that it is having on human trafficking and sexual exploitation through prostitution.

Indeed, at the last stage of the Bill, we argued very strongly for the inclusion of that independence. Not to take away from the work of a rapporteur or any outcome of the Modern Slavery Bill in Westminster, but we felt that, here, it was important that, some time in the future, we would have a debate, an argument and perhaps a validation of our intended purpose, so that we could say that the Bill set out to achieve a, b, c and d, and it did so. That is why we will not support that amendment.

Mr A Maginness: First of all, I pay tribute to Lord Morrow for bringing this Bill to the House and the work that he has put into it, which was enormous — one individual dealing with very detailed and, at times, complex legislation. It faithfully reflects the European directive on human trafficking, and he has done us all a great service by bringing the Bill, steering it through the Assembly and working very closely with officials in the Department of Justice. Of course, despite some differences, the officials, the Minister and the Department of Justice worked together with Lord Morrow, and I think that it is a good example of the Assembly working together. It might be a rare example but is, nonetheless, a good one that should be noted by those who watch our proceedings in the Assembly.

I also have to say that the Committee worked very closely with Lord Morrow and helpfully added to the debate around the Bill and helped to perfect the legislation before the House today.

Group 2, in many ways is a further honing of the various clauses to make sure that they are fit for purpose and essentially waterproof against challenge. I think that these further amendments are helpful in doing just that, and I welcome them.

I understand some of the concerns expressed about amendment No 44. I certainly, initially, along with other colleagues, took the view that it would be better to have a specific Northern Ireland rapporteur to deal with the various issues that need to be addressed that arise from human trafficking and from this Bill. However, I think it is

clear that having a Northern Ireland rapporteur, although desirable, would not be a great use of resources or public moneys. Given the extent of our problem and given the functions that a local rapporteur would have to carry out, it is therefore, I believe, preferable to use the office of the UK commissioner with an extensive remit to Northern Ireland. That is the right way to proceed with this. We will get value for money; it does not, as far as I know, cost the Department here resources or cost it financially —

Mr Ford: I appreciate the Member's giving way. Just on a technical point, we would be expected to make a small contribution towards the UK-wide role, but it would be significantly less cost than a separate Northern Ireland office.

Mr A Maginness: Yes. That is the point that I was trying to make, perhaps imperfectly. Nonetheless, it is important that we avail ourselves of the opportunity of using the UK commissioner. In relation to our situation in Northern Ireland, I would have preferred a local person. Nonetheless, I think that this is the right way to proceed, and it is a very important function that we keep the situation here under control and under supervision. This, I believe, is the best way of doing so in the present circumstances. It may well change in the future, and it is open to us to review it at some stage in the future, but, at this time, I think that this is the best way forward. For those reasons, we will be supporting amendment No 44. I believe that the House should support amendment No 44 as being the best way forward in all the circumstances.

Mr Elliott: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this group of amendments. There are just a couple that I want to highlight. The first is the group of amendments including amendment No 15 and the series of amendments that are similar to it. It removes the word "legal" to make it "independent guardian". This morning, I received a briefing document that deals somewhat with this particular aspect, although I would be grateful for a little clarification around the legal aspect. I understand that it is obviously so that there is a clear distinction between a legal guardian for a child as opposed to this type of independent guardian. Is this independent guardian still responsible to the courts in Northern Ireland? Will it have a responsibility to the courts service or will it be directly responsible to the courts or social services? I would be grateful for that clarification.

Amendment No 29 amends the criteria of a separated child. This follows an amendment at Consideration Stage. I welcome the clarification because I think that it does put a little more meat on the issue and allows us to make a better assessment of the separated child. That amendment came in at quite a late stage in the proceedings, I suppose, the last time, so I welcome the opportunity to have that in the Bill. I heard what the Minister said about it, and I accept that situation.

Amendment No 44 removes the Northern Ireland rapporteur, given the legislative consent motion that is coming forward regarding the Modern Slavery Bill and having a UK-wide anti-slavery commissioner. I think that, again, this is a positive advancement. I think that it will streamline the process. It will make it easier to manage and hopefully will have an overall positive impact. So, again, I and the Ulster Unionist Party have no difficulty supporting this amendment and, indeed, the others. The only thing that I ask for in clarification is around that legal aspect of the independent legal guardian.

Mr Dickson: I also welcome the opportunity to speak on the amendments in group 2. Similar to the last group, I view these as non-contentious amendments that will help to strengthen the Bill, and I support them. However, I want to touch on a couple of them very briefly.

The Bill acknowledges the importance of cooperation with the National Crime Agency, and amendment Nos 4 and 45 are very important in this regard to ensure that any changes in the reporting structures can be accommodated. I think that it is also important to put on record my party's view that our efforts against these heinous crimes would be greatly strengthened if we were to allow the National Crime Agency to operate in Northern Ireland. Indeed, it is sad that some of those who continue to support this Bill cannot bring themselves to support a key element of the necessary structures in our fight against what is an international crime issue.

Victims should and must be our primary focus. Therefore, I welcome the addition under amendment No 30 of further offences for which victims are protected from prosecution, including those in relation to false documentation. As I said, these amendments are non-contentious and will improve the Bill. I encourage Members to support them.

4.15 pm

Lord Morrow: I am grateful to the Minister for setting out the detail of the amendments in the second group.

Amendment No 4 and the consequential amendment No 45 to clause 29 are sensible amendments. They will ensure that, if future changes are made to the operation of the National Crime Agency so that there needs to be a change in the way in which the agency is notified about suspected victims, the Department can ensure that the correct organisation is referred to in the legislation using an order-making power.

I should say that I am proud that the Assembly has been the first of the United Kingdom jurisdictions to vote for a statutory guardian for child trafficking victims. The Assembly also voted that the same guardian should be available for separated children. I have tabled a series of amendments to ensure that the Assembly's intentions on separated children are deliverable in practice.

Before I go any further, I should make it clear to the Assembly that the Minister of Health is supportive of my proposed amendments, although, due to time pressures, he was unable to go through the formal procedure to seek Executive agreement as was originally intended.

I am grateful for the cooperation of the Minister of Health; Department of Health officials, especially Elaine Colgan; the Office of the Legislative Counsel; the Children's Commissioner; and the Law Centre for working together to develop this series of amendments to ensure that the Assembly's intentions on separated children are deliverable in practice. In particular, I pay tribute to the Children's Commissioner, Patricia Lewsley-Mooney, for her positive engagement with me on clause 22. I know that she is due to leave her post in the near future, and I hope that she can take pride in the role she has played in seeing an effective guardian for separated children take shape.

A series of amendments — Nos 15, 17 to 24 and 26 to 29 — relates to changing the name from "Independent Legal Guardian" to "independent guardian". The purpose of that is

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to ensure that there is no confusion with other legal guardian roles, such as a person who has parental responsibility for a child — that is, someone who is very much involved in the day-to-day care of a child. I am also adding new subsection (11) to make it clear that, wherever there is any other reference to a guardian in legislation — for instance, a statutory guardian ad litem — it will be separate from an independent guardian, which is to be available to children who are separated from their parents or caregivers and to child trafficking victims. There is also a consequential amendment, amendment No 46, to the regulatory powers in clause 29 to update the name of the role.

I am also making it clear, by a slight change of wording, that clause 22 will apply to a trafficked child who goes through the national referral mechanism and to a separated child who does not but falls within the definition of a separated child. At Consideration Stage, the Minister pointed out correctly that, as drafted, a separated child had to be going through the national referral mechanism to be eligible for a guardian. That issue is resolved by amendment No 16, which also sets it out that the Health and Social Care Board shall determine who is a separated child.

Members will want to know how that decision will be made. The Health and Social Care Board issued regional operational guidance in November 2013 in relation to separated children. That guidance, which is currently under review, was developed with a number of agencies, including the trusts, the Border Force, the PSNI, UKVI, VOYPIC etc, to create guidance on pathway and interventions to be pursued by the respective agencies individually and collectively to assess and determine the status of a separated child. I want to make it clear that it is the intention that that guidance and any future updates will be the basis of decision-making, so there is no need for a new framework for decision-making to be set out in this legislation. I will ensure that reference to the existing guidance will be made in the explanatory notes, which will make it clear that the guidance will be used to assist HSCB staff to make the assessment of whether a child is separated.

Through amendment No 29, I am also tabling a new definition of “separated child” in subsection (10) to ensure that children are not brought into scope unnecessarily and to give effect to the policy intention Members voted for on 20 October. The definition proposed at Consideration Stage would have included all children arriving in Northern Ireland in groups, such as those on school trips or with voluntary groups, even where there was no particular risk of harm to the child, and where they travelled with their parent’s consent in the company of other responsible adults. The new definition has three elements, the first of which is residency. A child should have come into Northern Ireland from somewhere else. It uses the phrase “ordinarily resident”, which is the phrase currently in use in the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972. Members will want to know that that could be a child from another part of the United Kingdom, as well as from further afield. Secondly, a child must be separated from those who have parental responsibility for them or from their regular caregivers. Thirdly, the revised definition also includes a harm test, which will allow discretion to be exercised and prevent children being deemed “separated” unnecessarily.

Finally, I am making a small amendment to clause 22(6) (a) with amendment No 25, so that the guardian will need not only to ascertain the wishes of the child but to communicate with them.

Members, I hope that you will feel that the amendments meet the spirit and substance of what you were asking for when you voted for guardians at Consideration Stage.

I should also add that I was asked to consider adding a requirement that a guardian should be able to represent a child before a court and tribunal. That is a sensible request, and it was my understanding that the Bill already provided that. I had the Bill drafted with the intention that that should be covered. For the record, I have subsequently been assured by the Department of Health that such representation is covered by clause 22(6)(b)(ii).

Amendment No 30, in my name, to clause 23, co-signed by the Minister of Justice, is important to ensure that victims of human trafficking are adequately protected from criminalisation. The introduction of a statutory defence, which was supported by all sides of the House at Consideration Stage, will, I believe, be valuable to victims of trafficking who have been forced to commit certain criminal offences. The amendment that I put forward today simply extends the ambit of the defence to include a set of offences that trafficking victims are particularly at risk of. I felt that the amendment was necessary because of recital 14 in the preamble to the 2011 European directive on human trafficking. As Members have heard me say before, I do not agree with everything that comes out of the European Union. However, the anti-trafficking directive has proved to be a very positive move. Recital 14 outlines that:

“Victims of trafficking in human beings should, in accordance with the basic principles of the legal systems of the relevant Member States, be protected from prosecution or punishment for criminal activities such as the use of false documents, or offences under legislation on prostitution or immigration, that they have been compelled to commit as a direct consequence of being subject to trafficking.”

As the Bill stands, victims of human trafficking and slavery would not be able to utilise the statutory defence with regard to the use of false documents and a number of immigration offences. Amendment No 30 would ensure that the defence was available to victims of trafficking in such cases.

The offences outlined in the amendment largely involve the production and use of forged documents by an individual victim. It is important to note that the defence would not apply where an individual was involved in the production of false documents for the use of others. I am aware that one of the tools used by traffickers in bringing people to this country for exploitation is giving them false papers. If a victim is caught with such papers, they commit a crime, but, in these circumstances, it is clearly not one of their making. I am also aware that the use or creation of false documents may be the only way that an individual victim may seek to escape from those who are abusing them, but, in doing so, again, they commit an offence. I am sure that Members will agree with me that allowing the statutory defence to apply in such cases, which would require a clear causal link between using the false papers and the person’s situation of trafficking, is in the spirit of what we are trying to achieve with clause 23. Following discussions

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with the Department of Justice, I am of the view that that is a sensible addition to the clause. I am grateful to the Minister and his team for the positive way in which they have engaged with me on the matter.

At Consideration Stage, I gave my view that clause 26 should remain in the Bill until the exact nature of the Anti-slavery Commissioner in the Modern Slavery Bill had been finalised and the Assembly had had an opportunity to review the legislative consent motion. Having seen the final proposals, I am satisfied at the present time that the Anti-slavery Commissioner presents the best way forward, given current budgetary constraints. There are also advantages to be gained from opting in to the commissioner, who will operate across the whole of the United Kingdom.

Trafficking often involves the movement of people, whether that be across international borders, regional borders or even more locally. It requires cooperation at global, continental, national and local levels. A UK-wide Anti-slavery Commissioner will have the benefit of being able to share with the PSNI and other key agencies in Northern Ireland the experiences, good practice and points for learning from counterparts in other parts of the UK. Therefore, I recommend that the Assembly support the proposal to opt in to the Anti-slavery Commissioner. As a result, I recommend that clause 26 be removed from the Bill. I hope that Members will support all the amendments in group 2.

Mr Ford: These are important amendments that will help future-proof the Bill, facilitate our understanding of the nature and scale of these heinous practices and, ultimately, offer greater protection for victims, especially child victims. In almost all respects, I am grateful for the support from Members who have spoken. I will deal briefly with the comments that were made around the Chamber.

Mr Givan, both personally and as Committee Chair, outlined why he and the Committee were supportive of amendment No 44. I will touch later on the references that Lord Morrow made. Although Mr McCartney talked about wanting to be able to have debates here about the reports that will be produced and said therefore that he did not support amendment No 44, it is the case that we have the power in this place to request specific reports from the commissioner. Those reports would be laid before the Assembly, providing a perfect opportunity for any of them to be debated should Members wish to hold a debate on them.

There is also a specific power under clause 15 — if amended later, as, I suspect, it is likely to be, — that there will be reporting on the impact on human trafficking and prostitution offences from the effect of the Bill. Therefore, once there is an Act in place, we will have the full opportunities to debate reports. Members are not particularly reticent about tabling motions for debate on matters that they consider important, whether or not there is a formal report laid before the House. Mr Maginness originally saw a benefit in having a local rapporteur but could now see the benefit in tying into the UK-wide commissioner. Mr Elliott, Lord Morrow and Mr Dickson made similar points. There is clearly broad consensus about moving to link into the UK-wide system and getting the benefits from it.

Mr Elliott asked about the specific role of the guardian and, in particular, how it might relate to the courts. The guardian

is specified as being an employee of an appropriate charity appointed by and under the arrangements made by the Health and Social Care Board and responsible through its normal accountability arrangements. It is possible that such guardians, like any public official, could find themselves before the courts for how they carried out their duties, but, in my memory, I cannot remember cases of social workers or health visitors being brought before the courts for the way in which they did their job, and I see no reason to assume that the guardian will be expected to be before the court.

But, clearly, the issues are for the robust arrangements that the Department of Health and the Health and Social Care Board are setting in place.

4.30 pm

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for giving way. I appreciate that clarification. My query was on whether the guardian has any responsibility to the courts, and the Minister indicated that, no, that is not the case. However, I will point out that, in other examples, social services representatives are sometimes called before the courts and have to give information and, indeed, evidence in some children's cases.

Mr Ford: I congratulate Mr Elliott for picking up the next point, because, as Lord Morrow highlighted, after that, there is the potential for the guardian to appear in court to represent the child. I shall not repeat the subsection because I would probably get it wrong, but Lord Morrow spelt it out in detail in his contribution. He also dealt in detail with the role of the Health and Social Care Board, and I trust that that will satisfy the House that we will ensure that the provisions of the legislation properly cater for separated children.

Lord Morrow also added to the list of those whom we must thank, including the Children's Commissioner and our former colleague in this place, Patricia Lewsley-Mooney, as well as, indeed, the DHSSPS officials, who have certainly helped me while I have been considering this group of amendments. So, I am grateful to them, as well as to those officials in my Department who have been working on it.

Lord Morrow also explained the key issues on the statutory defence and agreed with me, particularly on the relevant offences that relate to the victims of trafficking and the particular need to consider how they may go. He then spelt out the particular benefits that I and he believe we will now get from having the UK-wide commissioner. I believe that we now have a better role for that commissioner, because neither Lord Morrow nor I gave up when the Home Secretary produced some early proposals that would not have been particularly helpful to this jurisdiction. I believe that it is an example of constructive engagement. We may be the smallest of the three justice jurisdictions in the United Kingdom, but it proves that we can be effective when we speak together and can sometimes even persuade Whitehall to listen. I am grateful for the help that Lord Morrow gave in ensuring that, on this occasion, Whitehall listened.

On that basis, I believe that all the amendments in this group should receive the Assembly's full support. They carry through on our commitment to fight slavery and

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trafficking, and I trust that, when we come to vote on them later, they will have our full support.

Amendment No 4 agreed to.

Clause 15 (Paying for sexual services of a person)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): We now come to the third group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 5, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 6 to 14. This group comprises eight amendments to clause 15, including an increased penalty, a new category of offending behaviour and drafting changes. Amendment Nos 13 and 14 combine and revise the provisions dealing with support for those who wish to exit prostitution. I call Lord Morrow to move amendment No 5 and to address the other amendments in the group.

Lord Morrow: I beg to move amendment No 5: In page 9, line 13, at end insert

“(1A) In the heading to Part 5, after “PROSTITUTION” insert “AND PAYING FOR SEXUAL SERVICES OF A PERSON”.”.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 6: In page 9, line 23, at end insert

“and A knows or believes that the payment is made or promised by a third party.”.— [Lord Morrow.]

No 7: In page 9, line 26, leave out “level 3 on the standard scale” and insert “the statutory maximum”.— [Lord Morrow.]

No 8: In page 9, line 29, leave out “not exceeding the statutory maximum”.— [Lord Morrow.]

No 9: In page 9, line 33, after “services” insert “(other than sexual services)”.— [Lord Morrow.]

No 10: In page 9, line 38, after “sexual” insert

“; or

(d) B touching B in a sexual manner for the sexual gratification of A, B being physically in A's presence.”.— [Lord Morrow.]

No 11: In page 9, line 39, leave out paragraph (5) and insert

“(5) B does not commit an offence by doing anything which (apart from this paragraph) would amount to—

(a) aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring the commission of an offence under this Article by A;

(b) conspiring with A to commit an offence under this Article; or

(c) an offence under Part 2 of the Serious Crime Act 2007 (encouraging or assisting offences) in relation to the commission of an offence under this Article by A.”.— [Lord Morrow.]

No 12: In page 10, leave out lines 1 to 17 and insert

“(5) The Department must before the coming into operation of subsection (4) raise public awareness of the change in the law to be effected by that subsection.

(6) The Department must, at the end of the period of 3 years beginning with the coming into operation of subsection (4), review the operation of Article 64A of the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008

and lay before the Assembly a report on that review; that report must in particular include—

(a) information as to the number of arrests and convictions during that period in respect of offences under Article 64A;

(b) the Department's assessment of the impact of Article 64A on the safety and well-being of persons providing for payment sexual services of the kind to which that Article applies;

(c) information as to the number of arrests and convictions in the period covered by the report in respect of—

(i) offences under section 2 committed with a view to exploitation that consists of or includes behaviour within section 3(3) (sexual exploitation);

(ii) offences under section 4 committed with the intention of committing an offence mentioned in subparagraph (i); and

(d) the Department's assessment of the extent to which Article 64A has operated to reduce human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.”.— [Lord Morrow.]

No 13: In clause 19, page 13, leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert

“(1) The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety must, in conjunction with the other Northern Ireland departments, prepare and publish a strategy in relation to actions to be taken by Northern Ireland departments in the exercise of their respective functions to ensure that a programme of assistance and support is made available to persons who wish to leave prostitution.

(2) The strategy must—

(a) be published no later than 10 months after the coming into operation of this section; and

(b) provide for a programme of support and assistance to be made available in accordance with the strategy no later than 1 April 2016.

(2A) The strategy must ensure that assistance and support provided to a person—

(a) is not conditional on the person acting as a witness in any criminal proceedings;

(b) is provided only with the agreement of that person; and

(c) is provided in a manner which takes due account of the needs of that person as regards safety and protection from harm.

(2B) The strategy must ensure that assistance and support is offered from a person who is of the same gender as the person receiving it.

(2C) The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety must, in conjunction with the other Northern Ireland departments—

(a) review the strategy (or revised strategy) for the time being published under this section at intervals of not more than 3 years; and

(b) if appropriate, revise the strategy and publish the revised strategy.”.— [Lord Morrow.]

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No 14: In clause 20, page 13, leave out clause 20.—
[*Lord Morrow.*]

Lord Morrow: I am grateful to the 81 Members who voted in support of this clause on 20 October. I believe that this is an important step in helping to reduce the demand for individuals trafficked for prostitution and in reducing the level of prostitution in the Province. I have never said that it will end all prostitution, but I believe that it will be a step forward in reducing it and the exploitation that goes alongside it.

I was very pleased to see the announcement by the Justice Minister in the Republic of Ireland last week that they will be seeking to follow our lead in criminalising the purchase of sexual services. As Members opposite will no doubt like to hear, it is positive to see an all-Ireland approach being taken in that area anyway. Following the Assembly vote in favour of the clause, I engaged with the Department of Justice over some technical concerns about aspects of the clause raised by the Minister of Justice during the debate on 20 October. I am grateful for his input and for that of his officials and the Office of the Legislative Counsel. As a result, I am proposing some technical amendments to the clause to ensure that the objectives that the Assembly voted for are met.

Amendment No 5 would amend the title of Part 5 of the Sexual Offences Order 2008, in which the offence sits. The other offences in that Part explicitly refer to prostitution, so the amendment would ensure that there is no discrepancy with the new offence.

The term "prostitute" is not specifically referred to in clause 15 because, as well as the evidential restrictions that that term presents, which were articulated by the Attorney General in his evidence to the Justice Committee, using the term "person" emphasises the humanity of the individuals involved in selling sex and prevents the continued application of often unfair stereotypes and stigma to those individuals. That is particularly important when considering those who have been trafficked, coerced or who end up in prostitution because of some vulnerability.

I am proposing two amendments on payments.

Amendment No 6 is to new article 64A(1)(b) to ensure that person A cannot unwittingly commit an offence if a third party has paid a person to give A sexual services. It will require A to know that a payment has been made or believes that a payment has been made. Amendment No 9 is to new article 64A(3) and clarifies that provision of sexual services cannot constitute payment under the offence. That will ensure that consensual sex between two adults where there is no form of payment does not fall within the offence.

I am proposing two amendments on fines. Amendment No 7 is to the summary offence penalty, so that it reads that the maximum fine is the statutory maximum, which is the correct terminology for a fine in which the offence is triable either way. Amendment No 8 is to the indictable offence. It will ensure that the penalty just refers to a fine, which in the Crown Court can be limitless.

One of the key points that I made on 20 October was that it was not my intention that the seller should be subject to any liability if someone sought to buy or did buy sex from them. The Department of Justice has advised that the current wording is not extensive enough to prevent

potential criminalisation of the seller, so I am proposing amendment No 11 to ensure that the intentions of the Assembly are met.

On 20 October, the Assembly voted for an amendment requiring the Department of Justice to produce a report on the operation of the offence and its effects on human trafficking and offences under the Bill. Since the report relates to offences in addition to new article 64A, I am proposing amendment No 12 to remove that requirement from the text of new article 64A of the Sexual Offences Order 2008 and put it instead in the main text of clause 15. The amended text also consolidates the requirements to produce the report into one clause and specifies that the report should address offences of trafficking for sexual exploitation, which is the trafficking offence relevant to the operation of new article 64A. Amendment No 12 will also require the Department to raise public awareness of the change in the law before clause 15 comes into effect on 1 June 2015.

During the Minister's Consideration Stage speech, he expressed concerns that some of the scenarios that I said would not be covered by that clause would indeed be covered under my Bill. The Minister raised the concern that lap dancing would fall within the scope of clause 15. As Members know, I took extensive advice from the Attorney General about the wording of the clause before Consideration Stage, and he said that lap dancing would not be covered. However, the Minister has since expressed concern that certain circumstances would not be covered by the offence, namely when a person was exploited to provide sexual services in the form of the sexual touching of themselves observed by the client. That may not sound like a major consideration to some, but let me assure you that that practice goes on and that people are trafficked for that purpose. If I ignored this, it would amount to a clear dereliction of my duty.

As a result, on the advice of the Attorney General, I propose a further amendment, amendment No 10, to line 38 on page 9, clarifying that an offence is committed in such circumstances where the two parties are in each other's presence. I must be clear with the Assembly that the Department still has reservations about this addition. Indeed, Members will be aware that this is the only amendment to clause 15 that the Minister has not co-signed. The Department believes that, while I may have tackled the major concern that it raised, the new definition would encompass lap dancing where there is no direct sexual touching of the dancer and stripping. Members will know that I very clearly stated at Consideration Stage that it is not my intention that those activities should fall within the scope of clause 15. I have raised the point with the Attorney General, and he advises me that what we would consider lap dancing and stripping, where there is just lap dancing and stripping, would not fall within this definition and, consequently, disagrees with the Department's interpretation.

I recognise that the Department has the same concerns as me; it does not want the wrong people falling within criminal law when that is not the intention of the Assembly. However, I am taking the advice of the Attorney General and have tabled amendment No 10 to ensure that those who should fall within the law do so. I hope that Members will support amendment No 10 and the other amendments that I propose to clause 15.

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I move on now to clause 19. Members will remember that the Assembly voted to have a strategy and a programme of assistance and support for those who want to leave prostitution. That is an indication of the importance that the Assembly places on the need for support for individuals to exit prostitution and the need for that type of support to go hand in hand with the new offence that the Assembly supported in clause 15. Amendment No 13 is substantially a tidying-up exercise to combine the two elements of the Assembly's wishes into one clause. As a result, I propose that clause 20 is removed.

Before I go any further, I should make clear to the Assembly that the Minister of Health is supportive of my proposed amendments, although, due to time pressures, has been unable to use the formal procedure for Executive agreement. I am grateful for the cooperation of the Health Minister and his officials, especially Elaine Colgan, and the Office of the Legislative Counsel for working with me on those amendments.

Amendment No 13 has three key provisions that I want to bring to Members' attention. The first is that both the programme and strategy must include all Departments across government. I think that that is a constructive move. The second is that the amendment to clause 19 commits the Department to produce a strategy within 10 months of Royal Assent and for the programme of assistance to be in place by 1 April 2016. That will give the Department time to consult on the strategy and go out to tender for providers of the service. The third is that the strategy will be reviewed every three years rather than every year, which allows the strategy to provide a longer-term focus. That said, the amended wording builds in flexibility for revision and publication of the strategy to quickly incorporate learning identified at the point of delivery.

I hope Members feel that the amendments to clause 19 reflect the Assembly's wishes as expressed at Committee Stage and will support them and the rest of the amendments in group 3 wholeheartedly.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I will speak very briefly as Chairman of the Committee on this group of amendments.

Amendment Nos 13 and 14 merge clauses 19 and 20, which provide for assistance and support for those wishing to exit prostitution and a strategy in relation to that. As indicated at Consideration Stage, the Committee agreed from the outset that a strategy to provide support services for those who wish to exit prostitution was necessary, and the evidence that we received very strongly emphasised the need for that. The further detail regarding the strategy provided for by amendment No 14 is therefore welcome.

While the Committee has not considered the other amendments in the group, which relate to clause 15, the Committee supported, as I outlined at Consideration Stage, the provision to criminalise the purchase of sexual services, and the amendments appear to tidy up and, in some respects, enhance clause 15. They do not therefore go against the Committee position.

4.45 pm

Speaking briefly as a Member, I welcome the amendments, as I believe that they enhance the provision that the Assembly voted upon and that they will provide for better legislation. I welcome the way in which Lord

Morrow and the Minister have engaged in respect of that. It is important, in making a significant change to the law on this issue, that we try to get the most robust legislation possible, and I think that the amendments do that.

I welcome again the amendments on the exiting strategies and the work around them. That is something that the Committee heard evidence on and required work to be done on, and Lord Morrow has engaged very proactively in recognising that it did need to be developed. It deals with a lot of the accusations made at the start that all this Bill was about was clause 6 when the intent has always been to do what is best and to provide the best support for the victims of this crime. The exiting strategies and support mechanisms are very important to it.

I suppose, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I am a little disappointed that some of the Members who railed against clause 6 and who made accusations that all we were interested in was the criminalisation aspect are not in the Chamber today. I appreciate that the Alliance Party, which did vote against it, is here. However, others were very vociferous, yet, when it comes to making legislation better, in my view, for those who want to exit prostitution, they are not here today. The genuine motivation of some of those who sought to undermine Lord Morrow's efforts will not be lost on the wider public.

Given that this is the last group of amendments, I put on record my thanks to the Committee staff for their work in supporting us at this stage of the Bill's proceedings. I thank the Minister and his officials for their work to allow Further Consideration Stage to progress very smoothly. It is a demonstration of how the Committee has helped to create effective legislation by complementing the work that Lord Morrow and the Minister have engaged in. The Committee has taken a complementary and supportive role in that, and we are getting better legislation as a result. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. At the beginning, I echo how the Chairman finished off by saying that we appreciated the work of the Committee staff in supplying whatever information we required as the Bill went through its Committee Stage. Again, I thank the Minister and his officials, who were also very willing to assist us in the many, many issues that we had to address. I also thank Lord Morrow and the people he worked with. Certainly, any time that we asked for clarity on an issue, he was very willing to supply us with it.

We will support all the amendments in this group, except one. I will explain that presently. The amendments on the exiting strategies and the support mechanism are excellent because we had to send a clear signal that this was not just about clause 6; it was about wider issues. I think that the amendments, particularly how the Health Department will address and provide the support mechanisms, are to be welcomed.

We had a concern. The proposer of the Bill outlined what we believe were potential unintended consequences around the lap dancing and strip clubs scenarios. I think it is important that the proposer is now saying that it is the advice of the Attorney General that these would not become criminal offences, as we would say, in terms of the potential unintended consequences. I would like to hear the views of both the Minister and the proposer of the Bill, Lord Morrow, when each of them speaks. If someone

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unfortunately found themselves in that position and was charged, is what we say here today — and perhaps what he has said — a form of defence if it became an indictable offence? We await the outcome of that.

Mr A Maginness: I support the amendments in this section. I also thank the staff of the Justice Committee for their work, which was, at times, very difficult and complex. They did a great job and I would like to put on record, as an individual member, our gratitude to the staff.

These are tidying-up amendments. It is important to emphasise the support that will be given to people who wish to leave prostitution, and that given to people who have been involved in human trafficking. It is very important that we show that support as a society.

There are obviously some question marks over amendment No 10. As I understand it, the Attorney General has advised that particular amendment as a tidying-up of the Bill in relation to this aspect. It is preferable that we follow the Attorney General's advice in this matter. I cannot speak for my party, but only as an individual Member, because we have not had an opportunity of discussing this particular issue. However, I accept what Lord Morrow has said: that this is effectively a tidying-up amendment which has the Attorney General's support and weight behind it. Given that, I would prefer to support it rather than oppose it.

Mr Elliott: I welcome the opportunity for discussion around these amendments to the Bill. I want to touch on two amendments. The first is amendment No 11, which obviously provides further issues around the decriminalisation of the selling of sexual services. In one aspect, it almost seems to put clarity into the situation; in others, because of what it is doing, it may be confusing the situation in that it says that we are criminalising the purchase of sexual services, but we are now going further in the decriminalising of the selling of sexual services. I did not have a great lot of time to make a general assessment of that, or even to speak to Lord Morrow about the reasoning for that clarity. Maybe he will give us a wee bit more detail on that when he is winding up.

Amendment No 12 puts clarity into the reporting mechanism in relation to article 64A of the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. I must say that I very much welcome this amendment. It will be helpful to the Bill and, in the longer term, in establishing the progress and the positives or negatives of this particular aspect of the Bill. Again, I welcome that. Hopefully, in the future, that will be a positive aspect.

I would also like to put on record my thanks, as I did earlier, to the Committee staff, Lord Morrow, the Chair of the Committee and, indeed, the Minister and his staff in the Department as well, because obviously quite a lot of work went on, not only in the Committee, which we saw at first hand, but also behind the scenes.

Mr Dickson: The Alliance Party will support the majority of amendments in group 3, not because we think that the overall provision around the payment for sexual services is good law, but because we accept the reality that a majority of Assembly Members have made it clear that they wish to see the purchase of sexual services criminalised.

When we last debated this issue, we explained in detail why we do not think that it will reduce the market for

trafficking for sexual exploitation and why we believe it could create a more dangerous situation for those who have been trafficked and indeed for those who have not been trafficked. Nevertheless, we are where we are. Our view is that we have to make whatever improvements we can to the Bill as it stands.

I wish to place on record my wholehearted support for mechanisms to assist those who wish to exit prostitution and commend those organisations that deliver those services. I trust that the Bill will enhance those services.

Today, I will focus my remarks on concerns that I have about amendment No 10. Indeed, others have referred to it. The Bill as it stands does not seem to cover circumstances in which someone is forced to perform sex acts in the presence of a purchaser but the purchaser is not involved in any touching. This is a weakness. The amendment tries to address it, but while amendment No 10 appears to cover these circumstances, it also creates new problems, substantially widening the scope of offences, and will have unintended consequences. I would like to hear Lord Morrow's explanation of why he believes that there are not, and will not, be unintended consequences. Once the Bill leaves the Floor of the House and becomes law, it will be a matter for the courts, and no longer this House, to interpret.

If we are going to legislate as loosely as to say that person A commits an offence if they obtain sexual services from person B in exchange for payment and that this includes circumstances where person B does not touch person A but touches themselves for the sexual gratification of person A, would that not also make it an offence to, for example, watch lap dancers or strippers or purchase a strippergram or kissogram for a party? While many would regard such activities as morally questionable, I doubt that many think that they would be illegal. However, it appears that this amendment would make their purchase illegal.

We could even go further: what about cases in which someone goes to see a play with sexually explicit scenes? Some people may go because they consider it art, but what about those who go to enjoy particular scenes for sexual gratification? If my reading of this amendment is correct, then when an actor or actress touches themselves in a sexual manner in the presence of an audience member who has paid to watch it for the purpose of sexual gratification, that audience member has technically committed an offence. For example, are we to have 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' banned from the stages of Northern Ireland once more?

This highlights the type of problems which will inevitably arise when we try to use the term "sexual services" without a proper statutory definition. We simply cannot draw clear parameters of the offence. It might be useful to share an example from Canada, where the Supreme Court struck down its prostitution laws last December. A lawyer who was involved in the case said that:

"I think it's both a key thing and an example of a bigger problem with the bill when the thing that's being regulated — it's described as sexual services, [but] the Bill doesn't contain a definition of what it is. That's a real vagueness problem."

That Bill was not dissimilar to this one.

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The legislation in Canada ran into big problems because it violated the legal principle that says that the law has to be knowable, clearly articulated and not applied arbitrarily. Can we be guaranteed that with this clause? With this amendment, we are potentially entering into uncharted territory. I am not sure whether the consequences are simply not appreciated by the DUP or whether it is trying to drag us back to a Victorian era in which we will all have to cover up our piano legs.

The reality is that this amendment could be seriously detrimental to the efforts of the police, the prosecution service and the courts to tackle human trafficking by opening up the offence much wider and diluting the effectiveness of the Bill.

We really need to look at how the original problem that was identified can be effectively addressed. It seems more logical to reintroduce the prostitution element to give the matter more clarity. Otherwise, as I have explained, the legislation will increasingly encroach on areas where it is not appropriate or, indeed, deflect from the heinous and serious crime of human trafficking. This is supposed to be a Bill to address the trafficking and exploitation of human beings, not to legislate for sexual ethics more generally. If the amendment passes, we risk further losing focus on the Bill's primary objective. Therefore, I encourage Members to reject it and enable us to look again at how we can address the problem more effectively.

5.00 pm

Mr Ford: I note that a number of Members praised the work of my staff in dealing with the Bill. I certainly thank them. It is an illustration of the positive way in which we have approached the vast majority of issues that came up as we have discussed the various stages of the Bill.

The Assembly has made clear its desire to see the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services. Although I am personally not convinced by that approach, I nevertheless engaged with Lord Morrow on amending clause 15 to ensure that the Assembly's intent matches the provision in the Bill. The majority of the amendments tabled to the clause for today fall within that category. Lord Morrow has given detailed explanations of the reasons for them all. As he highlighted, we have agreed on most of the issues, but not all. I am grateful, for example, that Lord Morrow agreed to the Department's wish in amendment No 11 to see conspiracy and procurement added to the list of offences that the person selling sexual services can no longer be found to have committed. That is a key, useful statement for the clarity with which we sought to decriminalise those involved in prostitution, and that was clearly the wish of Lord Morrow from the beginning. I hope that Tom Elliott will bear in mind that point as we look at the implications of amendment No 11.

I am also grateful that Lord Morrow accepted the Department's view put forward in amendment No 12 that it was more appropriate to impose a duty on the Department to raise public awareness of the change in the law rather than, particularly in these days of budgetary restraint, running an advertising campaign. The Department will make endeavours to ensure that the public know of the new law, although I suspect that debates in the House have done that very well up to now. In particular, we will highlight to those by whom the impact will be felt most heavily — the sex workers — the changes and when

they will occur. We have been made aware that there is much concern among that group of individuals about the introduction of the law and the effects that it will have on their well-being and safety.

There are other fundamental issues that, despite all the agreement that we have reached in so many areas, I still have concerns about, particularly the continuing desire to include a statutory definition of "sexual services". Amendment No 10 adds a further angle to that. The origin of the existing definition was, as I understand it, an attempt to confine criminalisation to the purchase of sex from a prostitute rather than other less direct activities not involving physical presence or contact. Unfortunately, that definition was flawed, as it seemed to exclude from prosecution some circumstances in which potentially an offence should be available. Those circumstances were pointed out by the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). The offence, as it stands after Consideration Stage, does not appear to cover circumstances in which, for example, a person paid for an individual to perform an intimate sex act in his presence but no touching took place involving the purchaser, even in cases in which the person was subjected to force.

Lord Morrow fairly outlined in his opening speech the view that I have taken on the basis of the advice that I received in this area. Amendment No 10 seeks to address the gap and should allow for prosecution in the circumstances described by the PPS. However, I firmly believe that, although addressing that flaw, the amendment simply adds a different problem by opening up the offence still further to those who purchase sexual services involving activities beyond the private sphere. For example, it would include watching lap dancers, strip artists and live sex shows, providing that whatever is purchased is bought for sexual gratification, which, one imagines, is largely the case. Frankly, one imagines that it is largely the purpose. It could also, as Mr Dickson said, include the purchase of so-called strippergrams and kissograms, whether there is touching or not. Is that beyond what the Assembly intended when it passed the clause at Consideration Stage? I ask that question, because it seems to me that we are now going way beyond the Assembly's intent at that stage. Indeed, Mr McCartney raised how it would relate to lap dancing.

Let us remind ourselves of the words. Proposed article 64A(4) reads:

"(4) No offence is committed under this Article unless the sexual services that are provided or are to be provided by B to A involve—

- (a) B being physically in A's presence,*
- (b) B touching A or A touching B, and*
- (c) the touching being sexual."*

The amendment would add the words:

“; or

(d) B touching B in a sexual manner for the sexual gratification of A, B being physically in A's presence.”

It seems to me that that is a very wide-ranging definition.

Mr McCartney: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: I will give way.

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Mr McCartney: Lord Morrow mentioned that the Attorney General feels that this does not fall within that definition. Have you had any contact with the Attorney General to clear this matter up?

Mr Ford: I congratulate Mr McCartney on somehow reading from his position the next line of my hand-scribbled notes. Members have quoted the Attorney General's view. The Attorney General believed and, indeed, said in my presence that he did not believe that those activities would be covered. Certainly the advice that I have is, bluntly speaking, that, if people engage in lap dancing or stripping, they are touching themselves in a sexual way for the gratification of those who are observing it. I find it difficult to suggest that that is not covered by amendment No 10. Therefore, I believe that we are going way beyond the normal understanding that we had when this was originally introduced when we were talking about prostitution. There may not be many strip clubs operating in Northern Ireland, but, if we run the risk of criminalising activity way beyond the original intent, that raises some difficulties. My view is that by removing the context of prostitution from the offence and relying instead on seeking a statutory definition of sexual services —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: I give way to the Member.

Mr A Maginness: The Minister said that he had had some discussions with the Attorney General, but he also said that he had received alternative advice. Could he outline whom he received that alternative advice from?

Mr Ford: Mr Deputy Speaker, I think that my response to Mr Maginness will have to be that there is a convention that Ministers do not reveal the advice they have received. I was merely quoting a conversation with the Attorney General, since practically every other Member seems capable of quoting it. Where my other sources of advice are concerned, I shall maintain the usual ministerial protocol.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for giving way. I am not asking the Minister to name his adviser, but did he seek and receive alternative legal advice? He seems to indicate that the advice was contrary to what the Attorney General said. Could he clarify that?

Mr Ford: I am sorry, but I cannot clarify that, for the reason that I gave about the normal protocol.

My view had been that removing the context of prostitution from this offence and relying instead on a statutory definition of sexual services cannot precisely draw the parameters that we need for the law to be clear and easily understood. Lord Morrow quoted the Bill that was published in Dublin last week. I notice that the proposal in that Bill confines the offence to:

“purchasing sexual services in the context of prostitution”.

That is very different from where we are. It is not actually the case that Dublin is following Belfast; Dublin is thinking carefully and clearly in a way that I honestly believe this House has failed to do. When I was considering those points, I asked Lord Morrow to consider either reinstating the prostitution element or amending the offence to remove the attempt to define sexual services. The offence would then rely solely on the Public Prosecution Service

and the courts as arbiters of the Assembly's policy intent, rather than on statute. Any statutory definition —

Mr Givan: I appreciate the Minister giving way. He indicates that it would be left to the courts to establish the Assembly's policy intent. I do not accept that the amendment is vague. I believe that it deals effectively with an issue that needs to be dealt with, and the Attorney General supports that position. However, even if you accept that it would be left for the courts to establish the policy intent, where — throughout all that Lord Morrow has proposed, throughout a 1,300-page report of Justice Committee deliberations and throughout all these Assembly debates — would they ever find that the policy intent is what the Alliance Party is trying to say it to be? Nowhere on the record is that the case, because it is not the case.

Mr Ford: The issue is not what the Alliance Party wants the policy intent to be; the issue is ensuring that we do not have a statutory definition that creates more problems and has come about because of the attempt to remove the word “prostitution” from it. I believe that we have plenty of examples of where it is possible for the courts to interpret. Courts interpret appropriate policy intent day and daily without having matters spelt out. Any statutory definition is unlikely ever to be exhaustive without the context being set. It could inhibit the ability of the judiciary to interpret the wording of the offence in a flexible and sensible way. I retain those concerns.

I was not able to persuade Lord Morrow of my position, and he did not persuade me of his. Therefore, his amendment is tabled without agreement. I genuinely believe that, by dealing with this aspect of seeking to produce a statutory definition in a way that is almost trying to tackle prostitution without actually using the word “prostitution” in the context of a Bill dealing with trafficking rather than taking a comprehensive look at sexual offences in general, we in the House are running into difficulties in a way that makes it likely that this law will become extremely difficult for the police and the Public Prosecution Service. We may have to re-examine it in a few years' time as we report on its operation, as we or, at least, others in this place after us will be obliged to do.

I also retain doubts about the proposals for the offence being available for trial in the Crown Court. From a departmental point of view, it seems unlikely that the offence as drafted will allow for a sufficient range of factors to demarcate a summary trial from an indictable option. Again, this position was not accepted by the Bill sponsor. The option to try in the Crown Court remains. Amendment Nos 7 and 8, therefore, simply correct errors in the penalties that are available for both summary and indictable convictions.

Finally, I asked for some change to be made to the duty to report to the Assembly on a number of aspects of the Bill, both on human trafficking and on the operation of the new article 64A. The Department's view is that the duty to report on the operation of the new offence did not provide sufficient scope to include a duty to report on convictions for trafficking offences under sections 2 and 4 of the Act and on the extent to which the new offence has operated to reduce human trafficking. The new offence, unlike the existing one, has no connection with trafficking, and convictions will not be related to trafficking. However, I failed to persuade Lord Morrow of the sense

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of a statutory separation of the duty to report, although, in effect, this would have continued to result in identical reporting arrangements to the Assembly. Amendment No 12, therefore, represents a compromise for a single duty to report to be contained in the Act rather than, as previously drafted, in the Sexual Offences Order.

I want to make it absolutely clear that the amendments to clause 15 that have been jointly tabled do not represent in their entirety the changes that the Department would like to have seen made to the provisions, most of which were rejected by the Bill sponsor. However, given that the Department was involved in the process of reaching a compromise on some of these issues, I have added my name to those amendments. They represent only the extent of the outcome of negotiations. Research has shown that this new offence is unlikely to succeed in reducing the demand for paid sex and, therefore, may have limited effect in changing the market for trafficking for sexual exploitation. However, the Assembly has made clear its desire to take this path. I have, therefore, agreed to amendment Nos 5 to 9, 11 and 12 but continue to caution against the amendment to the definition of sexual services.

I now turn briefly to amendment Nos 13 and 14, which amend clauses 19 and 20 respectively and have been tabled by Lord Morrow.

5.15 pm

Again, whilst I understand that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is, in principle, supportive of these amendments, the Executive have not had the opportunity to agree the changes they would incorporate. I understand, however, that DHSSPS officials have worked with the Office of the Legislative Counsel and Lord Morrow to ensure that the intentions of the previous clauses 19 and 20 are deliverable in practice.

The proposed amendments combine the provisions in those two previous clauses into one clause 19, so that clause 20 is no longer required. This seems to be a sensible approach. I am sure that Members will be reassured to note that the key elements of clause 20 — the requirement to develop a strategy, and the requirement to involve other Northern Ireland Departments — have been retained. Again, whilst not formally approved by the Executive, I suspect that they will be acceptable to the House.

I note the move to a three-year strategy rather than an annual review, which will allow the strategy to provide a longer-term focus whilst retaining flexibility to quickly incorporate learning identified at the point of delivery. Again, this seems to be the sensible approach.

With the exception of amendment No 10 to clause 15, I commend the amendments to the House.

Lord Morrow: At this stage of our debate, I would like to thank everyone who has taken part. To all intents and purposes, it has been a good debate.

Right from the first day that I set out on this road, there were those in this House — some of them not here today — and those outside it who said that I had an ulterior agenda; that my Bill was just a cover for something else. I hope that I have made it clear, not only in the content of the Bill but in the amendments, that my Bill does what it says on the face of it, nothing more and nothing less, and

that it has no agenda other than to tackle human trafficking and exploitation. That has been at the root of my Bill and the drive behind it. That is why I brought it to the House and why I want it to succeed. I think that, to all intents and purposes, it has succeeded and will succeed. There are those even today who have tried to read into my Bill things that, they feel, it will do, and, I feel, it will do no such thing.

I am not ungrateful to those who stated where they feel that it should be different. That is fair enough. However, I take great exception to those who criticised me personally and my Bill and who are not here today to put their case. They seem to have disappeared into the sunset. Those sort of people will want to ask themselves questions. I suspect that the public will also want to ask them why they were not here today to put their case in relation to these amendments, and to the Bill, which is now virtually at its end game. They were not here for the long haul, but I suppose that we have in the Assembly, as in every walk of life, sprinters and long-distance runners. The long-distance runners are here today and the sprinters are elsewhere.

I listened carefully to the points that were made, particularly around amendment No 10. I will reiterate the key points. The practice that amendment No 10 covers is a sad reality and a driver for human trafficking. I emphasise again and again, and will emphasise as often as I possibly can, that this Bill is about tackling human trafficking; one of the greatest scourges in society, and not only here but across the world. The last figure that I heard for the numbers trafficked across the world was something like 90 million.

We can be a leader in relation to this scourge of human trafficking in this region of the United Kingdom. I do believe, no matter what the Minister says, that the Government in the Irish Republic are taking a long, hard look and there is every potential that they will go down the same road as us in tackling this scourge and implementing some of the legislation that we will have in the Assembly if it gets onto the statute book. As I said earlier, if I had not dealt with this issue and had ignored the scenario that the Bill seeks to address, it would have been a sad dereliction of my duty.

Members will recall that, when I first came to the House to talk about my Bill, I quoted a very famous individual, the great William Wilberforce, who was a great abolitionist. When he addressed MPs all those years ago, he spoke the immortal words:

“you may choose to look the other way but you can never again say that you did not know.”

If there are some who, even after this debate, feel that they cannot support some of the amendments, that is a matter for them, but I urge them to rethink. I can say, without a shadow of a doubt, that, when I was dealing with amendment No 10, I spoke to the Attorney General. If someone can direct me to a higher court or a higher authority on these matters, I am ready to listen. If so, that person can tell me, “You shouldn’t have gone there with it; you should’ve gone somewhere else”. If so, I would like to hear from you; maybe you will come to me privately afterwards.

First, the Attorney General is very clear that amendment No 10 will address the need to cover demand for the scenario where a person is exploited to provide sexual services in the form of the sexual touching of themselves

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observed by the client. Secondly, he is very clear that amendment No 10 will not criminalise lap dancing and stripping, as some have tried to insinuate here today.

Mr Dickson said that the amendment would cover that type of activity and even watching films. I suspect that, no matter what I say, Mr Dickson will be of the same opinion when he walks out through the door today, because there is none as blind as those who will not see and there is none as deaf as those who will not hear. There are some who, no matter what I say today, have their minds made up that this measure will not be effective or that it will go into other territory. As I said, I cannot go anywhere else for advice, other than the channels through which I went. Amendment No 10, and I urge the House to consider it, is crucial.

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Yes, I will.

Mr McCartney: I do not think that any of us doubt the principle behind you trying to close that gap. As we heard today, perhaps the gap in all this was the absence of the amendment at Committee Stage, where we could have examined it and tested it with the Attorney General.

We are getting two conflicting reports. The Minister says he has received legal advice that gives one view, and you say you have received other legal advice that gives another view. So, there is a genuine dilemma, and you cannot accuse people of turning and looking the other way. We are trying to make sure that, in six or nine months, we do not have to come back and say, "There was an unintended consequence, which we should have avoided".

Lord Morrow: I heard what the Member said. He quoted the Minister saying that he has got legal advice. There have not been many differences between me and the Minister on the Bill — I want to emphasise that — and it is better sometimes to build on the positives. However, maybe the Minister will do what I have done and reveal his legal advice. Who gave that legal advice? I am quite clear about where I got mine, and I have made it known on the Floor today who gave me that advice. Maybe, the Minister will feel obliged to be similarly transparent and will tell us where he got his legal advice.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Yes.

Mr Allister: The Member knows that I am supportive of his Bill. On this point about amendment No 10, it would seem to me that the key words that inform the amendment are the words already in article 64A(4), as set forth in clause 15(4), where it says:

"No offence is committed under this Article unless the sexual services that are provided or are to be provided by B to A involve",

and then the Bill sets out physical action between B and A, one way or the other.

The amendment introduces "B touching B", as opposed to A or B touching each other. But might it not be that the key consideration is whether, in B touching B, they are providing a service to A? In other words, are the key words "provided by B to A" a specific requirement of the offending; namely, that B touching B must be specifically for the purpose of providing a service to A? Or is it enough that it is a generic service to anyone and all and sundry

who might be present? If it is premised upon it having to be provided by B to A, is it not a specific requirement of the offending in respect of B touching B that it is specifically directed at A? Would that not, therefore, take you outside the lap-dancing situation, unless it was a one-to-one scenario of lap dancing? If multiple people are present at the lap dance, where is the proof that the service is provided from B to A in B touching B? I think that the distinction might be whether it is a generic requirement that it is simply a provision of a service, or a specific requirement of the provision. Maybe the Member has a view about that.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for what he said. I listened as carefully as possible. Let me say this: amendment No 10, which may be worth repeating, states:

"B touching B in a sexual manner for the sexual gratification of A, B being physically in A's presence."

I thought that it was quite clear what we were trying to do here. Let me also say that, as I said earlier, we know that people are actually trafficked for this sort of activity. This House, and I in particular, feel that I would be failing in my duties if I did not seek to address such a situation. I believe that the Bill would be less effective than ever was intended, and I believe that potentially other things could have been happening that we missed on an occasion like this. That is why I say to the House, "Think very, very carefully before you vote against this."

Mr McCartney has said that he feels that there is a gap here, and he referred to the two sets of legal advice. It has to be said that Bills can be amended. If, at a later date, it is discovered that the Bill requires an amendment, it can be brought back to the House. Having listened to the tone of the debate, not only today but at the previous stage, I believe that there would be an appetite in the Assembly to make it as tight as possible.

I believe that if we go for amendment No 10 on clause 15, we have all the issues covered.

I strongly commend it to the House and, as I said earlier, I ask Members to think very carefully before they vote against this. I think that it needs to be repeated that the Attorney General has assured me that this is the way to go. I cannot turn to anyone else. I will leave it, and Members can now make up their mind.

5.30 pm

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Yes.

Mr McCartney: Is there not a point about the ability to bring the Bill back and amend it in the future? It is also open to you to do that, but, where there is a genuine doubt about the advice — and I think that you have to accept that there is — some Members have not got the opportunity to speak to the Attorney General or, like the Minister, to take legal advice. Prior to both of you speaking, we had outlined that other people are saying that there is a possibility of unintended consequences, and we have to protect ourselves from that as well.

Lord Morrow: In relation to access to the Attorney General, I understand that his office and his services are available to individual MLAs who want to seek his advice in relation to a piece of legislation. Therefore, his door is

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always open. I am not speaking on behalf of him, and I need to be careful here, but I want to say that I understand that his services are readily available to any MLA who feels that they need to go to him and talk to him, not least about a piece of legislation that will go through the House. Therefore, I will stop there. I will leave it up to Members to decide, and I emphasise that I strongly urge them to support amendment No 10 in relation to clause 15.

Amendment No 5 agreed to.

Amendment No 6 made: In page 9, line 23, at end insert

“and A knows or believes that the payment is made or promised by a third party.”— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 7 made: In page 9, line 26, leave out “level 3 on the standard scale” and insert “the statutory maximum”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 8 made: In page 9, line 29, leave out “not exceeding the statutory maximum”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 9 made: In page 9, line 33, after “services” insert “(other than sexual services)”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 10 proposed: In page 9, line 38, after “sexual” insert

“; or

(d) B touching B in a sexual manner for the sexual gratification of A, B being physically in A's presence.”— [Lord Morrow.]

Question put, That amendment No 10 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 52; Noes 35.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Maurice Devenney, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Ms McGahan, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Dickson and Mr McCarthy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment No 11 made: In page 9, line 39, leave out paragraph (5) and insert

“(5) B does not commit an offence by doing anything which (apart from this paragraph) would amount to—

(a) aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring the commission of an offence under this Article by A;

(b) conspiring with A to commit an offence under this Article; or

(c) an offence under Part 2 of the Serious Crime Act 2007 (encouraging or assisting offences) in relation to the commission of an offence under this Article by A.”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 12 made: In page 10, leave out lines 1 to 17 and insert

“(5) The Department must before the coming into operation of subsection (4) raise public awareness of the change in the law to be effected by that subsection.

(6) The Department must, at the end of the period of 3 years beginning with the coming into operation of subsection (4), review the operation of Article 64A of the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 and lay before the Assembly a report on that review; that report must in particular include—

(a) information as to the number of arrests and convictions during that period in respect of offences under Article 64A;

(b) the Department's assessment of the impact of Article 64A on the safety and well-being of persons providing for payment sexual services of the kind to which that Article applies;

(c) information as to the number of arrests and convictions in the period covered by the report in respect of—

(i) offences under section 2 committed with a view to exploitation that consists of or includes behaviour within section 3(3) (sexual exploitation);

(ii) offences under section 4 committed with the intention of committing an offence mentioned in subparagraph (i); and

(d) the Department's assessment of the extent to which Article 64A has operated to reduce human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Clause 19 (Assistance and support for exiting prostitution)

Amendment No 13 made: In page 13, leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert

“(1) The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety must, in conjunction with the other Northern Ireland departments, prepare and publish a strategy in relation to actions to be taken by Northern Ireland departments in the exercise of their respective functions to ensure that a programme of assistance and support is made available to persons who wish to leave prostitution.

(2) The strategy must—

(a) be published no later than 10 months after the coming into operation of this section; and

(b) provide for a programme of support and assistance to be made available in accordance with the strategy no later than 1 April 2016.

(2A) The strategy must ensure that assistance and support provided to a person—

(a) is not conditional on the person acting as a witness in any criminal proceedings;

(b) is provided only with the agreement of that person; and

(c) is provided in a manner which takes due account of the needs of that person as regards safety and protection from harm.

(2B) The strategy must ensure that assistance and support is offered from a person who is of the same gender as the person receiving it.

(2C) The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety must, in conjunction with the other Northern Ireland departments—

(a) review the strategy (or revised strategy) for the time being published under this section at intervals of not more than 3 years; and

(b) if appropriate, revise the strategy and publish the revised strategy.”— [Lord Morrow.]

Clause 20 (Strategy on assistance and support for exiting prostitution)

Amendment No 14 made: In page 13, leave out clause 20.— [Lord Morrow.]

Clause 22 (Independent Legal Guardian)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Members, there are a number of conversations going on. I urge you to respect the Chamber so that we can all hear what is being said.

Amendment No 15 made: In page 13, line 31, leave out “Independent Legal Guardian” and insert “independent guardian”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 16 made: In page 14, line 2, leave out from “or” to end of line 4 and insert

“(2A) This section also applies to a child who appears to the Regional Health and Social Care Board to be a separated child.”— [Lord Morrow.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Amendment Nos 17 to 24 have already been debated and are consequential to amendment No 15. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group these amendments for the Question.

Amendment No 17 made: In page 14, line 8, leave out “Independent Legal Guardian” and insert “independent guardian”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 18 made: In page 14, line 15, leave out “Independent Legal Guardian” and insert “independent guardian”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 19 made: In page 14, line 22, leave out “Independent Legal Guardian” and insert “independent guardian”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 20 made: In page 14, line 27, leave out “Independent Legal Guardian” and insert “independent guardian”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 21 made: In page 14, line 34, leave out “Independent Legal Guardian” and insert “independent guardian”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 22 made: In page 14, line 35, leave out “Independent Legal Guardian” and insert “independent guardian”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 23 made: In page 14, line 37, leave out “Independent Legal Guardian” and insert “independent guardian”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 24 made: In page 14, Line 39, leave out “Independent Legal Guardian” and insert “independent guardian”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 25 made: In page 14, line 41, after “ascertaining” insert “and communicating”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Amendment Nos 26 to 28 have already been debated and are consequential to amendment No 15 and related amendments. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group these amendments for the Question.

Amendment No 26 made: In page 15, line 18, leave out “Independent Legal Guardian” and insert “independent guardian”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 27 made: In page 15, line 24, leave out “Independent Legal Guardians” and insert “independent guardians”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 28 made: In page 15, line 25, leave out “Independent Legal Guardian” and insert “independent guardian”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 29 made: In page 15, line 36, leave out from “who” to end of line 41 and insert

“who—

(a) is not ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland;

(b) is separated from all persons who—

(i) have parental responsibility for the child; or

(ii) before the child’s arrival in Northern Ireland, were responsible for the child whether by law or custom; and

(c) because of that separation, may be at risk of harm.

(11) A reference in any other statutory provision to the guardian of a child does not include a reference to an independent guardian appointed under this section.”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Clause 23 (Defence for slavery and trafficking victims in relation to certain offences)

Amendment No 30 made: In page 16, line 37, leave out from “any of the following offences” to end of line 1 on page 17 and insert

“—

(a) an offence under—

(i) section 4(2) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 committed in respect of a Class B or Class C drug;

(ii) section 5(2) of that Act committed in respect of a Class B drug;

(iii) section 6(2) of that Act;

(b) an offence under section 26A(3)(a), (b), (d), (e), (f) or (g) of the Immigration Act 1971;

(c) an offence under section 1, 2, 3 or 4 of the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981;

(d) an offence under section 106 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999;

(e) an offence under section 4 of the Identity Documents Act 2010.— [Lord Morrow.]

Clause 24 (Protection of slavery and trafficking victims in criminal investigations)

Amendment No 31 made: In page 17, line 5, leave out “victim” and insert “complainant”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Amendment Nos 32 to 43 have already been debated and are consequential to amendment No 31. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group the amendments for the Question.

Amendment No 32 made: In page 17, line 8, leave out “victim” and insert “complainant”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 33 made: In page 17, line 11, leave out “victim” and insert “complainant”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 34 made: In page 17, line 13, leave out “victim’s” and insert “complainant’s”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 35 made: In page 17, line 14, leave out “victim” and insert “complainant”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 36 made: In page 17, line 15, leave out “victim” and insert “complainant”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 37 made: In page 17, line 17, leave out “victim” and insert “complainant”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 38 made: In page 17, line 19, leave out “victim” and insert “complainant”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 39 made: In page 17, line 22, leave out “victim” and insert “complainant”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 40 made: In page 17, line 23, leave out “victim” and insert “complainant”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 41 made: In page 17, line 26, leave out “victim” and insert “complainant”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 42 made: In page 17, line 26, leave out “victim’s” and insert “complainant’s”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Amendment No 43 made: In page 17, line 28, at end insert

“(2) In this section—

“the accused” means a person who is alleged to have committed, or has committed, an offence under section 1 or 2;

“complainant” means a person against or in relation to whom an offence under section 1 or 2 is alleged to have been committed, or has been committed.”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Clause 26 (Northern Ireland Rapporteur)

Amendment No 44 made: In page 18, leave out clause 26.— [Lord Morrow.]

Clause 29 (Orders and regulations)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Amendment No 45 has already been debated and is consequential to amendment No 4.

Amendment No 45 made: In page 20, line 3, at end insert“(za) an order under section 13(5A) (power to amend body to be notified about suspected victims);”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Amendment No 46 has already been debated and is consequential to amendment No 15 and to the related amendments to clause 22.

Amendment No 46 made: In page 20, line 15, leave out from “child” to “order” on line 16 and insert

“independent guardians) shall not be made unless a draft of the regulations”.— [Lord Morrow.]

Clause 30 (Short title and commencement)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Amendment No 47 has already been debated.

Amendment No 47 made: In page 20, line 24, leave out subsection (2) and insert

“(2) Except as provided by the following subsections, this Act comes into operation on the day after Royal Assent.

(3) The following provisions come into operation on such day or days as the Department may by order appoint—

(a) section 11 (with Schedule 3);

(b) section 13.

(4) Sections 12 and 21 come into operation one month after Royal Assent.

(5) Section 15(1) to (4) and (6) comes into operation on 1 June 2015.

(6) Section 22(1) to (3) and (5) to (11) comes into operation 10 months after Royal Assent.”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Schedule 3 (Slavery and trafficking prevention orders)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Amendment No 48 has already been debated.

Amendment No 48 made: In page 38, line 22, leave out head (c).— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Amendment Nos 49 to 55 have already been debated and are consequential to amendment No 48. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group the amendments for the Question.

Amendment No 49 made: In page 38, line 23, leave out “, the Secretary of State or the Commissioners” and insert “or the Secretary of State”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Amendment No 50 made: In page 38, line 30, leave out “, the Secretary of State or the Commissioners” and insert “or the Secretary of State”.— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Amendment No 51 made: In page 38, line 31, leave out “, the Secretary of State or the Commissioners’ and insert

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'or the Secretary of State'.— [Mr Ford (*The Minister of Justice*).]

Amendment No 52 made: In page 39, leave out lines 4 and 5.— [Mr Ford (*The Minister of Justice*).]

Amendment No 53 made: In page 39, leave out line 21.— [Mr Ford (*The Minister of Justice*).]

Amendment No 54 made: In page 39, line 28, leave out "(c) the Commissioners.".— [Mr Ford (*The Minister of Justice*).]

Amendment No 55 made: In page 39, line 31, leave out "the Secretary of State or the Commissioners" and insert "or the Secretary of State".— [Mr Ford (*The Minister of Justice*).]

Amendment No 56 made: In page 39, line 37, after "may" insert ", subject to paragraph (3A).".— [Mr Ford (*The Minister of Justice*).]

Amendment No 57 made: In page 39, line 42, at end insert

*"(3A) The information must be destroyed no later than the date on which the offender ceases to be subject to notification requirements.".— [Mr Ford (*The Minister of Justice*).]*

Schedule 4 (Minor and consequential amendments)

Amendment No 58 made: In page 44, line 12, at end insert

"THE SEXUAL OFFENCES (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 2008 (NI 2)

7A.—(1) In Article 22(2)(b) (meeting child following sexual grooming, etc.) for paragraph (ii) substitute—

"(ii) an offence under section 2 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (human trafficking) committed with a view to exploitation that consists of or includes behaviour within section 3(3) of that Act (sexual exploitation), or".

*(2) In Article 58(7) for "Articles 59 to 60" substitute "Article 60".— [Mr Ford (*The Minister of Justice*).]*

Schedule 5 (Repeals)

Amendment No 59 made: In page 47, line 4, column 2, at beginning insert

"

Article 59.

— [Mr Ford (*The Minister of Justice*).]

Amendment No 60 made: In page 47, line 11, at end insert

"

The Policing and Crime Section 15.
Act 2009 (c. 26)

— [Mr Ford (*The Minister of Justice*).]

Long Title

Amendment No 61 made: In the long title, leave out from "offences" to end and insert

", slavery and other forms of exploitation, including measures to prevent and combat such exploitation and to provide support for victims of such exploitation; and for connected purposes."— [Lord Morrow.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That concludes the Further Consideration Stage of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Adjourned at 6.00 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 2 December 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

British-Irish Council: Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-used Languages

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. In accordance with the statutory requirements, I wish to make the following statement on the indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages (IML) meeting of the British-Irish Council (BIC), which took place in Cardiff on 24 October 2014. I attended the meeting as appropriate Minister in place of the Minister of Culture Arts and Leisure, who was unable to attend. The Minister for Social Development attended as accompanying Minister.

The Welsh Government hosted the meeting, which was chaired by Carwyn Jones AM, First Minister of Wales. The Irish Government were represented by Joe McHugh TD, Minister of State for Gaeltacht Affairs. The British Government were represented by Clive Barbour, head of international, social and economic engagement at the NIO. The Scottish Government were represented by Alasdair Allan MSP, Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages. The Government of Guernsey were represented by Deputy Michael O'Hara, Minister at the Culture and Leisure Department. The Government of Jersey were represented by Tony Scott Warren, language officer. Finally, the Isle of Man Government were represented by the Tim Crookall MHK, the Minister for Education and Children.

One of the two main themes of the meeting focused on the place of indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages in early years education. This is an area that Ministers had asked officials to examine and was the subject of an expert and stakeholder seminar entitled 'Promoting IML languages through early years education' organised by the British-Irish Council in Cardiff in November 2012. The Council endorsed a paper that captured the key issues in developing and supporting early years education and childcare within indigenous, minority, and lesser-used language communities. The Council also agreed the important role that encouraging linguistic continuity can play through the use of IML languages in childcare and early years education settings in each jurisdiction. In order to achieve that, it is necessary to identify needs, plan for provision and develop resources in the workforce, including through relevant professional development. Quality practice development and the use of relevant research also have a key role to play.

The meeting also received a presentation by Professor Rob Dunbar from Edinburgh University on the second theme of the meeting, which focused on the official report of the British-Irish Council's seminar on language policy and legislation. The seminar was held in Edinburgh in November 2013 and considered language legislation in BIC member Administrations and further afield. It also considered how to embed IML languages in other legislation; the role of policy as opposed to legislation in supporting and developing IML languages; external influences on IML languages policy; and reflections on the first year of the Welsh Language Commissioner.

The Council noted the report and discussed the important role that legislative, regulatory and policy approaches can play in support of IML languages, whether suitable initiatives in this regard may be appropriate to their jurisdiction and how continued sharing of best practice in the area of language legislation and/or regulation could further support IML languages across the BIC jurisdictions.

The Council also reviewed a report prepared by officials detailing the other activities of the IML languages work sector since the last ministerial meeting in November 2011. Ministers noted the continuing sharing of good practice between member Administrations on language issues. They especially commended the range of bilateral and other relationships built up and facilitated through membership of the Council and the opportunities that those relationships have presented. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that these contacts have been beneficial for the smaller BIC Administrations.

Finally, the Council considered and approved proposals for the future work programme of the IML languages work sector. This will focus on issues relating to language learning for adults, marketing, the arts and digital media, the links between language and the wider economy, and the role of the community in sustaining IML languages. The Council also expressed its view that the three-year cycle between ministerial meetings was too lengthy and requested that consideration be given to more regular ministerial meetings.

Mr McCausland (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): The work that is carried forward on indigenous minority languages is largely done not at ministerial meetings but in the ongoing work programme between officials. How is the information, good practice and so on that is discovered through that work disseminated to the Department and more widely in culture, arts and leisure in Northern Ireland? I appreciate that the junior Minister is standing in for the Culture Minister, but maybe I could get an indication subsequently.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for his question. He is aware that I attended the BIC meeting on behalf of the Culture Minister. I do not have the complete answer that he requires, but I will certainly pass his question on to the Minister and maybe get a written reply.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis. An dtig liom a fhiafraí den Aire faoin pholasaí teanga, mar an dara téama? Will the Minister give us more information on the second theme of the meeting, which was language policy and legislation? What consideration was given to embedding IML languages in other legislation?

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for his question. As I said, the meeting received a presentation from Professor Rob Dunbar, which discussed languages legislation and embedding indigenous minority languages in legislation. There was quite a bit of discussion on the Scottish and Welsh models in particular and on how, when legislation is brought forward, the rights of those language speakers are enshrined in law, how that affords protection for the rights of citizens to use those languages and how it also helps to develop the languages. Ministers felt that it was important to enshrine that in legislation.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaimse buíochas fosta leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis ar maidin. Ag amharc ar an darna leathanach den ráiteas, is iontach liom an meas atá ag muintir na hAlban agus ag muintir na Breataine Bige ar a dteangacha, agus ritheann sé liom gur trua nach léirítear an meas céadna ar an Ghaeilge anseo. In reference to the theme of legislation and policy, it strikes me that the people of Scotland and Wales have great respect for their languages; perhaps there are people here who could learn something from them. Tá ceist agam faoin téama áirithe sin. Will the Minister tell us what she learned from the discussions around legislation that might be helpful to us here as we plan an Irish language Act? Go raibh míle maith agat.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for his question. As I said in my previous answer, there was quite a lengthy discussion around how legislation enshrines the rights of speakers, particularly the Irish language Act here. The Member will be aware that the CAL Minister believes that legislation is very important for the status that it affords the language and for protecting the rights of citizens to use it. Obviously, it requires the agreement of the Executive and the Assembly. The Minister is on record as saying that, if local agreement cannot be achieved, there is a commitment in the St Andrews Agreement for the British Government to introduce an Irish language Act here. The Minister believes that they should honour that commitment.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for her statement. Does she agree with the Church of Ireland that support and respect for linguistic diversity is vital in a shared society? What best-practice policy approaches were discussed at that meeting that might help us to lead in relation to respect for linguistic diversity in Northern Ireland?

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for his question. I agree that making a mockery of someone's language or insulting an entire language community serves no purpose at all. I made some comments in my previous answer about the legislation. Also discussed at the meeting was the importance of encouraging and developing early years

education and learning through the medium of a particular language. If people start learning a language at an early stage and it is open to all members of the community, that is the way to show clear respect. As the language develops, it will gain respect from all communities, no matter which community anyone is from.

Mr D McIlveen: In relation to the Minister's last question, surely considerable respect is shown for the diversity of languages in Northern Ireland; we are the only part of the United Kingdom that provides an interpreting service for all our ethnic minority communities. We are unique in that regard, and we should be very proud of that. What discussion took place around how we recognise all the minority languages in Northern Ireland, which, of course, take in many of our recent immigrants over the last 10 years from eastern Europe and other parts of the world?

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for his question. He makes a valid point about the importance of translating for people from countries that do not have English as their first language. We are looking at making it easy for people to understand services that are there for them, and we need to ensure that interpretive services are provided in a language that people understand. The Gaeltacht Quarter or the Ulster-Scots hub and visitor centre, which opened last week, are also very important because it is not just about the language; it is about people learning about the culture and all that. It is important that those places are open for people, particularly those from different ethnic minority backgrounds, so that we have that richness. Diversity is where we want to go; we want to see respect and tolerance, as they make our whole society much richer.

10.45 am

Mr Allister: I suppose it is a commentary in itself that it took six weeks to make this statement and that this useful body only meets once every three years. However, given that there is a real deficit in our early education years of introducing our children to real, meaningful languages that will have commercial use for them in the future and be to the benefit of the country, would the Ministers not have been better spending their time discussing that, rather than discussing esoteric, hobby-language pursuits?

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for his question. I found the discussion of languages quite beneficial. The Irish language — I am assuming that is what the Member is referring to — is a very vibrant language, which is treasured by a certain community. We have to look at the Gaeltacht Quarter and how it has developed and sustained a vibrant economy. There is benefit in maximising and realising all the social and economic benefits that come from that.

British-Irish Council: Summit

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):

Mr Speaker, in accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the twenty-third summit meeting of the British-Irish Council, which took place in Douglas, Isle of Man on 28 November 2014. The deputy First Minister and I attended the summit. The First Minister was unable to attend and, in accordance with the provisions of the 1998 Act, nominated me to attend in his place.

The Isle of Man Government hosted the summit, and the heads of delegations were welcomed by the Chief Minister of the Isle of Man, the honourable Allan Bell MHK. The Irish government were led by the Taoiseach, Mr Enda Kenny TD. The United Kingdom Government were led by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP. The Welsh Government were led by the First Minister, the Rt Hon Carwyn Jones AM. The Scottish Government were led by the First Minister, Ms Nicola Sturgeon MSP. The Government of Jersey were led by the Chief Minister, Senator Ian Gorst, and the Government of Guernsey were led by the Chief Minister, Jonathan Le Tocq.

These twice-yearly summits continue to provide an opportunity for the British-Irish Council to play its unique and important role in furthering, promoting and developing links between its member Administrations through positive, practical relationships and in providing a forum for consultation and exchange of information on matters of mutual interest within the competence of those Administrations.

Digital inclusion, which is one of the BIC work streams and was an agenda item at the meeting, is about ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to benefit from the potential of information technology. It was appropriate, therefore, that, although this was the twenty-third summit of the Council, it was our first e-summit.

As is now customary at each summit, the Council discussed the current economic situation. Each member Administration outlined their latest economic indicators and the strategies that they are putting in place. We were pleased to be able to report that there are positive signals of growth across a range of economic indicators and that the cautious optimism recorded at the previous summit has been sustained. We were particularly pleased to report our recent successes on the job-creation and investment fronts.

As its main agenda item, the Council also discussed the benefits and increasing importance of digital participation in everyday life. We reviewed audiovisual material produced collaboratively by the work stream to highlight these benefits and the disadvantages of exclusion. The Council was updated on examples of work under way in the different BIC jurisdictions to promote digital inclusion.

The Council agreed the importance of ensuring that everyone in their jurisdictions has the opportunity to share in the benefits of technology and the Internet, and the potential contribution towards wider government policies, for example accessing public services and tackling issues like social isolation. We discussed the training being provided in Northern Ireland to enable the harder-to-reach, digitally excluded sections of the population to gain

digital skills and to access digital services. The Council agreed that officials in the BIC digital inclusion work sector should continue to collaborate on the common themes of people, partnerships and policies and investigate potential opportunities for research cooperation.

The Council noted the work that had taken place across each of the twelve British-Irish Council work sectors since the previous summit in June 2014. In particular, the Council noted the decisions made at three successful BIC ministerial meetings held in that period, namely the BIC misuse of substances, BIC indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages, and BIC environment work sector meetings.

Ministers also noted that further ministerial discussions are planned in a number of work sectors in 2015.

The Council also reviewed the latest youth employment statistics across the Administrations and welcomed the encouraging picture emerging in this important area. The Council noted the secretariat's mid-year progress against its business plan. Finally, the Council noted that the next BIC summit would be hosted by the Irish Government in June 2015 with a focus on the use and misuse of alcohol.

Mr Weir: He has obviously been promoted today. Can I ask the Minister what the Northern Ireland Executive are doing to increase digital inclusion?

Mr Hamilton: It is just a temporary promotion, obviously. In the BIC, the Isle of Man leads on digital inclusion. This was the 23rd summit but the first e-summit of the British-Irish Council. There are a growing number of government and private sector services being made available online. I think that that is reasonable, particularly in the circumstances we find ourselves in, and I know only too well in my role as Finance Minister the pressures that Departments face. It can save money, importantly, and make services more accessible to our people, but it is important that, in so doing, we are careful and mindful of the fact that there are some who are outside the digital ways of life. It is almost second nature for young people nowadays, but there are people for whom using the Internet is not something that they are comfortable with or confident in doing. It is important that we continue to work at increasing the number of people in Northern Ireland who are digitally included.

The figures have increased. The work of Go ON NI, which is an initiative led by my Department to get more people online, has reported great success over the last four years. Since its operation, it has increased the number of adults using the internet by 10%, to a total of 80%, which is quite impressive and compares very favourably with other BIC areas. However, it still means that one in five people is not on the Internet, so we continue to work on programmes, particularly with people who are harder to reach, those who live in rural areas, people with disabilities and older people. As is common across the BIC area, we have been using the libraries infrastructure as a way to reach those who do not use the Internet and digital channels to access services.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, given that more and more computer applications depend on a high-speed connection to maximise the potential of the Internet, will you elaborate on what discussions took place regarding digital inclusion for rural areas in the North of Ireland?

Mr Hamilton: We should be rightly proud that we were the first region, not just in the British-Irish Council area but in Europe, to have 100% access to broadband for our citizens. I appreciate that, in some parts of Northern Ireland, the speeds available are perhaps not as fast as they are here in Belfast or in some other urban areas, but we are in a stronger position than they are in many other areas in the BIC area. I noticed in the discussions that we had at the summit that the Administrations of Scotland and Wales commented on how the topography and geography of their countries made it very difficult to get anywhere near the level of access to broadband that we have.

I entirely appreciate the point that the Member makes. I know that there has been work conducted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to identify what are described as "not-spots", where there are lower speeds and sometimes difficulties in getting any sort of signal at all. There are plans and programmes in place to invest in that sort of infrastructure. It is important that, while we fill in the gaps where there are slower speeds of access to the Internet, we continue to invest. We cannot take it for granted. Just because we are the first region in Europe to have 100% access to broadband, we cannot rest on our laurels. Technology is changing all the time. We need to continue to invest so that we get superfast broadband, develop good 4G networks and always stay ahead of the game with the offer that we have not just for our citizens but for the companies that invest in Northern Ireland.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat arís, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis. I note that the Minister said that representatives were able to report positive signs of growth across a range of indicators in the economy. Was there any discussion of the damage being done to the economy by the austerity policies being pursued by the coalition Government in Westminster?

Mr Hamilton: There was a discussion around those issues. This was not only my first time on the Isle of Man but my first British-Irish Council summit. In the discussion around the economy, I found it interesting and useful that each of the eight member Administrations outlined how their economy was doing. It was also an opportunity, particularly with UK Government representatives there in the form of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Francis Maude, the Cabinet Office Minister, whilst being always cordial and friendly, to be direct in raising the concerns of our Administration. The deputy First Minister certainly raised these points, and the Welsh and Scottish Administrations said that, while their economies were showing signs of improvement, they had concerns. We are certainly matching Wales and are maybe a little further behind some of the economic developments in Scotland, but we are certainly up there and holding our own.

There was a degree of frankness and directness in raising issues around the reduction in public expenditure and how that is having and will continue to have an impact on our economy. As you might expect, the issue of welfare was also raised with the UK Administration, not always in a positive way. It was a good opportunity to be blunt with the Secretary of State about the impact of her Government's policies. We know that only too well in the House; we saw it recently in the draft Budget and will continue to see it in future Budgets.

Almost irrespective of who occupies 10 Downing Street after the next election, there will be reductions in expenditure. As Mr Campbell rightly pointed out, the Taoiseach pointed out to the meeting the significant steps that he had had to take. I am on record as having praised the courage that he and his Administration have shown in going after the need to reduce public expenditure and sometimes taking difficult decisions in raising taxes. It was useful, too, in the sense that it affects not just Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales but all of the British Isles.

Mr Swann: Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. The Minister concentrated on the e-commerce side of things. The Council also reviewed the latest youth employment statistics across all Administrations. How are we faring against the other regions in the UK and Ireland, and did he pick up any useful tips to bring home and give to our Employment and Learning Minister?

Mr Hamilton: I am always trying to find useful tips to give to all Ministers, not just the Employment Minister. Whether they listen to the advice that I give them is another matter entirely.

Dr Farry: I always listen.

Mr Hamilton: Always listen. There you go; very good. Whether he heeds it or not is a different matter altogether.

That was an area touched on in terms of the ongoing work of the Council and its work streams and work sectors, but it was not delved into particularly. It came up in the discussion on the economy. We should not rest on our laurels, but the Member and the House will be familiar with the fact that our unemployment has fallen considerably. We are now at the UK average, and we should welcome that. We should not be complacent: at 6%, there are still too many people unemployed and still work to be done. Within that, one of the worrying indicators, although it is improving, is the level of youth unemployment in Northern Ireland. It was noticeable, though, that we are not the worst by any means in the United Kingdom. The Employment Minister will be more familiar with these statistics than I am, but, having listened to the Welsh Administration talk about their problems, I think that they are in a graver position than us in respect of youth unemployment. Again, it is a challenge that affects every member Administration in the British-Irish Council. It is something that is worrying across the European Union.

That is why I have been supportive of many of the initiatives that the Minister for Employment and Learning has taken forward to try to address what is potentially a very damaging issue to our society and have assisted in the funding of some of them.

11.00 am

Mr Lyttle: Was an opportunity taken at the meeting to raise the difficulties surrounding the First Flight Wind offshore wind farm, which had the potential to create 100 jobs for Northern Ireland and to secure 13% of our energy from renewables?

Mr Hamilton: There was no opportunity to raise that issue, and it was not raised. Whilst I am concerned about the decision that has been taken by First Flight Wind, I am not familiar with the nuts and bolts of the issue so I do not want to comment on the whys and wherefores of the decision.

Obviously, the company took the decision, and I was not familiar with it until yesterday. If I had been able to raise it at the summit on Friday, I would have been almost a soothsayer. I would have been better doing the lottery that evening if I had been able to foresee the company taking the decision that it has taken in the past 24 hours. Obviously, it will greatly interest the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, who is responsible for energy policy in the Executive, and it is probably an issue that is better raised with her.

Mr Campbell: It is good to hear that all the Ministers got on so well and were able to speak in a language that everybody could understand.

The Minister mentioned the e-summit and the youth employment statistics. Was any comparison made between how we in Northern Ireland compare with the other BIC Administrations when it comes to young people applying for employment in Departments?

Mr Hamilton: There was no direct discussion on that issue. There was a lot of sharing of information and experience on unemployment, general economic conditions and issues around youth unemployment. The issue is, I understand, a standing item on the agenda for all summits, and, as concerns or issues on youth unemployment or young people applying for government positions develop, it will come to the Council's attention and could be discussed at future summits.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his statement. To what extent were the conclusions of the Smith commission discussed at the summit meeting?

Mr Hamilton: As you might expect, given that the Smith commission reported the previous day, it was a topic of considerable conversation at the summit, both at the meeting itself and on the margins. The deputy First Minister and I took the opportunity to have a bilateral meeting before the summit with the new Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, who was at her first BIC meeting as First Minister, and the issue was discussed then. It was also discussed at the summit.

There is a lot of detail in the Smith commission's report, which we will study as an Executive. Whilst the Scottish First Minister was at pains to stress that the report did not go far enough to please her and the Scottish Government, it is indicative of what is in play for the further devolution of powers, particularly tax powers, to the devolved Administrations, which include Wales and Northern Ireland. From the conversation that the deputy First Minister and I had with the Scottish First Minister, it became clear that, as they develop their thinking and understanding of the contents of the Smith commission report, especially on tax powers and welfare powers, when the Executive believe that there are opportunities for us, we will explore them with the Scottish Government, drawing on their experience of what happens from here on in.

The report was commissioned but will not be actioned for a while; it will be actioned over a period of time. It is incredibly important that the Executive work hand in glove with the Scottish Government and our counterparts in Wales. When there are opportunities for Northern Ireland and for the devolution of further powers that benefit the people of Northern Ireland, we should examine them seriously. We should learn from the other devolved Administrations. Part of the essence of devolution is

that we all move at slightly different speeds, in slightly different directions and at different paces, but there is a lot of commonality and a lot of things that we can learn from each other. That is what the British-Irish Council is all about. Given the hotness of the topic, it was a useful opportunity to discuss the Smith commission directly with the Scottish First Minister.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement. In relation to youth employment and, particularly, youth unemployment, was there any discussion about common strategies to tackle this sector, particularly in regard to digital technology use?

Mr Hamilton: The discussions on digital inclusion were very focused on how we make sure that the roll-out of government services in particular is as accessible to as many citizens as we can make it. We were on the Isle of Man, which is a very small economy that I am very envious of. It has reported 30 years' consecutive economic growth and unemployment at 2%. Oh, to have the problems of the Isle of Man. They have been able to change and adapt over the challenging period of the last number of years and get into, in particular, a lot of high-tech and digital industries such as e-gaming and e-banking. It has really grasped the whole area of potential in the private sector.

I am sure that the Employment Minister will agree that, as we bring people through our schools, our colleges and our universities, this is an area where there are increasing opportunities. We shared with the Council many positive indicators around the record year that Invest Northern Ireland had last year and the fact that, this year, it has already surpassed the number of jobs that it promoted last year. Many of those jobs have been, if not necessarily in the IT sector, with an IT basis to them. So, there are huge opportunities for our young people to get into employment through that sector in particular.

There has been useful work, not only on an east-west basis but on a North/South basis — the Employment Minister will be much more familiar with that than I — to learn from shared experiences and tackle youth unemployment. Indeed, I understand that there has been cross-border work on shared initiatives, particularly related to Europe, to help to fund perhaps some work in Northern Ireland and, indeed, in the Republic of Ireland. My view on working with other Administrations, whether on a North/South or east-west basis, is that we should not be afraid to learn from others and should not be afraid to work with others, if the end result is that it improves the lives of our citizens in Northern Ireland.

Executive Committee Business

Work and Families Bill: Final Stage

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

I beg to move

That the Work and Families Bill [NIA 34/11-15] do now pass.

I am pleased that the Bill has reached its Final Stage. This is an important and forward-looking Bill that promotes greater flexibility and choice for working people and, in particular, working parents. It establishes improved options for people who want to achieve a better balance between the demands of the workplace and the home. It does so, first and foremost, by giving working parents the option of sharing leave and pay entitlement following the birth or adoption of a child. It also extends the right to request flexible working to all qualifying employees. I thank all those who have given of their time to contribute to the Bill's progression and, in particular, the stakeholders who contributed so positively throughout the consultation process.

The Bill before us today will enable us to meet the needs of working parents more effectively while allowing employers to carry on running their business without unnecessary disruption. It establishes a progressive policy framework that recognises changing family roles and supports the contribution that fathers and partners increasingly want to make to the upbringing of their children. It is important that our workplaces support this change and that we address in a very positive way the historical and unhelpful assumptions that it will always be the mother who takes on the bulk of childcare and, along with it, a lengthy absence from work. At the same time, let me assure Members that the Bill in no way compromises the rights of mothers to take the full entitlement provided for them in the current arrangements.

I believe that the measures in the Bill will also make an important contribution to the work that is ongoing to promote gender equality in the workplace and in wider society. My Department has developed a gender action plan that seeks to build on the work being taken forward by the Executive to address the historical differences between men and women in pay and participation in the workforce.

We know that women are performing better than men in many different aspects and levels of the education and training system. However, there are issues with the representation of women within some key sectors of the economy, most notably those that are set to grow most rapidly over the coming years. Furthermore, there are issues regarding the retention and progression of women in the workplace, and it is to that aspect of providing equal opportunities that the Bill is most relevant.

While the Bill's focus is most directly on working parents, there are also benefits for business. Put very simply, we cannot expect to successfully operate in the global marketplace if we do not make the most of the local marketplace of talent. The sharing of parental leave will enable many employers to retain and develop talented individuals, particularly by helping working mothers to preserve a meaningful attachment to the workplace. That can only have a positive impact on skills retention and the flexibility of the Northern Ireland labour market.

Achieving a balance between employee and employer needs in a way that promotes economic well-being is central to what my Department is seeking to achieve through the current review of employment law. I am satisfied that the Bill meets that objective.

As Members may know, the new rights to shared parental leave and pay that the Bill introduces in Northern Ireland correspond to new rights in Great Britain. Consultation has shown that that is what stakeholders here want, and it is only right that working parents in Northern Ireland do not have lesser entitlements. The similarity in the arrangements will also ease any administrative burden on employers who have staff in both jurisdictions. The swift progress of the Bill, thanks in no small part to the detailed and efficient work of the Employment and Learning Committee, should allow our working parents to exercise the new rights at the same time as their counterparts in Great Britain.

I want to emphasise that policies taken forward in Great Britain, or indeed elsewhere, are not always policies that are suited to the needs of Northern Ireland. A good example is the move in Great Britain away from a statutory process for considering flexible working requests to a reasonableness-based approach. The Bill makes no such change. The statutory process is one that is generally working well in Northern Ireland, and stakeholders have told us that a reasonableness approach has the potential to create new uncertainties and satellite litigation. The Bill, therefore, leaves that policy unchanged.

It may be helpful if I briefly remind Members of the key provisions that are contained within the Bill. The Bill will create a new entitlement for employees to be absent from work on shared parental leave for the purposes of caring for a newly born or adopted child. It will permit qualifying birth parents, adopters and intended parents in surrogacy arrangements to qualify for shared parental pay. It will make provision for intended parents in surrogacy arrangements to avail themselves of paternity and adoption leave and pay. It will set in place powers that, following any future review and subject to Assembly confirmation of relevant regulations, could allow statutory paternity rights to be made more generous. It will provide for statutory adoption pay to be paid at 90% of earnings for the first six weeks. It will create a new right for employees and certain agency workers who have a qualifying relationship with a pregnant woman or her expected child to attend up to two antenatal appointments during the pregnancy. It will create a comparable right for the partners of primary adopters and a new right for primary adopters to take paid leave to attend up to five introductory meetings before a child is placed with them for adoption. Finally, the Bill will remove the current requirement that an employee must have a parental or caring responsibility in order to make a flexible working request, and will open that right to all employees. That is a substantial list of positive measures for working people, and working parents in particular.

Importantly, many employers have expressed their broad support for the measures. That reflects the progressive attitude that our employers have towards their employees and their understanding of how promoting a work/life balance is a fundamental element of employee engagement and is also good for business. Understandably, however, the same employers have also quite rightly expressed legitimate

concerns about what the practical realities of implementing the Bill will mean for them.

I understand the concerns that have been raised about the regulatory impacts of the proposals, and that is why it is right to leave the process for requesting flexible working unchanged. While more staff may be able to assert the right to request, employers will still use the processes they are familiar with when dealing with a request. As I have stated, that includes the current statutory procedure, which is being retained on the basis of feedback from consultees.

11.15 am

The administration of shared parental leave and pay will be as light in touch as possible and will mirror, closely, the processes with which employers and employees are already familiar for other working parents' rights.

Shared parental leave regulations will include requirements for employees to provide an early indication of their expected leave pattern. There will also be a limit of three employee notifications for leave or changes to periods of leave, excluding, of course, the changes that are agreed between the two parties. Those measures should encourage a culture where open and honest conversations can take place between employers and employees from the outset. However, I am mindful that agreement cannot always be reached. There are, therefore, proportionate provisions for situations where agreement is not possible. Again, as I have stated on other occasions, it is my desire to create a modern, efficient and integrated employment relations system with a strong economic focus, whilst protecting the rights of individual employees.

The generally positive response to the consultation proposals and the ongoing engagement with key stakeholders give me confidence that these measures will be implemented successfully. It will be in a way that offers working families and employers flexibility and certainty in the practical application of the rights.

Before the debate is opened to Members, I put on record my thanks for the positive role that the Employment and Learning Committee has played in supporting the progression of the Bill. The Committee's call for written submissions, and the opportunity afforded to stakeholders to give oral evidence, provided us all with additional insights into the concerns of stakeholders. The need for continued engagement with stakeholders, particularly in the preparation of guidance, which has been emphasised by the Committee, has resonated with me and my officials and will be a key action going forward.

We have already published for comment preliminary draft guidance for employers and are working on a range of other materials which will be issued in the near future. We will be working closely with key stakeholders to ensure that all of the guidance materials will be fit for purpose. It is critical that the uptake of the new rights is appropriately monitored. My officials are considering how best to take this forward in quantitative terms, including how to make best use of information collected by HM Revenue and Customs, which will administer the scheme. However, I assure the Assembly that my Department will continue its normal engagement with stakeholders, exploring any qualitative issues that arise as the new rights bed in.

I look forward to hearing Members' contributions on this important Bill, and I commend it to the Assembly.

Mr Swann (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning):

Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his opening comments. On behalf of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I welcome the Final Stage of the Work and Families Bill. I thank the departmental officials and the Minister for the close working relationship we maintained throughout the passage of the Bill. That helped to ensure that the Committee scrutinised the Bill thoroughly. At this opportunity, I also thank the Committee staff who worked so hard on facilitating our scrutiny of the legislation in a relatively short time.

The Committee's views on the Bill have been outlined at previous stages, as the Minister noted. I point out, again, that the Committee will continue to keep a watchful eye over the subordinate legislation and guidance that will be issued by the Department, as the actual concerns voiced by stakeholders were not specifically dealt with in the legislation but will be developed in the subsequent subordinate legislation.

On behalf of the Committee, I am pleased to support the Bill. I welcome the significant interest and scrutiny of Members throughout its passage in the Assembly. It is a Bill that will reshape the face of parental leave, and Members ensured that it got the close scrutiny that it deserved. We support the Bill.

Mr Buchanan: Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I welcome the Final Stage of the Work and Families Bill. Let us hope that, as it finds its way through Final Stage and on to the statute books, it will be something that will not only help working families and the parents, particularly, women, but will reduce the bureaucratic burden of red tape on our business sector, which is a problem at the minute.

I commend the Minister and the departmental officials for their close work with the Committee over the short period in which the legislation was coming through, and the Committee staff for the work that they have done. As the Chair said, the Committee will be keeping a close watch on the subordinate legislation that will be brought forward by the Department to address the concerns raised by stakeholders that were not specifically dealt with in the legislation. We look forward to keeping a close eye on that. Again, I support the passage of the Bill through the House today.

Mr Ramsey: As a member of the Employment and Learning Committee and on behalf of the SDLP, I thank the Minister and departmental staff. It was an easy passage in many ways because a lot of the groundwork was done during a number of meetings, with key people from the Department briefing us and taking on board our concerns.

In the past, I have spoken about the impact that the legislation will have on businesses, and I would like to reiterate my views on that. As I have said before, it is crucial that businesses are made fully aware and educated so that they can react positively to the legislation. Committee members and stakeholders talked about the need to see the creation of a one-stop shop. I hope that that will enable businesses to be more informed and to be able to deal with the legislation as it comes forward. Such a website would provide stakeholders with the online tools and guidance necessary to allow them to properly understand and, ultimately, implement the legislation. I

believe that it is crucial to the success of the legislation that such mechanisms are put in place immediately, and I am keen to hear what the Minister has to say on that, before any law is enacted. I call on the Minister to implement that as quickly as possible.

Families are at the heart of the Bill, and the SDLP remains committed to ensuring that standards in early years development are raised. We believe that good parental leave policies must be complemented by good family policies, including childcare, early years and nursery provision. We, therefore, argue that support for the family structure is central to positive childcare policies, and, once again, we clearly and, from the Committee's perspective, consensually welcome the Bill.

Not every family operates within the same context or circumstances, and I believe that it is important that the legislation remains flexible enough to benefit everyone. It is crucial that the Assembly supports hard-working families, and I welcome the Bill in helping to ease the external pressures that many of them face.

With regard to shared parental leave, as we have heard through the Bill's passage, one such external pressure is the matter of parental leave. The introduction of legislation will go a long way to help to rebalance the nature of parenting and provide greater equality to everybody involved in parenting. In the past, I have commended the Bill for presenting Northern Ireland with a real chance of addressing the inequalities of parenting in our society. This legislation will help to reduce women's disproportionate caring responsibilities and go some way to tackling the discrimination felt by many women in the workplace.

I reiterate the CAB's belief that it will allow families greater flexibility, control and choice over care arrangements. I am happy to say that the Bill will also ensure that parents, including adopters and those using surrogates, will be able to avail themselves of shared parental leave, but I believe that we must ensure that more is done to help different family situations. I raised the issue of kinship carers with the Minister. It will not be possible through this legislation, but I think that, in future, we should be minded of the many thousands of kinship carers across Northern Ireland who we should be legislating for.

I was glad to see that those who are planning to adopt or are in the process of adopting are considered in the Bill. The change in adoption leave rights and the enhancement of statutory adoption pay will give adoptive parents the ability to spend much more time with their child. The proposed changes in appointments, entitling intended parents to take unpaid leave to attend up to two antenatal appointments is another way to help parents to develop a bond with their child.

In conclusion, the legislation will be beneficial not only to parents, adopters and surrogates but to the business community. The fact that the legislation aims to mirror the current arrangements already in place is also beneficial to many. We support the Bill.

Ms Lo: The Work and Families Bill gives new parents greater flexibility in their parental leave and gives equal rights to adoptive parents. This is progressive legislation, and I commend the Minister for bringing it to the House.

I am relatively new to the Employment and Learning Committee, but I understand that the Bill has gone

through the various stages in a non-contentious way. That is obviously down to the open engagement and good cooperation between the Minister, departmental officials and the Committee. It is good to see legislation passing through the Assembly so smoothly.

It is important that we create a culture of shared parenting and recognise the inequality that many women face in the workplace. All families are different, and households face different pressure whether in work, at home, in caring aspects and in the economic need perhaps to bring income into the household. The realities of modern-day society should be reflected in the law. It is true that sharing entitlements will not suit everyone, but, if the Assembly can allow flexibility in that area, we must do so.

The Bill recognises the role of adoptive parents as equally important. Currently, an employee qualifies for adoptive leave only if he or she has 26 weeks' service. The Bill makes adoption leave a right from the first day. The enhancement of statutory adoption pay to 90% of the adopter's salary for the first six weeks brings it into line with statutory maternity pay. The Bill also extends the adoption and parental leave and pay provisions to cover surrogacy arrangements and entitles intended parents to take unpaid leave to attend up to two antenatal appointments. Those measures are all most welcome.

The Bill is about facilitating choice, not about dictating how parents must take their leave. While it is likely that mothers will continue to take the majority of the leave, as the Minister pointed out in previous debates, if we can enable change in our society so that shared parenting is embraced, it will be good for us all. That does not mean that giving employees more choice will disadvantage businesses. The Bill will make changes that will have the effect of creating a more inclusive workforce.

As we know, talent is not gender-biased, and we should be moving towards a greater maximisation of our talent pool. A female employee may take maternity leave for a number of months and sometimes up to a year. If she and her partner shared parental leave entitlement, she could return sooner if she so wished. In cases like that, companies could see key personnel returning to work earlier. It benefits employers to retain and build on the skills and talents that women bring to the workplace and also works towards removing some of the structural barriers to career progression.

I support the Bill, not just because it has been brought to the House by an Alliance Minister but because it will benefit parents in so many ways, will help businesses to retain and progress talented individuals, particularly women, and will enhance the flexibility of Northern Ireland's labour market.

Dr Farry: I thank Members for their comments and, indeed, welcome the points that they raised. I very much concur with the general themes that they reflected.

I will respond first to the comments from the Chair of the Committee, Mr Swann. I put on record my thanks to him, the Committee staff and all members of the Committee for the manner in which they have taken the matter forward. As he very well knows and will no doubt concur with and welcome, the Committee's work in that regard is far from concluded. He is quite right to emphasise that this is enabling legislation and that a lot of work is still to be done on the scrutiny and consideration of subordinate

legislation. Indeed, some of that will need to return to the Assembly, given the confirmatory nature of some of the subordinate legislation that we are talking about.

The Committee will clearly have a major role in all that work. Indeed, it is something that our officials are committed to expediting, because we have our eyes on the prize of getting it in place for 1 April 2015 to coincide with the commencement in the rest of the UK. There are major advantages to ensuring that we act in a coordinated manner, given the crossover between what happens here and elsewhere, not least in terms of the administration to be conducted through HMRC and the fact that companies operate across jurisdictional boundaries in that respect.

11.30 am

The Chair and the Committee have also made the point about a review of the shared parental pay and leave provisions. I am more than happy to give the assurance that we will revert to the Committee with details of our terms of reference for any review in due course, once everything is up and running. That process of continued review is a healthy one to adopt to ensure that what we put through in the high-level discussions actually works on the ground. We have a commitment to take on board fully the views of stakeholders in that regard as we see things develop.

I thank Mr Buchanan, the vice-Chair of the Committee, for his ongoing support and understanding of the importance of the Bill to a whole range of constituencies. As other Members have stressed, it is a Bill that is good for the business community as well as for working families, parents in particular.

I concur with Mr Ramsey that this legislation is good for business. It is worth stressing the importance of why we are saying that. It may come across in very narrow terms as more complication and administrative work, but, as Anna Lo also mentioned, there is a real prize for business in the retention and progression of talent. We need to encourage people from a variety of different backgrounds. It is right to reflect on the fact that families now come in all sorts of sizes, shapes, forms and types of unit so that we fully reflect the needs of the modern family, particularly how parents interact with the world of work. This should provide a means for key personnel to be retained, or, indeed, return to the workplace more rapidly than in the past, if, indeed, that is the wish of the parents concerned. That will have an impact on productivity levels and on the development of our economy as a whole.

Mr Ramsey is also right to put it in the context of what else is happening in the Executive. I concur with him on the importance of early years policy, which the Department of Education is taking forward, and what is happening with childcare, which OFMDFM is taking forward. All three interventions — and, indeed, there are others — are working towards a singular goal of developing our young people, supporting families and supporting our economy overall. We welcome the synergy and interface between all those interventions. He recognises that kinship care is outwith the scope of the Bill, but the point that he made is well made and received. No doubt it will continue to be subject to discussions, whether in the Employment and Learning Committee or elsewhere in the Assembly and other Committees. No doubt people will return to that in the future.

I also thank my colleague Anna Lo for her comments and her understanding of the Bill. I welcome her to the Committee. No doubt she will provide a unique perspective on a whole range of issues. She focused on the practical benefits that the Bill brings, the evolving shape of the modern family and the shifting balance of how we can best support parents.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that this is an important piece of legislation. It is primarily an enabling piece of legislation, but it is consistent with the overarching objectives of the Executive to support individuals, families and the economy overall. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Work and Families Bill [NIA 34/11-15] do now pass.

Deregulation Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Deregulation Bill, as amended following Committee Stage in the House of Commons, dealing with: auditors ceasing to hold office as contained in clause 19 and schedule 5; appointment of proxies under company law in clause 20 and Part 8 schedule 6; abolition of Office of the Chief Executive of Skills Funding in clause 49 and schedule 13; legislation no longer of practical use in clause 82 and schedule 20; and to extend to other workplaces, the current Northern Ireland exemption of Sikhs from requirements to wear safety helmets on construction sites in clause 7; and agrees that the UK Parliament should consider amendments to the Bill to the repeal of those provisions of the Sea Fisheries Act 1868; the Fisheries Act 1891; and the British Fishing Boats Act 1983, which are redundant.

First, I apologise for my voice, which is leaving me. That may be good news for some in the House but it is not particularly good news for me.

We are here to look at the issue of extending some measures of the Westminster Deregulation Bill to Northern Ireland. I believe that those measures will help to ensure that legislation that is no longer of any practical use is removed from the statute book, simplify the regulatory environment and make things easier for business. They will also mean maintaining parity with the rest of the United Kingdom in those areas and avoiding any potential comparative disadvantage for businesses in Northern Ireland. The consent of the Assembly is therefore being sought for provisions relating to matters devolved to Northern Ireland.

The provisions under consideration relate to correcting an anomaly in extending the exemption for Sikhs from wearing protective headgear, from construction sites to other less hazardous workplaces which are not currently covered by the exemption; simplifying regulation relating to auditors ceasing to hold office under the Companies Act 2006; correcting some drafting errors in the Companies Act 2006 relating to proxies; and the abolition of the Office of the Chief Executive of Skills Funding, providing for the relevant powers to be transferred to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, thereby ensuring that identified services can continue to be provided for Northern Ireland.

There is a range of pieces of legislation that are no longer in practical use and which we are seeking to remove from the statute book. The first relates to the audit of charitable companies in the Companies Act 2006. We are also taking away the Newspaper Libel and Registration Act 1881, the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Act 1977, the Milk (Cessation of Production) Act 1985, the Mining Industry Act 1920, the Milk (Cessation of Production) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, the Sea Fisheries Act 1868, the Fisheries Act 1891 and the British Fishing Boats Act 1983.

As Members can see, this provides an opportunity to address a number of legislative issues in a timely and efficient manner, which I hope will contribute to reforming regulatory requirements.

I welcome the support provided by my colleagues the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and indeed the Executive, in allowing me to bring a composite motion before the House for consideration. That in itself shows that my Department, along with DARD and DEL, has been working closely with the Cabinet Office and, indeed, Whitehall Departments to ensure that the Northern Ireland position is recognised and respected in the Westminster Deregulation Bill.

Regulatory reform is a key issue for me, the Department and Executive colleagues, and hopefully passing this motion will be an important step in helping to deal with that issue. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Flanagan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Níl ach cúpla focal le rá agam mar LeasChathaoirleach an Choiste Fiontair, Trádála agus Infheistíochta.

I have only a few short remarks to make. The overall purpose of the Bill, as the Minister said, is to assist in reducing the burden of regulation in the areas that are within its scope. Any steps taken to remove or reduce unnecessary or redundant red tape are to be welcomed. The Committee welcomes the legislative consent motion (LCM) on that basis.

The Committee sought and received clarification from the Department on two matters pertaining to the Bill. The first was about a query regarding the Mining Industry Act 1920. Officials confirmed that the Deregulation Bill will repeal the Act, which relates to powers that are held by a board of trade that have either been transferred elsewhere or have become obsolete. Officials assured the Committee that there would be no impact on the current licensing regime in the North and that the Health and Safety Executive has no objections to the repeal of the Act.

Secondly, members questioned officials on the impact on a company's insurance liabilities of the proposed extension to the exemption for turban-wearing Sikhs from wearing safety helmets in hazardous workplaces. The Department provided written assurances to the Committee that the current exemption protects employers from liability should someone suffer injuries as a consequence of choosing not to wear a helmet on a construction site. Clause 7 of the Deregulation Bill will extend the limited liability provisions associated with the current exemption to other workplaces.

Some provisions in the LCM, as the Minister said, are within the remit of the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Committee therefore wrote to the respective Committees and neither had any points of concern regarding the provisions in the legislation relating to their respective Departments. So, having carefully considered the proposals, the Committee is of the view that the LCM is the most appropriate means of removing this unnecessary and redundant legislation. We therefore support the Department in seeking the Assembly's endorsement of the LCM.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for bringing forward this legislative consent motion. It all seems to be eminently sensible, although we seemed to be slightly at the mercy of the Department when we were being briefed and we looked forward to hearing more in certain areas.

Just now, the Minister listed one or two other areas that are not actually listed here. It may be that I was not listening properly or missed out, but I also think that there was a matter relating to the Companies House register. There are also one or two other matters that are going through the Lords. Are we, as a Committee, going to get more of a briefing on each of the other issues that are going through the Lords? Obviously, I would like to know and understand more. However, I think that this measure is eminently sensible and it is good to see it going through and taking off a burden. I hope that we can do it in many other areas so that, when we bring forward legislation, it all gets much simpler.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Members for their comments. There has not been any real contention about the Bill, principally because we are tidying up a lot of things that have stayed on the statute books and which should have been taken off a considerable time ago. I am pleased to say that the regulatory reform bug — I can talk about bugs this morning because I have one — seems to have now caught on. I am pleased about that because it means that we are tidying matters that otherwise would have stayed on the statute book. I welcome the positive way in which the Committee dealt with the issue. The changes are minor but they will simplify the whole regime.

Mr Kinahan mentioned the House of Lords matter. As I understand it, the matters that affect Northern Ireland are all contained in the LCM, and I do not foresee anything coming forward that is not contained in it. I hope that the Committee has been fully briefed on the range of issues that I mentioned in the House this morning.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. I hope that we were not too severe on your sore throat.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Deregulation Bill, as amended following Committee Stage in the House of Commons, dealing with: auditors ceasing to hold office as contained in clause 19 and schedule 5; appointment of proxies under company law in clause 20 and Part 8 schedule 6; abolition of Office of the Chief Executive of Skills Funding in clause 49 and schedule 13; legislation no longer of practical use in clause 82 and schedule 20; and to extend to other workplaces, the current Northern Ireland exemption of Sikhs from requirements to wear safety helmets on construction sites in clause 7; and agrees that the UK Parliament should consider amendments to the Bill to the repeal of those provisions of the Sea Fisheries Act 1868; the Fisheries Act 1891; and the British Fishing Boats Act 1983, which are redundant.

Jobseeker's Allowance (Homeless Claimants) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to move

That the Jobseeker's Allowance (Homeless Claimants) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

These regulations amend the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 to introduce an easement that will enable claimants who have recently become homeless to be treated as available for, and actively seeking, employment for a temporary period. The applications of the easement will be conditional on the claimant taking steps to find living accommodation.

To be entitled to jobseeker's allowance (JSA), a claimant must satisfy the conditions of entitlement, which include being available for, and actively seeking, employment, which are known as the job-seeking conditions. The steps a claimant should take to satisfy the conditions are those that are reasonable for the claimant to take in any week and are detailed in their jobseeker's agreement.

When setting the jobseeker's agreement where an individual is homeless, advisers must consider how the homelessness situation, the need to find accommodation, and other issues, affect the steps that are reasonable for the jobseeker to take to find work in any given week.

Homeless claimants are likely to face difficulties when attempting to satisfy the job-seeking conditions. For example, they may find it difficult to contact, or be contacted by, prospective employers. Currently, the JSA regulations allow an individual affected by a domestic emergency to be treated as being available for employment, in order to deal with the emergency, for a maximum of one week per emergency, with four such emergencies in a year. Where claimants have been treated under those circumstances for a least three days in any week, they will also be treated as actively seeking employment in that week.

11.45 am

The Department for Work and Pensions carried out informal discussions with stakeholders from the homeless and voluntary communities, including Homeless Link and Crisis. It concluded that the existing domestic emergency provisions did not allow sufficient time for the claimant to address their homelessness situation. It also concluded that, because homeless individuals often lead very chaotic lives, a limit of four emergencies a year should not be placed on those individuals. The stakeholders were supportive of the principle of allowing homeless people time to focus on finding accommodation as a preliminary to conducting a job search. Therefore, the regulations amend the domestic emergency provisions of the JSA regulations so that, if they are applied because of a claimant's homelessness, advisers are allowed reasonable flexibility to treat claimants as meeting the job-seeking conditions for periods of longer than one week, with no cap on the number of occasions that it can be applied.

'The homelessness monitor: Northern Ireland', published in May 2014, makes reference to the recent Northern

Ireland Housing Executive homelessness strategy, which states that in Northern Ireland the propensity to sleep rough is confined largely to Belfast and, to a much lesser extent, Londonderry. It is estimated that around 10 people sleep rough in Belfast on any given night, excluding foreign nationals, but that up to 100 people could be at risk if street outreach and other services were not available. Unfortunately, a breakdown of data is not available on the numbers who are homeless or rough sleeping and claiming jobseeker's allowance. However, it is thought that the policy will impact on a relatively small number of JSA claimants in Northern Ireland at any one time.

I am sure you will agree that the changes are worthwhile and necessary to allow homeless claimants time to focus on finding sustainable living accommodation that will better enable them to find work in the future. I believe that it is a significant improvement to support claimants who are recently homeless and to prevent individuals becoming entrenched in a homelessness lifestyle.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for introducing the regulations to the House. The Committee for Social Development considered the Department's proposal to make the regulations at its meeting on 26 June and the resulting statutory rule at its meeting on 3 July 2014. The Committee was of course supportive of the regulations. The Committee did note that the regulations will introduce, as the Minister said, an easement that will enable certain homeless claimants to be treated as available for and actively seeking employment for a temporary period.

It is good to hear that the regulations have been made as a direct result of informal discussions between the Department and various stakeholders from the homeless and voluntary sectors in the broader community. The proposal is to amend the domestic emergency provisions of the jobseeker's allowance regulations so that, if they are applied because of a claimant's homelessness, advisers are allowed reasonable flexibility to treat claimants as meeting the job-seeking conditions for periods of longer than one week, with no cap on the number of occasions that it can be applied. On that basis, the proposals are clearly to be welcomed. Making those additional easements will help reduce the pressure on people who are already homeless and under significant stress as a result of that.

I remind the House that the rule coming to the Assembly this week is timely, in that it is homelessness awareness week. On behalf of the Social Development Committee, and with the Simon Community and the Housing Executive, I helped launch an app relating to homelessness a few days ago in the Long Gallery. As part and parcel of that, and in the run up to Christmas, which is poignant for many people who are homeless, it is timely that we launched the app and, more importantly, that we consider this statutory rule.

Following what the Minister has outlined and consideration by the Committee, and knowing the importance that the Committee has attached to the issue, we are willing and more than keen to commend the rule to the House.

Mr Storey: I thank the Chair of the Social Development Committee for the consensus and support for the regulations. I share the comments that he made about the timing of the issue.

Along with him, I attended the Simon Community launch of the app. During homelessness week and without any great fanfare or publicity, I visited some provisions that make an invaluable contribution to people who find themselves in that situation. Given the time of year, it is vital that we continue to have compassion and understanding for those who find themselves in very difficult situations. I was greatly struck when I visited one provision last week. No one could visit that location without feeling not only concern but relief that such places exist to help people in particular need. I thank the Chair for those comments and for the Committee's work.

The regulations introduce an easement and will enable claimants who have recently become homeless to be treated as available for and actively seeking employment for a temporary period. By amending the domestic emergency provisions of the JSA regulations, we will allow homeless claimants the necessary time to focus on finding sustainable living accommodation that will better enable them to find work in the future and, I trust, enable them to change their circumstances dramatically. With those concluding comments, I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Jobseeker's Allowance (Homeless Claimants) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Private Members' Business

A6: Dungiven Bypass

Mr Principal Deputy 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 to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and is 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 are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr McAleer: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises that the A6, which passes through Dungiven, is the main arterial route between the city of Derry and Belfast and is instrumental in terms of infrastructure to support regional development and economic growth in the north-west; and further recognises that Dungiven is one of the most polluted towns in western Europe and has been waiting for a bypass for over 40 years; and believes that this section of the A6 scheme should be advanced without delay, as per the Executive's investment strategy 2011-2021.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Most of us will be aware, particularly those who live in the west and the north-west, of the strategic importance of the A6. It is a key arterial route in the Six Counties, connecting the city of Derry and the city of Belfast. It is part of the TEN-T comprehensive network. Along with other Members — not just from my party but from the SDLP and others — I lobbied the Minister to press the Commission to get this vital part of the core network established by 2030, and that is a job of work.

The A6 is absolutely vital not just for the town of Derry but for the north-west. Earlier in the year, our party's members of the Committee for Regional Development had the opportunity to meet business people from the Derry area, and the A6 was one of the key pieces of infrastructure that they flagged up as being very important for the future development of the city. In fact, the failure to complete it is impeding the economic growth of the city. Therefore, it is absolutely vital for the regeneration and growth of Derry city and the wider north-west.

Environmental health studies conducted by Limavady council and others have produced a great deal of evidence that Dungiven is one of the most polluted towns in western Europe, which is due in large part to the enormous number of vehicles that are forced to pass through the town every day. Obviously, that is made worse by the fact that the town has no bypass. This has been in the pipeline for the best part of 40 years. Certainly, as a representative of the north-west, I see it as vital. The A6 feeds not only into the Six Counties but into the wider island of Ireland, connecting people from that part of County Derry and, indeed, Donegal to Belfast and on to Dublin. That was probably the key motivation for bringing the motion before the House.

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

“and recognises that, in addition to the bypass at Dungiven, there are other sections of the A6 that

must be dualled and upgraded without further delay, including the section at Moneynick.”

First, I want to thank the proposers of the motion. It gives me the opportunity to move our amendment, which lays our cards on the table in relation to how the north-west has fared in transport infrastructure investment over the years and what needs to be done to address that neglect. Our amendment extends the issue beyond the Dungiven bypass and recognises that there are serious issues all along that route.

It seems incredible that, at this late stage, the Minister is looking for an alternative route for a bypass; at least, that is what I am told. Either those in the past got it horribly wrong over 40 years, or the Minister needs to explain why he may not be following the plans that were gathering dust on his shelves. Of course, I look forward to Mr Kennedy sorting out the whole thing.

Our amendment makes it clear that, while the bypass is critical, there are other serious transport issues that should not and must not be long-fingered for a variety of reasons, not least the fact that some direct rule Minister in the distant past promised that the whole thing would be up and running by 2016. Of course, we all know that it will not.

As you all know, I am a fair and reasonable Member of the Assembly, so I am not laying total blame at the door of the present incumbent, who, to be fair, as I have said before, found some money for the railways, which was a vast improvement on his predecessor. Now, again, because I am a fair person, I am not laying all the blame at the door of Conor Murphy either. I see a previous Minister across the Floor, Mr Gregory Campbell. At one time, he was the Minister for Regional Development. Of course, he was rotating at the time. Some unkind people might say that, even today, he is still rotating, but we will leave it at that.

Of course, the previous Minister, Mr Murphy, did not sit on his hands all the time. We will soon get 14.5 miles of motorway from Larne at a cost of £140 million, complete with a bypass for half a dozen houses and a river diverted to please local anglers. Good luck to the people of Larne, but if you are in the north-west it is not a good deal.

One criticism that I would make of the previous Minister, Conor Murphy, was that he stubbornly refused to decouple the bypass, which the motion is about. I firmly believe that, if that had been done at the time, we could have made a lot more progress.

I think that any fair-minded Member — I repeat that I am one of them — who listens to the traffic reports every morning will know that there are three items of news: the M1 is flowing freely, there is a wee bit of a problem at Sandyknowes and, as usual, traffic is at a standstill at Moneynick. Now, many people —

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dallat: Of course. To the lord, I most certainly will.

Lord Morrow: You do not have to be so humble. *[Laughter.]* I was interested to hear the Member say that the M1 was flowing freely. I wonder whether he has ever tried to get down the motorway on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday or sometimes a Saturday morning. He might discover that it does not flow just as freely as he suggests or indeed as some of us would like it to from time to time.

Mr Dallat: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I fully accept what Lord Morrow has said, but these things are relative. If, like you, he were to spend some mornings on the Moneynick Road, he would, in fact, describe the M1 as fantastic.

Mr Ramsey: Pleasurable.

Mr Dallat: Yes, pleasurable.

Somebody needs to offer an explanation of why the north-west has been so unfortunate. It has had a really bad run of luck. If I were a betting man, I do not think that I would have won a horse race in the last 50 years. The M5 was parked up — no fault of the Minister — the M6 was sidelined, the railway was stalled and the Magilligan ferry, which has been mentioned again recently, has been long forgotten and has been tied up. We know from Mr Kennedy last week that it was never discussed in his Department before his time. That makes me wonder why I spent an afternoon with Mr Murphy at Magilligan solving the problem. I then discover that it was not an issue.

12.00 noon

Let us not be negative; let us get back to the motion and the amendment. I do not want to see the proposals for the north-west parked in the same way as the cars are at Moneynick any longer. The issues are serious. They are not just about traffic jams but about economic and social inequalities. I came into the Assembly with other peace-loving people to address that issue 16 years ago. What have I to show in the north-west? There are talks going on at the moment, and there is chat about bonds for raising money. I suggest that we need a bond badly in the north-west to address the issues that, historically, have not allowed the north-west to develop economically in the way it should have. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment continually tells us that she cannot influence where inward investors locate, but we all know — there is no issue — that if you have good transport infrastructure you are more likely to be successful.

I really feel that this is perhaps our last opportunity to register once and for all a special case for the north-west. I want the Minister to listen to my next point. When I spoke to a senior official recently, he was probably irritated by my constant wrangles. He said, "You know, we have other roads that carry more traffic than the A6". That is probably true, but it totally misses the issue that infrastructure is not there that should be there, irrespective of counting the vehicles that pass between 7 and 10 or whatever it is. Let us give the north-west a boost in tourism. Let us turn the Glenshane pass into a pleasurable journey between our two cities and maybe even stop off at the Ponderosa for something to eat — I do not know, whatever people do. Let us get away from the image that travelling west is some kind of nightmare that you should not really undertake.

I do not, in any way, want to undermine the original proposal. Dungiven is the most polluted town in western Europe: that is a fact. The people, particularly those at the lower end of the town, need justice and some kind of relief from what has been happening to them. Let us rise above the narrow discussions we have had about curries, yogurts, Trojan Horses and all the other things. Let us create a positive image of the Assembly to show that we actually care for people — not Protestants and Catholics but all the people, particularly those in the north-west, who have had a very raw deal over the years. Here is an

opportunity to improve our image. Let us be serious about what we are paid for.

Mr Campbell: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. More often than the press gives us credit for, we rise to be, I hope, unanimous about what we want to see. While the mover of the motion had difficulty in spelling Londonderry, I will have no such difficulty.

This is about more than just Londonderry or the north-west. It is a connectivity issue, to use an in word. I put a question to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment a couple of weeks ago, and I got a reply yesterday. It was about the most frequented visitor attractions in Northern Ireland. Four were in the north-west: one was the city walls; another was the Giant's Causeway, which is just about in the north-west, depending on how you define it — we will certainly claim it; and the others were the Roe Valley Country Park and the Peace Bridge. That is in the whole of Northern Ireland, which includes the Titanic centre and all the other fantastic attractions that we have across the Province.

Mr McMullan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: Yes, I will.

Mr McMullan: Does the Member not think that the glens of Antrim should be included in his list of places to see?

Mr Campbell: I did not quite get that, but I take it he was including another one.

Mr McMullan: The glens of Antrim.

Mr Campbell: The glens of Antrim. That is maybe pushing the north-west a wee bit.

There is a huge volume of traffic. Hundreds of thousands of visitors go to each of those tourist attractions. We are at one in saying that this road, particularly the Moneynick and the Dungiven to Londonderry sections, needs to be dualled. I may be the first, but I am sure I will not be the last to speak up for the Minister in this context, in that he has an exceptionally difficult task. We ask him to make bricks, and, of course, he says, "That is a great idea, but, please, can I have the straw?". I am sure he will say to me and others, as he frequently does, "Can I depend on your support with the Minister of Finance?". He normally does that, and I will be disappointed if he does not do so on this occasion. The answer that I normally give him is "Yes, you can, Minister". There is a difficulty in getting the resources.

I was born and bred in Londonderry, and I have represented the north-west all of my adult life, so I am an absolutely passionate believer in and supporter of building the links not just to the north-west but from it. We need to get people to come and go and to build the necessary infrastructure. This will be an essential part of that. But, the Minister has a major difficulty. He was criticised when we were talking about the rail network. I joined in the criticism, but, hopefully, it was constructive criticism. We got over that hump, and we got the development of the railway. We are now at another difficulty that needs to be overcome, and the Minister will have our support in doing that. We need to ensure today that there is unanimity across the House, that we all speak with one voice —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: May I interrupt? My apologies: you have an extra minute. I see you are watching the clock.

Mr Campbell: That is good to know. I will try to utilise that. If I interject with the odd bit of humour, hopefully it will be recognised as such and people will not take exception and write letters of complaint. More about that anon.

We have to get down to how we will provide the Minister with the resources. We can all get up and complain; we can all say that we need this and that we have been disadvantaged in the past; but the bottom line is that the Regional Development Minister needs the resources to provide this.

People mentioned the A5. The A5, had it not been for a legal case, would have meant hundreds of millions of pounds being spent on infrastructure in the west and north-west of Northern Ireland. That was not the fault of the Minister or the Executive; that was an entirely different issue. There has to be complete unanimity and, hopefully, there will be. We need to try to work over the next few years to provide the Minister with the resources to do the job not just for the north-west but for the entirety of Northern Ireland.

Mr Hussey: I will begin by offering my support for capital road improvement work, in particular on the section of the A6 between Randalstown and Castledawson. This element of the A6 project has, in my view, the greatest capacity to contribute economically and reduce congestion.

The motion that Sinn Féin has put before us today states that we should further recognise:

“that Dungiven is one of the most polluted towns in Western Europe”.

I readily accept that air quality is an issue in part of Dungiven, but I do not accept that Dungiven has an air quality issue that means it can be described as one of the most polluted towns in western Europe. Even if I did, if I were from that town, I would not be advertising such a fact in the way that the sponsors of the motion are doing today. I would probably want to see hard medical evidence and facts of the impact of existing pollution before I made it the central plank of my argument.

A more positive argument is that of the reduced congestion and positive economic impact on the town that would come about by virtue of the construction of a bypass. Again, I have a problem with the comment that the western end of Main Street has an issue, making it amongst the worst in western Europe. In the last couple of weeks, the European Environment Agency published statistics on the most polluted cities in Europe. Bulgaria and Poland featured heavily, as we would have expected, as did towns in Italy and Slovakia. I am sure that those are not places that Mr Dallat has been to on his recent holidays, but they are the sort of places that would attract —

Mr Dallat: I have.

Mr Hussey: You have? Well, there you go. It is great to travel widely and extensively.

Unsurprisingly, Dungiven does not feature in those statistics. According to some reports earlier this year, Oxford Street in London is the most polluted street in Europe, in particular for nitrogen dioxide pollution. Dungiven does, however, properly feature as an air quality management area monitored by Limavady Borough Council. We do, and we all should, welcome the important role undertaken by the local council in actively

monitoring air quality trends in the town and particularly in Main Street. I will declare a bit of an interest in that, in my previous life, working for Pearl Assurance, I was responsible for the entire area from Larne to Londonderry. I was often on that road through Dungiven, although the roads seemed to be clear when I went there. They must have known that I was coming.

A shift to electric vehicles would possibly reduce and ultimately resolve the problem of air pollution, but, of course, that is going to take time. Promoting a bypass based on reduced congestion and positive impact on the town will still provide a favourable solution, even in an electronic vehicle age.

The motion urges the Minister to get on with funding the entire A6, but that fails to place the 2011-2021 investment strategy in context. The investment strategy suggests that the A6 will be funded by alternative finance, such as some form of loan or PPP serviced by resource funding repayments. The Executive are currently in a resource-funding crisis, such that the Finance Minister had to go to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and get a loan. Without detracting from the merits of the road upgrade, the signatories to the motion would be well served by addressing their minds to how it will be financed. The capital picture is not all that rosy, and the DUP/Sinn Féin-agreed draft Budget makes no provision for funding a single element of the A6 project.

My colleague the Minister for Regional Development has moved the Randalstown-to-Castledawson section beyond procurement-ready to shovel-ready from early next year. An opportunity exists to start this section in the next financial year. All that Sinn Féin has to do is work with the Finance Minister, who it has the ear of, and secure conventional capital to move the project forward. Mr Campbell made reference to the fact that this is the sort of thing that could be done. Of course, the Finance Minister is the Minister who holds the purse strings. If Sinn Féin were to get such an arrangement and agreement with the Minister, perhaps this could start next year, but that is in the hands of another Department. For that reason, I will leave the Minister for Regional Development alone and I suggest that you direct your other solutions to the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Mr Lunn: I suppose, as I do not come from the north-west, that I rise on behalf of the rest of the country to support the motion and the amendment, which introduces another aspect to the A6 debate without diluting the original motion. I must say, having listened to other Members, that, for once, I am quite glad that I live in Lisburn, where we do not appear to have these massive traffic problems unless we try to get here, but that is for another day.

12.15 pm

The case for a bypass for Dungiven is well made. It has been a sound case for at least 40 years. A bit like Mr Hussey, I remember my weekly drive to Londonderry or Derry as a young insurance man all those years ago. I remember it mostly with affection, but that affection did not extend to Dungiven or Toomebridge because they were the bottlenecks. Thankfully, one has been solved but Dungiven still has not.

Even in those days in the early 1970s, there was a traffic jam in Dungiven every morning and evening. Concern

was being expressed even then about air pollution and the potential risk to the health of the population, and those concerns remain. I fancy that stricter emission controls would probably have reduced the problem, but that improvement has been countered by the massive increase in the volume of traffic, so I do not think that it has improved overall. That is before you start to talk about the acknowledged problems of vibration, noise, congestion and general nuisance. I would certainly not like to live in the lower end of Dungiven — between the river and the junction halfway up the town — where the pollution must be at its worst.

It is not clear from the papers I have read what state of readiness the Dungiven bypass is at. I would appreciate the Minister telling us whether it is ready to proceed if funds permit. Is there still a problem with the illegal dump that apparently lies on or close to the route? Are there any remaining land acquisition or planning issues? Hopefully, there are not.

That brings me to the amendment, which is fine in itself, but it raises a question about priorities, which others have hinted at. If finance becomes available, the question must surely be that, if Dungiven is ready to proceed, and if the two sections either side of Toomebridge, particularly the section that I call Moneynick, from the end of the M22 up to Toomebridge, are also ready, which would have priority if they could not all proceed? It would be very nice if they could all proceed.

On the grounds purely of road safety and accident history, the M22 to Toomebridge would probably be the favourite, followed by the bit from Toome to Castledawson. However, in terms of public health and congestion easement to reduce journey times, the obvious choice would be Dungiven. That would have the added bonus of honouring a promise made to the population of Dungiven by, I fancy, just about every Minister in the last 40 years, including some present.

I respectfully suggest that both schemes — all three if you count Randalstown and Castledawson as two schemes — should at least be at shovel-readiness. Perhaps they are; the Minister can advise me. When the finance is available, Dungiven should be given priority, and a long-standing problem would be solved, to the relief of residents and motorists alike.

I am a fairly regular traveller on the alternative route to Strabane/Londonderry, which is the M1 and the beautiful new section of road that takes you right through to Ballygawley. A few years ago, the bypass at Newtownstewart was added. The changes in that journey — not necessarily the speed but the ease — must be making a difference to the region that that road touches. I am sure that the same thing would apply to the A6.

The A6 should be the premier route in Northern Ireland. The only competition is perhaps the A1 to Dublin, although some might not agree. Those are the two major routes. Mr Campbell said that the Minister has a difficult task, and I acknowledge that, but, at some stage, we will have to be able to proceed with some of these plans. I do not think that we will be able to proceed with all three in any foreseeable timescale, so I hope that Dungiven will be given priority because it is the most important.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Mr Maurice Devenney, I remind Members that it is the convention that a maiden speech be made without interruption. I call and welcome Mr Maurice Devenney.

Mr Devenney: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. It is an honour to speak in the House this afternoon for the first time. I was checking very closely whether it was the afternoon, because I thought that I might have to change references to the "afternoon" to "morning" in my speech.

I have been co-opted to the Northern Ireland Assembly to replace Willie Hay, former Speaker of the Assembly. Before I speak to the motion, I want to pay tribute to my friend and colleague William Hay.

Having represented the citizens of Londonderry in local government for over 30 years and in the Assembly since 1998, William was well respected and known for his hard work, dedication and commitment to those he had the honour of representing. I wish William well in his new role in the House of Lords. I thank my Democratic Unionist Party colleagues for selecting me for this position and for their continued support and encouragement over the years.

As someone who now makes the return journey from Londonderry to Belfast at least three times a week, the A6 is all too familiar; the journey can often take up to two and a half hours in the morning and in the evening. The proposed project for the 30km dual carriageway from Londonderry, incorporating the Dungiven bypass, was first announced by the then Secretary of State Peter Hain, so it is with deep regret that we are a decade on and are still no further forward. The road network between Northern Ireland's two largest cities is vital to growth in the north-west and should not be overlooked.

My constituency, Londonderry, is continuing to grow rapidly as a serious destination for tourism and investment; the UK City of Culture year saw huge numbers of people flocking to enjoy all that the Maiden City had to offer. Figures released just last week show that the number of overnight trips to Londonderry and Strabane increased by 50% between 2012 and 2013 and that associated expenditure increased by 75% to £47 million in 2013.

While those figures are encouraging, the Londonderry to Belfast road is vital for the economy of Northern Ireland and specifically that of the north-west. An upgrade to the transport infrastructure is urgently needed to support the region's development and its further economic growth. The recent announcement by the Regional Development Minister on the Londonderry to Coleraine railway line has dealt a further blow to the region. Therefore, the A6 must be a priority.

Improved infrastructure will have a catalytic effect on the north-west and will improve the opportunities for investors to invest there, for developers to develop there and for tourists and commuters to get there. For business, that transport link is essential: by improving journey times on that route, there will be enormous benefits for commerce in the north-west. That will benefit Northern Ireland as a whole by ensuring that it is less burdened by transport delays.

Dr Eddie Rooney highlighted that the levels of pollution in Dungiven pose a potential health risk to people who

are living and working in that area, particularly vulnerable groups, such as the very young, older people and people with severe respiratory conditions. That has been of great concern to the residents of that area. The upgrade to that section of the A6 will no doubt alleviate pollution problems that come from the high volume of traffic that passes through.

Finally, the message should be clear from Londonderry and the north-west that the A6 is vital, is necessary and should be at the top of the agenda. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt ar son an rúin agus ar son an leasaithe. I will be speaking in support of the motion and the amendment.

I commend Declan McAleer and apologise to the Chair: Cathal Ó hOisín was originally meant to propose the motion but could not do so because of time constraints. I knew that the Minister would be wise enough to know that Declan got up to ensure that the motion did not fall. We could have used the excuse that we were caught at Moneynick, but at 12.00 noon in the day that is an excuse that everybody would see through.

I commend Maurice Devenney for his first contribution to the Assembly and for being on-message immediately. Whatever work William did to ensure that the DUP had a good representative for Foyle paid off: Maurice was on-message on the A6, which is welcome.

On the motion, when Ross Hussey was speaking he perhaps felt that it was some sort of veiled attack on the Minister, as if he is the only person who is responsible for this. I think that we are all wise enough to know that this is an ongoing and long-established issue. As representatives of Foyle, Members from the north-west who have spoken, and even Trevor Lunn from a constituency far flung from the A6, we think that it is important to ensure that the issue is always on the agenda. In particular, we want to put it on the agenda because it was a major commitment in the Programme for Government, which —

Mr Hussey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Yes.

Mr Hussey: I accept fully that you would never want to attack the Minister, and I accept fully that the A6 is an issue of great concern in the north-west. I accept that without reservation.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCartney: I am saying that just in terms of the framing. We believe that it is important, and I am sure that the Minister will accept that, in any contact that he has had with any person in the north-west, particularly in Derry, they will always point out the major infrastructure, and the A6 obviously features heavily in that. As I said, this is part of major commitments made in the Programme for Government to tackle unemployment, create more jobs and, obviously, deal with regional disparity and regional imbalance. It also has to do with the issue of connectivity and the ability for people to be able to move freely is what inward investors want. That is what INI tells the representatives when we sit down. That is what we need. We need better infrastructure and the ability for people

to get in and out of the city quicker. That makes it more attractive for investors. That is the purpose of the lobby for the A6, and, no doubt, it was the purpose of the lobby for the A5 and any other capital project that is either in place or ready to go forward. It is all about making sure of those types of issues.

As a representative of the north-west, I understand well that there are other areas that are dealing with unemployment and poor infrastructure. They, quite rightly, make the case as well. We know that we are in a competitive market, but we believe that, given the critical importance of Derry, of the north-west and of the expansion of the university, issues like the A6 become even more potent and important. That is why it is important that we bring this forward.

Ross Hussey quite rightly made the point that, if we are ever going to present this to anyone to ask for more money, we have to be nearly shovel-ready. I think that that is perhaps one of the growing concerns. Perhaps the Minister will address the fact that there is a suggestion of looking at another way of bringing about the Dungiven bypass. Many people believe that the route that is now nearly established is the best one. Perhaps looking for an alternative route would slow the process down and push it further down the agenda. I believe that if we are all going to present a united case — the One Plan is very core to it — we have to put ourselves in the position where, if someone were to go the Minister in the morning and say, “Are you ready to proceed with the A6?”, he would be in a position to say, “Yes, I have all the technical detail done.” At present, the speculation about seeking another way of going around Dungiven, in my opinion, perhaps pushes it back. We should be trying to assist the Minister in the process of having it shovel-ready so that, if the opportunity were to present itself in terms of capital, we would be ready to go.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension today. 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 debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Environment

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I have to tell Members that questions 1 and 4 have been withdrawn.

Sixmilewater: Fish Kill

2. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the recent fish kill at Sixmilewater, Ballyclare. (AQO 7189/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is continuing to investigate the cause of a serious fish kill that occurred on Wednesday 29 October on the Sixmilewater at Ballyclare, County Antrim. As part of the investigation into that fish kill which was carried out by the NIEA in conjunction with DCAL inland fisheries, a large body of evidence was gathered. It included the collection of statutory samples from several premises, a detailed biological survey of the Sixmilewater and its tributaries in the area, and a detailed survey of the numbers and spread of fish deaths.

Interviews under caution are also being conducted as part of the process. The standard protocol in incidents of this nature is that interviews under caution are conducted in writing, and it is anticipated that it will be several more weeks before the process has been completed. Once the interviews under caution have been completed, the NIEA will review all the evidence and make a decision on appropriate enforcement action.

You will appreciate that, because it remains an ongoing investigation with evidence still being gathered from some parties, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this stage on the premises under investigation, as that might threaten the success of any future enforcement action. However, I can assure you that this remains a live investigation and that the NIEA is following definite lines of enquiry. Once the investigation has been completed and I am no longer constrained by legal considerations, I will, of course, be happy to provide you with a further update.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. If there are further investigations ongoing with a view to making prosecutions, it will be fine to wait on that information coming through, but there was a further incident on 22 October —

Mr Clarke: November.

Mr Girvan: — November, when the Ballymartin river was polluted. Is the Minister aware of any investigations into that incident? That river is also a tributary of the Sixmilewater.

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Girvan for his question and supplementary question on this topic. It is one that I know is very close to his heart, and we had an Adjournment debate about it one or two weeks ago.

I am aware of the more recent incident to which the Member referred. I assure him that Environment Agency is also aware of it and is investigating.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answers and look forward to hearing about many of the issues that we raised in that Adjournment debate. Does the Minister believe that the current penalties are effective as a deterrent, especially to public bodies, if, indeed, they are at fault? Does he have any idea why they are not working?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Kinahan. This issue was raised during the Adjournment debate, and there is evidence to suggest that fines for polluters are lower in this jurisdiction than in the others on these islands. However, the scale or nature of punishment for those crimes is beyond my remit as Environment Minister and is very much a matter for the courts. During the Adjournment debate, I said that I would raise the matter with the Minister of Justice, and I fully intend to do so.

However, I am given to understand that the average fine for pollution imposed by the courts in Northern Ireland has increased significantly in recent years and that fines of thousands of pounds are now routine. Of course, we do not want them to be routine, and we do not want pollution incidents to be routine. However, I believe that, for offences as serious as this, there should be serious penalties and deterrents, particularly for potential repeat offenders.

Ms Lo: Whilst it is important to have enforcement and increasing fines as deterrents, the most important thing is prevention, although it is very difficult to have preventative measures. What preventative measures is the NIEA taking to prevent these very serious damaging events?

Mr Durkan: The agency works in conjunction with other bodies, primarily DCAL's inland fisheries, on the prevention of incidents like this. Unfortunately, we cannot prevent every incident, and it is impossible to measure how many events we have prevented through our proactive work. I know that quite a lot of work has been done in this specific geographical area, not only among and between government agencies, but with other stakeholders and anglers on the river. I believe that locals and local anglers have embraced that work very positively and have played an important role in it. That is how this should be addressed; prevention is, obviously, better than cure. The Environment Agency and DCAL's inland fisheries also visited all premises along this stretch of water in the not too distant past to look at pollution risks and to advise businesses of them. Subsequently, many of the businesses put in mitigation measures to prevent these disasters from happening.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. The Minister will be aware that, on occasions, the time between an incident, the detection of its source and subsequent prosecution is very significant. Sometimes, that is down to the manner in which it was first reported. Will the Minister ensure that the Environment Agency looks at the procedures in those cases?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Ó hOisín. In my answer to Ms Lo, I outlined the importance of a proactive approach to preventing such incidents. When these incidents occur, it is vital that our reactions are sharp, swift and successful. If there is an issue with how quickly, or

otherwise, government agencies respond to incidents of this nature, it is something that I would like to address and see addressed. I will happily speak to the Member, as I know that he has a keen interest in angling, as do other Members, and I am happy to speak to them to hear their suggestions as to how this might be improved.

Community Planning: Health Role

3. **Mr McKinney** asked the Minister of the Environment what role health bodies will play in local government community planning. (AQO 7190/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I want to stress that community planning is not just for local government. From 1 April 2015, new community planning duties will be placed on central and local government. The Local Government Act 2014 sets out the process by which councils will lead community planning, and by working with their community planning partners, identify long-term objectives for improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of a district. The Act also places a duty on all 12 Departments to promote and encourage community planning and to have regard for community plans.

The community planning partnership will provide leadership in each council area by bringing together the key organisations and people. To ensure that that happens, I am making regulations to name the bodies that will be required to participate in the process as statutory community planning partners. Consultation on those regulations started on 17 October. I encourage all those with an interest in community planning to provide responses to the public consultation, which closes on 12 December 2014.

Given the key role of health bodies in improving the life of citizens, the health sector is well represented on the list of proposed statutory partners, with the health and social care trusts, the Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) included. Indeed, the health sector has been very enthusiastic about the prospect of becoming involved in community planning, as previous work has shown the benefits of working together to achieve common goals and improved outcomes.

I know that the health bodies here already play a key role in the interface between public health, Health and Social Care and the role of the new councils. The DHSSPS strategic framework for public health, Making Life Better, reflects the important role of local government in helping to deliver improvements and in addressing health inequalities at community level. The joint working arrangements already in place between the Public Health Agency and councils to support health and well-being improvement, along with the commissioning responsibilities —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Minister's two minutes are up.

Mr Durkan: — of the HSCB, will contribute to effective council community planning activity.

Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister for his fulsome answer. Will he outline how the needs of people with disabilities will be taken into account in community planning?

Mr Durkan: Community planning involves integrating all areas and aspects of public life, such as the services

and functions that are delivered in that area, and producing a plan that will set out the future direction of a council area, with a focus on improving service delivery for all its citizens. To reflect the diverse nature of the communities that they serve, councils' community plans will be developed by bringing together key public-sector organisations, such as statutory community planning partners, and other non-statutory support partners. Those support partners might include businesses, voluntary organisations, and community and other groups that make vital contributions to promoting a district's social, economic and environmental well-being.

Under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, all public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. The Local Government Act explicitly makes reference to that duty for community planning. Equality of opportunity and social inclusion should be embedded in all stages of the process, and community planning partnerships will need to ensure that they work proactively to identify and address the specific needs of people with disabilities.

Mr G Robinson: Will hard-to-reach rural communities have a role to play in health on local government community planning bodies?

Mr Durkan: While I am in the process of drawing up a list of statutory community planning partners, I cannot tell each and every council who it should have on their community planning partnership. Different councils will have different needs and aspirations, and some council areas will be more rural in their make-up than others. However, I am determined to make sure that community planning ensures that all areas and sections in the new council areas are catered for, protected and looked after. For that reason, I believe that it is very important that consideration is given to those living in rural areas and that their needs are represented on a community planning partnership.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will senior representatives of health trusts at director level be compelled to participate in the community planning process? I say that because, recently in Omagh, negative proposals came forward regarding palliative care and dementia care that would never have seen the light of day if local elected representatives had been alongside health chiefs in decision-making.

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McElduff for that sensible question — not that his questions usually are not sensible. As I outlined in my previous answer, the Department recently opened consultation that will identify statutory partners to participate in community planning with councils. Health organisations are well represented in that. I believe that it is imperative that they are on that list and that they have to be part of the community planning process, not least to avoid the kind of recent scenarios to which Mr McElduff referred. I believe that that is in the health trusts' interests as much as it is in the interests of the elected representatives and the people that they represent.

It appears that the trusts often make decisions based on balancing the books rather than on addressing need, and that need is perhaps more acutely understood by locally elected representatives. This is a fine model, and I am hopeful that it will succeed in getting statutory bodies

to work together to the benefit of their citizens and our citizens.

2.15 pm

Hightown Quarry Landfill Site

5. **Mr McCausland** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the Hightown Quarry landfill site on the Upper Hightown Road, north Belfast. (AQO 7192/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Excuse me, Mr Deputy Speaker, I was informed that question 5 had been withdrawn as well, and it has now been withdrawn from my file. I can have a stab at it if you want.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Minister, there may be some confusion. It is topical question 5 that has been withdrawn.

Mr Durkan: Obviously there has been some confusion. I was disappointed because, for a few years, I had been asking Mr McCausland questions, and this was his first chance to ask me one. He was never able to answer mine either. *[Laughter.]* The Hightown quarry landfill site is the subject of a recent planning application. That planning application is being treated as an article 31 application, so, ultimately, it will fall to the Minister to make the decision on it. As it is the subject of a current application, I cannot go into too much detail on it, and I certainly cannot give much away on my assessment of it. I assure the Member that the planning application will be dealt with as efficiently as possible.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I call Mr McCausland for a supplementary, and I am sure that the Minister will try to answer it.

Mr McCausland: I would be delighted if he answered the question that I actually asked, which was not about a prospective planning application but about his assessment of the landfill site as it is today. Having grown up in the area, I am familiar with the part of the hill just above the Horseshoe Bend as it was many years ago. The quarries have been filled in, but a much larger mountain is now developing there. Can the Minister assure me that officials have investigated whether the dumping at the landfill site has, up until now, been done in accordance with what was permitted or has it in some way gone beyond that? I am surprised that it has been able to grow in the way in which it has.

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McCausland for that supplementary or maybe for clarification of his original question. I may have let the cat out the bag. There was a recently submitted planning application to extend the site. I assure the Member that what occurs on that landfill site is what occurs on any landfill site that we are aware of: it is closely monitored by NIEA and DOE officials. If the Member would like to bring to my attention any problems specific to the site or the situation, I will be happy to hear from him and have them investigated further.

Councillor Appointments: NDPBs

6. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of the Environment which departmental outside bodies will be specified for councillor appointments as part of the Local Government Bill. (AQO 7193/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I will not specify any bodies to which councils will make appointments. Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 lists the positions that are deemed to be positions of responsibility. This includes those requiring the appointment of a councillor as an external representative of a council — in other words, where a councillor is nominated by the council to serve as a member of a public body on behalf of the council. The Act defines “public body” as a body other than a council established by or under any statutory provision. There appears to have been some confusion about that, and local government sought clarification from my Department. My officials have been liaising with their counterparts in other Departments to identify public bodies established by or under any statutory provision that seek nominations from councils. The Department will provide councils with the information.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for that response. I think it probably continues to add to the confusion, with respect. Can the Minister give the House an assurance that he will continue to liaise with all the other relevant Ministers to ensure that there is consistency in how councils engage with arm’s-length bodies that have to relate to the new district councils in the new dispensation?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. It is important that there is a degree of consistency. However, yet again, as I said in response to an earlier question, councils will have different needs. There will be bodies that are more relevant in some council areas than in others. However, I can imagine that there may be some difficulties where members are currently appointed to bodies by one council but not by another and now those two councils are amalgamating. My officials will continue to work with their counterparts in other Departments and, most importantly, their counterparts in local government.

Mr Campbell: The Minister would not outline the bodies that he will specify in the Bill, but will he undertake to look at the number of terms that councillors can serve consecutively on outside bodies, which I know has been a matter of some concern over a number of years?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. As I have outlined, my officials continue to work with their counterparts in other Departments and in local government. I will ensure that, as part of that ongoing work, they ascertain the information to which the Member refers.

Council Grants: Budget 2015-16

7. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the implications of the draft Budget 2015-16 for grants to councils. (AQO 7194/11-15)

Mr Durkan: If the current draft budget proposals for my Department were to be confirmed in the final Budget, there would be immediate and substantial reductions in key statutory grant payments to all councils, particularly to the less well-off councils dependent on additional rate support payments to guarantee basic levels of service at local level. Also, a wide number of grant programmes will face significant cuts and potential termination. They include emergency planning, which provides support to councils to undertake emergency planning preparatory work; construction products, which provide support to councils to carry out statutorily required inspection work;

local air quality, which is aimed at assisting district councils in carrying out the statutory air quality duties prescribed under the Environment Order 2002 and corresponding air quality regulations; the Rethink Waste revenue fund, which provides grants for councils to improve resource efficiency and boost waste prevention, recycling and re-use activity; the listed buildings programme, which provides support for repair works to listed buildings in council ownership; and the natural heritage programme, which provides support to encourage the conservation and enhancement of key elements of the environment. In respect of the transferred functions grant, uncertainty remains about whether these sums will be protected from the basis of calculation or, indeed, any actual cuts in the future.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree with me that cutting money to the councils that need it most is hardly the best way to begin a new council structure? Those councils are the poorest councils, which, unfortunately, happen to be located west of the Bann.

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Eastwood for that supplementary question. As the saying goes, I would not start from here, that is for sure. I would love to be in a position where I could offer an assurance to all councils, particularly the less well-off councils. However, unfortunately, I cannot. The imposition of budgetary cuts of this magnitude will have a very detrimental impact on all councils at a time when they are starting a new era in local government, when they need certainty and when we here should support them as best we can. The impact on the less well-off councils — Mr Eastwood referred to the geography of the situation; they are largely in the west — gives me great cause for concern too. Not only will there be an impact on all councils but it will be disproportionately harsh on those that can least afford it.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Has the Minister assessed the impact on jobs if some of the grants do not go to local authorities?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Boylan for that supplementary question.

That work is ongoing. However, as a member of the Committee, you saw my budget paper last week and you will be aware of the impact that the draft Budget will have on jobs in the Department, leading to possibly 500 job losses. I am also aware of the impact that the cuts will have on jobs supported by my Department, be they in local authorities, where quite a number of building control staff, for example, are supported through the construction products grant, the local air quality grant and the emergency planning grant, or in other NGOs, which I do not want to name now but which are supported through other grants and do invaluable work in helping us meet our recycling and waste reduction targets. I do not have a final figure on that yet, but I am sure it will be bleak reading indeed, which will compound the bleak announcements of last week, not just from my Department but across all Departments.

Taxis: Driver Test

8. **Mr Ramsey** asked the Minister of the Environment how the recently introduced taxi driver test will benefit people with disabilities. (AQO 7195/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The taxi industry provides a valuable and vital service to many people with disabilities across the North, providing the only means of transport for many. The introduction of a new taxi driver test is an important element of the Taxis Act 2008. It was introduced on 31 October and will help increase minimum standards and professionalise the industry. Further, from September 2016, all taxi driver licence renewals will need to be accompanied by evidence of periodic training.

The taxi driver test will include a practical and a theory test. The theory test will include questions specifically relating to people with disabilities. The questions have been designed to ensure that those becoming taxi drivers are trained and fully responsive to the needs of people with a disability.

My Department has been working closely with groups representing people with disabilities. As part of a report on a new specification for wheelchair-accessible taxis, a survey of people with disabilities was undertaken. When asked what features they thought would make it easier for them to use taxis, 49% of all respondents cited better trained drivers who are more aware of disabled people's mobility assistance needs. For that reason, within the periodic training regime, the only mandatory module for all drivers will be disability awareness.

The Member will also wish to note that an updated wheelchair-accessible taxi specification will come into force in the middle of next year. I am confident that these measures will make the taxi industry more accessible and go some length towards making the journeys made by people with disabilities safer and more comfortable.

Mr Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's detailed response and declare an interest as chair of the all-party group on disability. It will be encouraging and motivating for all those in our community who have disabilities, who struggle with public transport at the best of times and who depend on taxis.

Will the Minister outline any discussions he has had with the taxi disability groups across Northern Ireland in relation to the single-tier system that is coming into place soon?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Ramsey for that question. In the last year, I have had countless meetings with representatives of all sectors of the taxi industry as well as stakeholder groups such as Disability Action, the Consumer Council and the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) specifically to discuss the taxi reform programme and to take soundings on their views. The following stakeholders expressed their support for single-tier licensing to me: Disability Action, IMTAC, the Consumer Council, Women's Aid, Victim Support, Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Pubs of Ulster and Visit Belfast.

2.30 pm

I made it clear in my statement to the Assembly in June that I have considered all the arguments presented to me and none has persuaded me to persist with the current dual-tier system in operation in Belfast. The relevant legislation is nearing completion and will be made within the next month. I intend to update the Environment Committee on progress on taxi legislation when I attend its meeting this week.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That ends the period for listed questions. We move on to topical questions.

Solar Photovoltaic Farms: Applications

T1. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm that applications for large solar photovoltaic (PV) farms in open countryside are being determined on the basis that the installations are temporary, albeit for 30 years, otherwise the land would have to be rezoned. (AQT 1841/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Applications for solar farms are determined under planning policy and the relevant development plan. The current policy for all renewables is Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 18 'Renewable Energy', as the Member is aware. For solar PV farms, the Department may include conditions on any permission for the removal of the structures 30 years after connection to the grid. That may be related to the lifespan of the technology, for example, and the planning condition ensures that old, non-functioning equipment is not left in the landscape. If an applicant wishes to continue operating after that 30-year period or beyond it, they would have to make a fresh planning application.

The zoning of land is a function of the statutory development plan. The reason for the temporary nature of planning permission related to solar farms is not related to the zoning of land but rather to issues associated with the proposed development and lifespan of the equipment or technology.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire arís eile. I thank the Minister again. What assurances can he give that those large solar installations will be decommissioned, the panels recycled and the land restored at the end of that 30-year period? In other words, what I am asking is: can it be conditioned as part of any potential approvals that are issued?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McGlone for that supplementary question. As mentioned, if an applicant wishes to continue operating at the end of the 30-year period, they would have to make a fresh planning application. The application would be subject to the full rigours of the planning system and be assessed against the relevant area plan in place at that time, along with the prevailing planning policy and any other material considerations. If the use of large-scale installations continues without the benefit of planning permission, the Department can initiate enforcement action against the applicant to ensure compliance with the original condition.

Social Housing: Demolition Restrictions

T2. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of the Environment to comment on an application for a proposed housing development in Brookhill Avenue in north Belfast to assist those who have suffered from mental ill health, which has great social value and is a very interesting enterprise but has encountered difficulties through restrictions to the development due to the fact that demolition in an area of townscape cannot take place without an alternative use having been identified. (AQT 1842/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Maginness for that question. I previously met with the Member on this application. The meeting was attended by Mr Maginness, other community representatives and, quite tellingly, service users. I was most impressed by what they had to say. The planning application remains under consideration. It seeks to replace existing specialist supported housing at Brookhill with new facilities. There are three detached buildings that may be affected. While those are unlisted, they are in an area of townscape character.

I am aware of the background to the application. As I said, I met Mr Maginness and the applicants' advisers and supporters. At the meeting, it was agreed that evidence should be submitted to show that all other options, including avoiding demolition of the buildings, have been considered. It was agreed that, in parallel, officials would engage with the applicants' architect on design issues. Amended plans have been submitted as of 21 October, accompanied by further information. A further meeting between my officials and the applicants will be arranged and held before the Department presents an opinion to Belfast City Council for statutory consultation. I hope to get that done soon.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his detailed response on the application. Does he agree with me that the social value of the application outweighs, in many respects, the value of retaining the buildings due to their townscape character and that this is indeed a worthy project? Does he also agree that, in such circumstances, planners should take the view that the application should succeed?

Mr Durkan: Clearly, this project has potential social and health benefits, as it involves the provision of modern supported housing facilities. The applicants and their many supporters clearly articulated that at the meeting that we held. There may indeed be benefits in maintaining supported housing at this location. That is something that I heard loud and clear from those who avail themselves of the supported housing. However, the issue for planning is to assess whether it is feasible to accommodate the supported housing needs at this location whilst seeking to retain the built heritage. I believe that a balance can be struck and I am determined to strike it.

Road Fatalities

T3. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of the Environment what measures his Department is taking to address the concerning situation of the tragic deaths on the roads in various constituencies in recent months, with the figures this year, when compared to last year, making for very alarming reading. (AQT 1843/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Givan for that question. He quite rightly identifies the fact that this year has been a particularly bad one for fatalities on our roads in comparison with the previous two years. However, we must bear in mind that the previous two years had the lowest figures on record for fatalities, and we should look at the general trend to see how much we have improved our road safety and reduced the number of fatalities on our roads over the years due to continued education, improved engineering and the stricter enforcement of laws pertaining to road safety.

However, I think that it is important that we do not rest on our laurels. I assure the Member that that is not what has been happening or why we have seen the drop back this year and this sad and sudden increase in road deaths. It is strange because there has been no increase in serious injuries or collisions on the roads. However, that shows just what a fine line there is between survival and death on our roads.

I assure the Member and, indeed, the House that I remain extremely committed, if not more committed than ever, to ensuring safety on our roads. Next year, I will have less money to do that. However, I think that necessity can sometimes be the mother of invention. I will have to look again at how we work with our road safety partners to get the message out there. I chaired a meeting of the ministerial working group on road safety yesterday that was attended by Minister Ford and Minister Kennedy, and I am assured of their support. Indeed, I am sure that I have the support of all Members.

Mr Givan: I thank the Minister for that response. Fatalities on our roads had been on a downward trajectory for quite a number of years, and that is why the considerable increase this year and the devastation that that has caused the families impacted on by it is such a cause for concern. I know that the Minister is all too aware of that.

His predecessor and Ministers before that were able to use their ministerial office to attract media coverage and to enhance public awareness, and that was helpful in bringing the issue to the public's attention. I appreciate the difficult financial constraints and the implications that those may have on advertising campaigns. However, will the Minister assure the House that he will seek to use his office in a way that will attract as much public awareness as possible to the issue to try to help address the problems on our roads?

Mr Durkan: Absolutely. I give the Member and the House an assurance that I will use my office to do just that. I remind him and all other Members of their responsibility to use their office and any opportunity that they have to reinforce road safety messages as well.

The Member quite rightly outlined the fact that, although we are talking about statistics, we are talking about people. Each fatality on our road represents a life lost and a family devastated. I believe that we all have a responsibility to reduce that number or to eradicate it. My Department has a campaign called "Road to Zero". We would love to get to a position in which we had zero road deaths every year. That may sound beyond our ability, but it should not be beyond our ambition. The causes of many of the fatal collisions remain speed, drink and drugs and a lack of attention. Basically, it is human error, and that is why it is extremely important that we continue to reinforce our messages to the public.

Farmers: NIEA Interviews Under Caution

T4. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of the Environment why, rather than a face-to-face interview, when a farmer is called in to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) for an interview about using tyres on his farm for his legitimate farming business, he is treated like a common criminal by being sat down, interviewed under

formal caution, with the interview taped using three tapes, as would be the case when charged in a police station. (AQT 1844/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. I am unaware of the specifics of the case and therefore cannot comment on them. However, issues have been brought to my attention in the past around how officials, particularly NIEA officials, conduct their work, and, as such, I have ordered a root-and-branch review of the agency. I want to make it more customer-friendly and customer-focused. Certainly, the behaviour described by Mr McMullan does not give the impression of an organisation that is either of those things.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for his answer. The community will be heartened by the fact that you are conducting a root-and-branch review of the agency's dealings. When a farmer applies to the agency to bring tyres on to his farm, why does he have to pay £842 for a licence to cover him for a three-year period?

Why is that permit or licence so dear? It is £842. There is no rationale for it whatsoever. Consider how much the countryside is blighted by bonfires every year. Nobody responsible for bonfires is being brought to book. Why is the farming community being singled out? Why is the farmer having to pay £842 for a permit to bring tyres onto his farm? Go raibh maith agat.

2.45 pm

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that supplementary question. I can assure him and the House that the farming community is not being singled out. Anyone who handles waste tyres will be subject to the same type of scrutiny and investigation.

The rationale behind paying that licence fee is actually to attach a value to those tyres because, all too often, tyres that are being used on farms are the very ones that end up on bonfires. I know that this is an issue that the Member has raised previously. Unfortunately, he was not able to be here on the day that there was an Adjournment debate on this subject. I know that that was through no fault of his own. I would happily meet him to discuss it in the future.

Finance and Personnel

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Question No 6 has been withdrawn.

Public Sector: Skills Gap

1. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what redeployment and retraining opportunities he intends to provide to cover the skills gap in the public service created by early retirement and redundancy packages. (AQO 7202/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): At the outset, I want to make clear that my answer is in respect of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. It is for other Ministers to answer for other public-sector bodies that come within their areas of responsibility.

The Executive have asked my Department to bring forward a range of proposals for strategic personnel interventions to effect a pay bill reduction in the Civil Service, including

a voluntary exit scheme. It is important to stress that a voluntary exit scheme is only one of a range of measures to be considered.

DFF, in close collaboration with other Departments, has begun the process of establishing the overall size of the pay bill reduction that needs to be delivered and how this is to be achieved. It is recognised that it will be important in the planning of these measures to take account of the Civil Service maintaining essential business continuity. At this early stage, it is not possible to estimate the extent to which there might be any redeployment or any need for retraining due to the implementation of a voluntary exit scheme.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for his answer. In my constituency, there are 13,400 people working in the Civil Service and public service. Will he assure me that the interests of local towns like Lurgan, Portadown and Banbridge will be protected in any redundancy situations that he develops?

Mr Hamilton: As the Minister responsible for personnel in the Civil Service, I obviously have the responsibility of bringing forward a voluntary exit scheme for the Civil Service. Other Ministers are actually responsible for the bulk of public servants in Northern Ireland. The Civil Service accounts for roughly only 15% of the total public sector in Northern Ireland, which is around 212,000 individuals. I will seek to do that carefully.

The Member and the House will appreciate that the severest pressure that we face is the need to reduce our pay bill so that we can not only live within our means next year but be better prepared for future years. That will necessitate some tough choices, particularly around personnel issues. I think that everybody understands that, as far from ideal as it is, when you have less money and you are providing fewer services, you will need fewer people to do that.

I am sure that one thing that we will not consider is the impact on individual towns or parts of Northern Ireland. What will obviously be at the forefront of our minds in devising, implementing and executing a scheme is the interests of the people who live in those towns and the services that they receive from government, whether they be through the Civil Service or the broad public sector. That is what we always have kept to the forefront of our minds: we are here to provide services and achieve outcomes for citizens. That will obviously necessitate public servants' being situated not only in Belfast or major towns but right across Northern Ireland. As far as possible, we will ensure that anything that is done will not do any violence to the delivery of services, whether that be in Upper Bann, East Londonderry, Strangford or indeed any other constituency.

Mr McCrea: The Minister will be aware that local media have said that trade unions are planning to strike as a response to the job cuts — I suppose that the “voluntary exit scheme” is the proper phrase for it. Is the Minister willing to comment on what the impact of those strikes could be?

Mr Hamilton: Within 24 hours of the draft Budget being announced earlier this month, I had already arranged a meeting with representatives of the trade unions. We had a very useful discussion, as we do on any occasion we meet. What I heard at that meeting and at previous ones

stands in stark contrast to some of the public utterances of some members of the trade union movement who I do not think are representative of the trade union movement as a whole or the members of trade unions.

Listening to some who appear on our airwaves and television screens regularly, there is an air of unreality about what they say on this issue. I think that they fail to understand, in the way that, I think and hope, most of us in the House understand, and I am pretty sure the people of Northern Ireland and the business community in Northern Ireland understand, that there is less money to do everything we want to do in Northern Ireland. That requires us to cut our cloth accordingly.

If those views are, in any way, seeping through to others in the trade union movement, I encourage trade unions to reflect again on those sorts of comments. If one of their objectives is to protect public services, they have to ask what a strike, a series of strikes, or, as one member of the trade union movement said, a winter of discontent in Northern Ireland, would achieve. I am all for them protesting. However, if they are going to protest, they should protest where it matters. The fact that we have £1.5 billion less spending power today is not as a result of decisions taken by the Executive; it is because of decisions taken by the Conservative-led coalition in Westminster. If they want to protest, that is the place to go.

Mr Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his responses today. Given the dependency in some areas, as Samuel Gardiner said, on public-sector jobs, including my constituency, where there are high levels of economic inactivity, and given that it is a most emotive subject matter for many in our community, will the Minister outline to the House what discussions he has had with the trade union bodies in respect of the plans for early retirement and redundancy packages?

Mr Hamilton: As I said in response to Mr McCrea, I met the trade unions within a day of the draft Budget being published. We had a very good discussion in and around this issue. Obviously, you would not expect trade unions to welcome, with open arms, a draft Budget that reduces public spending. I have said that it is not a perfect draft Budget; it includes tough choices and difficult decisions. Obviously, they had comments to make in respect of a voluntary exit scheme and a reduction in headcount across the public sector.

By meeting them early, I showed my intent to include them in the conversation. There have been, there are, and there will continue to be, meetings between officials from primarily my Department, officials elsewhere in the public and the trade unions. I have a paper before the Executive this week on a reform and restructuring plan which includes details of a voluntary exit scheme. I hope to get approval for that from my Executive colleagues this Thursday, because we need to start moving on this very quickly if we are to realise savings starting in the next financial year.

When it is up and running, it is important that there is discussion with the trade union movement about the terms of all that and how it will work. Let us face it: many members of the public sector will want to avail themselves of a voluntary exit scheme, and I am sure that the unions will want to ensure that their interests are also looked after in that process.

DFP Papers: Timely Delivery

2. **Mr Hazzard** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assurances he can give on the timely delivery of key departmental papers to the Committee for Finance and Personnel, particularly those papers relating to the draft Budget 2015-16. (AQO 7203/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It is my responsibility as Minister to ensure that I am content with all the output from my Department, including briefing for the Committee. I will always endeavour to provide the information requested on a timely basis.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer, short as it was. No doubt the Minister will agree that scrutiny of these plans and papers is very important. In light of that, does the Minister agree that public engagement and, indeed, engagement by community groups and trades unions in the consultation process for the draft Budget are very important?

Mr Hamilton: The drive for efficiency may extend even to my answers in the Chamber, although do not hold your breath. Yes, I do. We are not unique, but our process of agreeing a draft Budget, putting it out to public consultation, finalising it in a final Budget and then legislating — a process that extends over roughly five months — stands in contrast to some other Administrations. I sometimes envy the ability of the Chancellor to get up on Budget day and say, “This is the Budget for next year”. The next day the legislation is introduced, and within a week it is law. There is a neatness to that, but it does not allow for healthy public debate in the way that we do, although some may criticise the time that it takes.

The Committee system in the House plays an important role in taking feedback from Departments and scrutinising what they say when the Budget, as with this one, will make reductions. It also allows them to engage with sectoral groups, interest groups and the community, who are affected by Ministers' decisions. It could be criticised by some as cumbersome, and perhaps there is sometimes a perception, particularly in an environment where we do not have as much money as we would like, that there is not a lot of change. I think, however, that it is a useful process that allows the public, trade unions, the business community and others to have their say and an input into the Budget. I am sure that you already see that in the consultation, and I hope that you will see it reflected in the final Budget, which I hope to see agreed in early January.

Autumn Statement

3. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on his Department's discussions with Treasury officials and Ministers ahead of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. (AQO 7204/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I have not had any direct communication with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the content of his autumn statement, and, whilst my officials are in ongoing contact with their Treasury colleagues on a range of issues, they are not sighted on the content of the autumn statement.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. All the talk

and speculation on the statement here is about the transfer of powers and corporation tax. The 'Financial Times' says yes; 'The Irish Times' says no. In wider terms, have you or your officials had any meaningful discussions about the real-term cuts to the block grant that you have alluded to in previous answers and how they have impacted and will impact on the Executive's ability to deliver core front-line services in the next year?

Mr Hamilton: As you would expect of me in this role, I take any opportunity to stress to Treasury Ministers when I meet them the impact that reductions in expenditure in Northern Ireland have had and are having. It is fair to say that our 2011-15 Budget was challenging, certainly in the latter years, and we are experiencing that in this financial year. However, that conversation was slightly different from the conversation that we are having now. I made a statement in the House today about the British-Irish Council meeting in the Isle of Man last Friday, which I attended on behalf of the First Minister. The issue was raised not just by me and the deputy First Minister but by the Scottish and Welsh Administrations. It was raised not with Treasury officials but with the Secretary of State. There is no doubt that the impact of spending reductions comes up in discussions that I have with Treasury Ministers and with other Ministers. Indeed, the ramifications for public spending in Northern Ireland and how we can deal with the issues come up in discussions that officials have with their counterparts in Treasury too.

Mr Girvan: Will Northern Ireland receive a Barnett consequential from the £2 billion announced by the Westminster Government, and will it be ring-fenced?

3.00 pm

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. We will hopefully find out soon exactly what the impact on Northern Ireland will be. To be honest, I was not expecting a terrible lot to come out of the autumn statement through Barnett consequentials for Northern Ireland, given that the Chancellor and certainly his Government have been heading more towards income tax reductions next year and have been dealing with less in their own tax revenues. I did not expect there to be a huge amount of additional spending, so I was pleasantly surprised by the announcement at the weekend of an allocation of £2 billion to the NHS that would have some Barnett consequentials. The timing is interesting: you would almost think that there was an election in the offing. However, we will take whatever we can get. It appears that there is at least between £40 million and £50 million of a Barnett consequential for Northern Ireland as a result of the decision that the Chancellor is expected to announce in his autumn statement tomorrow. Obviously, that is gratefully received by the Executive, and it will be a great help in arriving at a final Budget position.

On the Member's final point about whether it is ring-fenced, that is obviously a decision for the Executive to take in the fullness of the situation that we face. I am sure that my colleague Mr Wells, the Health Minister, could make a compelling case for why some of or all that money should go to his Department, but we should bear in mind that a range of pressures is emerging between draft and final Budget across a range of Departments. I have spoken about some of those pressures in the House, and other Ministers have come to the House and spoken about some

others. Let us not forget either that the Executive were generous to the Department of Health in the settlement that we had in the draft Budget and that some other Departments had to pay for that with larger reductions. We were able to give it £150 million of an additional allocation. It is one of only two Departments that will be in a beneficial position next year compared with last year. However, those pressures and what we have already done with the draft Budget —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Minister is over his two minutes.

Mr Hamilton: — are obviously factors that the Executive will consider.

Mr Agnew: Even if we get a positive decision, as he would see it, on corporation tax powers, will the Minister listen to the likes of Bro McFerran and Allstate and rein back his position on reducing the rate to 12.5% or even less?

Mr Hamilton: I share the views of others, not least my colleague the Enterprise Minister, who answered questions in the House yesterday. I am deeply disappointed by Bro McFerran's comments, particularly those on the Executive's ability to take decisions. Obviously, the Executive have been able to take what Mr McFerran would consider to be positive decisions on supporting his business and bringing employment into Northern Ireland. I think that it is disappointing. Aside from whatever the media may wish to do to blow up the impact of what Mr McFerran said, his views are not reflective of the business community in Northern Ireland.

We have a rare occasion where not only are all the five parties in the Executive supportive of the devolution of corporation tax powers but you have a collective across business, and not just big business represented by the likes of the CBI, the Institute of Directors (IOD) or the Chamber of Commerce but small business in the shape of the Federation of Small Businesses, the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association or Pubs of Ulster have all got behind the campaign to devolve corporation tax powers to Northern Ireland.

I remain hopeful of a positive decision tomorrow. The economic pact that the First Minister and deputy First Minister agreed with the Prime Minister in June last year made a commitment, which the Prime Minister signed, to make a final decision on the devolution of corporation tax no later than the 2014 autumn statement. The autumn statement is due tomorrow, so we expect a final decision tomorrow. I am hopeful, given the robust and compelling case that Northern Ireland has made not just on the need to rebalance our economy but on our unique situation as the only part of the United Kingdom sharing a land border with a state with a significantly lower rate of corporation tax. I think that that compelling case stands on its merits, and I hope that we get a positive decision from the Chancellor tomorrow.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, you alluded to health with regard to the Barnett consequential and to the idea that there may perhaps be some ring-fencing of that. However, I understand that infrastructure is also to be accommodated in the Budget tomorrow in the autumn statement. I wonder whether there would be a willingness on your part and on the part of the Executive to ring-fence some Barnett consequential for Northern Ireland for infrastructure.

Mr Hamilton: If there are Barnett consequential from decisions that are taken across the water on infrastructure investment, it will not be a matter of us ring-fencing that for infrastructure. It will come as capital that will have to be spent on infrastructure. That will be very welcome, too, because, whilst our capital position next year is improving from this year, it is still under pressure. Any money that we can pour into developing our infrastructure helps our economy and helps to create jobs, but it is also a boost to attracting investment to these shores.

We will see what comes forward in the autumn statement in any capital Barnett consequential. Some announcements that I have seen appear to be the bundling and re-announcing of previous commitments made by the Government, so it is not yet clear whether they are new decisions and therefore with a Barnett consequential if there is comparability or whether they are just a rehash of old announcements.

It is a bit like the caution on the announcement about health. Although it does look as though there are positive Barnett consequential coming from that, it is not clear how some of it might be financed. It could be coming from decisions that have negative Barnett consequential. There may be other positive and negative decisions, so we will find out at approximately this time tomorrow whether it is good news or not-so-good news for Northern Ireland.

Defamation Law

4. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what impact the proposed closure of the Northern Ireland Law Commission will have on the review of the law of defamation. (AQO 7205/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland Law Commission launched its consultation on the law of defamation on 27 November, and it will run until 20 February next year. I expect the commission to try to complete the analysis of responses and the final report by 31 March 2015, which is the scheduled date for closure. We are considering how the commission's resources can be maximised to help it to achieve that objective. However, if it is not able to do so, it may be possible to retain the services of the lawyer leading the project for a further short period to allow for the completion of the review.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his response. We were talking about the Barnett formula. Obviously, with Lord Barnett recently deceased, he would seem to fall outside the law of defamation. The Minister outlined contingency arrangements. Will they in any way compromise the independence of the project?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. I thank him for his original question, too, which gives an opportunity to clear up for the House some confusion that may have emanated from the Minister of Justice's decision to end the work of — close down, effectively — the Law Commission from the end of this financial year. There was concern in some print media that that would lead to the end of the review, which I commissioned about a year ago, and that we would not see any progress on the matter. I had correspondence with the Minister of Justice, and we have agreed the consultation, which was published just this past week. That will take some time to complete and get the feedback on.

The Member asked about independence. My whole objective in asking the Law Commission to carry out a review of the law of defamation in Northern Ireland is to determine whether there is a need to extend to here in full or in part the changes that were made to the law of defamation in England and Wales was that we needed an independent perspective on it. We had views expressed by some in the legal profession, who may be considered to have a vested interest, and by some in the press and media, who may also be accused of having a vested interest. I thought it important to get an independent view.

In short, the contingency arrangements that I am talking about are designed to advance rather than diminish the level of independence. My Department will not be assuming any responsibility for the final stages of the review project. Rather, it is envisaged that the commission's lead lawyer, who has been carrying out the work on our behalf, will complete the final report and refer it back to the Department for consideration.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answer, but he misses the point in this. It is not really just that the report into defamation has been delayed and may not be completed but that the Law Commission is an important outworking of the criminal justice review. At the stroke of a pen, the Minister of Justice effectively abolished —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Can we have a question, please?

Mr A Maginness: — the commission. Is that not a terrible waste of resources that the Assembly could have used to build a good legislative body in the House?

Mr Hamilton: There is a pattern developing: a lawyer asked the first question and another lawyer asked the second. I would expect a lawyer to point out where I was wrong in respect of this.

The decision on the Law Commission is not a matter for me; it is a matter for the Minister of Justice. The point that my learned friend made so eloquently would be better directed towards the Minister of Justice, who obviously faces, not just this year but in future years, pressures on his budget. I am sure he can argue with the Minister of Justice about the relative merits of the Law Commission.

While not wishing to speak for the Minister of Justice, I am sure that he would highlight the fact that, in the very pressurised budgetary environment that he is facing, not just this year but in future years, he has to take decisions that, in a more perfect environment or a more benign environment, may not be decisions that he would want to take, but that in order to ensure that as much of the front-line services, particularly around the police, are protected and supported within his area of responsibility, the decision to do away with the Law Commission is, in that context, a reasonable one to make.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. So we have got the review. However, when the consultation comes out, will the Minister guarantee that, if reform is needed, legislation will be brought forward?

Mr Hamilton: I was concerned, and this is why I am glad to have the opportunity to clear some of this up, that the Commission's expiring at the end of this year might have kiboshed the whole review and shunted it into the sidelines; it might have made it difficult for us to pick up

and continue in a way that included the all-important independence that I wanted to have in that review.

I would be foolhardy if I stood here and guaranteed anything, including legislation, on this. However, the whole purpose of the review is to get an independent perspective and for us to consider that and see where the balance of the arguments are on the need to introduce legislation. If the conclusion that I reach after studying the report is that there is a need for legislation, I will seek to bring that forward. Obviously, towards the end of an Assembly term there is a rush to get legislation through and there is pressure on resources in terms of the legislative draftsmen, the time available in this House and the time that the Committees have available. Certainly, if there is a need to do it, that is something that I certainly will pursue.

Stephen Brimstone

5. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline his Department's role in the fact-finding investigation into the actions of Mr Stephen Brimstone. (AQO 7206/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: DFP had no departmental role in the fact-finding investigation into the actions of Mr Stephen Brimstone.

Mr Swann: Will the Minister clarify what specific role the head of corporate HR within his Department had? They were tasked to carry out a fact-finding investigation into Mr Brimstone's role as a civil servant.

Mr Hamilton: The Member has articulated the position exceptionally well, to the point where I am wondering why he needed to ask the question. The head of corporate HR in my Department — corporate HR has a range of responsibilities, not just in my Department, but for the broad Civil Service — was asked by the permanent secretary responsible for the Department for Social Development to carry out a fact-finding mission. I presume that that was done on the basis of getting an independent view or voice from outside the Department. That work was carried out, but it had nothing to do with me, and I did not commission it. Therefore, it is not a responsibility for my Department.

Mr Allister: Mr Stephen Brimstone, because he is a special adviser, is a temporary civil servant. He is therefore subject to the same code of ethics as every other civil servant. Your Department has responsibility for all civil servants in that regard. Why, therefore, would you not be interested in the fact-finding exercise pertaining to that which was carried out by your corporate HR department? Why do you want to be complicit in covering up the facts that were unearthed?

Mr Hamilton: That is a typical response from the Member, who has shown his position on this issue through his very open remarks in the Committee. I would have thought that, as a lawyer, he would have waited until the balance of evidence was there, but he has very clearly reached a conclusion in his own mind on the matter.

This was a fact-finding investigation, commissioned by the permanent secretary responsible for the Department for Social Development: it was nothing to do with me, and it was nothing to do with my Department. I daresay that, had I shown an interest in the report and asked to see it, the very same Member would have been accusing me of

interfering in the process. I think that what I have done in not asking for the report, not looking at the report, not seeing the report, not commissioning it and not being involved in it in any way, shape or form was the right and proper thing for me to do.

3.15 pm

Mr Campbell: Will the Minister, in his capacity as Minister of Personnel, outline the protection offered to temporary civil servants when they come before a Committee for an inquiry, which Mr Brimstone has done not once, not twice, not three times but four times — and is due to come for a fifth time to answer questions, when others have declined to come — from constant badgering from people who cannot face up to the truth?

Mr Hamilton: It would not matter to me whether they were special advisers or, indeed, any other civil servant or public servant. When they come before Committees of this House, they should be treated with courtesy and respect. First, they should not be treated as if they are guilty, which is the behaviour of the Member Mr Allister in his dealings with Mr Brimstone. Secondly, they should not be treated as if they are some sort of witness in a court of law where the Member can practise the skills that he has developed through the years in the High Courts in Belfast. All witnesses and all people who come to the House to give evidence in whatever way, shape or form should be treated with decency and respect.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to topical questions.

Smith Commission: Local Impact

T1. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his analysis of the Smith commission recommendations and their potential local impact. (AQT 1851/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I think that it was an interesting report that was published last week by the Smith commission. I have taken a look at it, and, obviously, I will study it in much more depth. It is interesting in itself because of the impact that it has on Scotland, but it is more revealing perhaps, particularly with the conversation that we are having at the minute in respect of the devolution of further powers to Northern Ireland. Obviously, we are very much focused on the devolution of corporation tax, and, hopefully, we will get a positive response to that in the next 24 hours. It reveals that, particularly around welfare and other tax devolution, there is potential in Northern Ireland, should we want it and should we judge it to be in our interests, for more powers to be granted to the Assembly should we agree to seek them.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. The Smith commission's recommendations on welfare have changed the context of welfare cuts. Does the Minister think that the enhanced benefits offered to Scotland could have some impact or potential here?

Mr Hamilton: The area of welfare contained in the Smith commission report is one of the more complex ones. I met the new Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, last week at the British-Irish Council. She was at pains to point out that the Smith commission, in her view, was a good start but did not go far enough as far Scotland was concerned.

In respect of welfare, I do not wish to ascribe views to her, but I think that she was a little underwhelmed that the welfare benefits that were potentially going to be devolved to Scotland were only a small chunk of the overall welfare benefits and that any decisions that came at a cost would have to be paid for by the Scottish Government. This, of course, sounds familiar to us here because, obviously, we have negotiated flexibilities around welfare reform. All of these flexibilities come at a cost to the Northern Ireland Executive.

I think that there is potential for us to work closely with Scotland. They will tease out and work out themselves whether it is in their interests, whether they want to take it, how they want to take it, what they want to take, what they do not want to take and what the ramifications are for developing an IT system for Scotland. As they form a view on all of that, it is important that we keep close to them and continue to engage with them. The deputy First Minister and I pointed that out to the First Minister, and she was keen for that to continue, because, looking four or five years down the line, if the Scots do develop their own welfare system and that is a system that is more in keeping with where we might want to be at that time having passed some welfare reform legislation in the intervening period, there may be an opportunity for us to work with the Scots and have a joint welfare system, which would help to reduce many administration costs.

However, I am at pains to stress that that very much depends on what the Scots decide and will be very much in the longer term. I do not see it happening in the next year to 18 months or before we have to make a decision on the issue.

Public-sector Restructuring: Potential Impact

T2. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, bearing in mind that we are looking at workforce restructuring proposals, and given the high level of public-sector workers in Northern Ireland, what his initial view is of the potential impact on the number of workers and jobs. (AQT 1852/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Down through the years, certainly since I have been here and before that, there has been consensus across the House that we have an over-reliance on the public sector in Northern Ireland for economic growth and employment. We have a rather large public sector of around 212,000 people for a population of just 1.8 million. Whilst we want to rebalance the public sector, the circumstances that we find ourselves in that are forcing us towards rebalancing it are not ideal.

It is too early to say precisely how many people we expect to lose across the public sector. In the discussions that I have had so far with every Minister from every party represented on the Executive, I found that there are no Departments, arm's-length bodies or public sector bodies that do not foresee the need to reduce their headcounts by some degree. No matter who is stewarding those Departments in a ministerial sense, there are no Departments that see it as anything other than necessary to help us to live within our means.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the Minister for that answer. Among the 200,000 people in the public sector, there is clearly uncertainty, anxiety and concern about those issues. Will he confirm that he, as the Minister, and

his Department are in discussions with unions and the staff side and that a key feature of any proposals will be voluntary rather than compulsory redundancies?

Mr Hamilton: As the Member was talking, I wrote down one word: “voluntary”. It is important to stress that we are developing a voluntary exit scheme.

I do not want to jump to rash conclusions, but the feedback that I am receiving is that a voluntary exit scheme will not be rebuffed by many in the public sector. A number of people would like to avail themselves of such a scheme, and we will see the quantities as we develop a scheme over the next number of months.

I am aware that it is one thing, and it is my responsibility, to stand here and say that we have a Budget, that we must live within our means and that, particularly in the current circumstances, that requires drastic action. However, I also have to be sensitive to the fact that we are talking about people, and the Member was right to make that point. Many people and families across Northern Ireland, for whatever reason and whatever their particular motivation or concern, will want to know with some certainty what is happening, when it is happening and what it means for them.

Whilst it would be wrong to say that something like that will not happen and that we will not have to have a voluntary exit scheme — we clearly will have to have such a scheme — it would be equally wrong to rush out and say that there will be x number of people in this, that or the other Department. A lot of work has to be carried out before we can hollow out exactly how much money we have, what it will cost to remove people and whether we will have to do that over one, two, three or maybe more years. We will then decide where the people will come from and when they will come out of those Departments or arm’s-length bodies. It is very complex, technical, difficult and challenging work, but, at all stages, we have to bear in mind that we are talking about people and we need to be sensitive to their concerns.

Smith Commission: Consequences for Northern Ireland

T3. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the consequences for Northern Ireland following the publication of the Smith commission report. (AQT 1853/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There are, perhaps, no direct consequences flowing from the Smith commission report. It was a discrete piece of work that was done for Scotland, viewed from a Scotland perspective and populated by Scottish politicians, and, obviously, Scottish politics were very much to the forefront of the minds of members of the commission and the conclusions that they reached.

Some have suggested that, because there was a rebuffing of corporation tax for Scotland and then the subsequent comments of the First Minister in Scotland that she was disappointed. To be fair to her, she has been supportive of our call for the devolution of corporation tax to Northern Ireland. Some have also suggested that the rebuffing of the Scottish demand for corporation tax might have thrown some sort of a spanner in the works. I do not see it that way. I am at pains to stress that Northern Ireland is in a unique position. We are not Scotland, in terms of our economy and our economic development. Scotland’s

economy is much stronger and more industrialised than ours.

As the Member and the House will know, we have suffered for a number of years from underinvestment because of the Troubles, and we have that challenging land border issue with a state that has a considerably lower corporation tax rate. The fact that there is nothing in the Smith commission report about corporation tax does not necessarily mean that there is going to be a bad answer for Northern Ireland. I hope that we get a positive outcome by way of, at least, some sort of decision by the Chancellor. Obviously, a lot of work will be required to be done after a decision is made. A positive or supportive decision by the Chancellor will necessitate work being done at Westminster, by way of the passing of legislation there, and in Northern Ireland, by passing legislation here. I am still hopeful that we will get the go-ahead tomorrow that will allow us to proceed with securing that policy.

Mr Campbell: Hopefully, the Minister is right and there will be a positive response tomorrow. Assuming that there is, and, within 24 hours, we know the position, will the Minister’s officials, post-legislation at Westminster, begin the very diligent process with the Treasury of rolling out the positive response?

Mr Hamilton: The economic pact was very clear about a final decision being made no later than the autumn statement. I expect a statement tomorrow. I do not know what nature and shape that decision will take, or what it will or will not say, but we expect a decision of some kind tomorrow.

If it is, as we hope, a positive decision, in many respects, after a decade of work to get to this point, the work to ensure that the legislation can get through Westminster will really start. Obviously, we will be looking to the Member and his colleagues to ensure the swift passage of that legislation across the Houses of Parliament. We have work to do in Northern Ireland too with regard to consenting to that legislation, and, later, passing our own legislation and deciding where we want to set our level of corporation tax. Work will be ongoing with officials. Even if there is a positive decision tomorrow, it will not be a positive decision with a precise price and all the technical details. Some work will still have to be carried out with regard to all of that, and that will, obviously, have to be done incredibly quickly over a short time.

Like the Member, I hope that we get a positive decision tomorrow that will allow Northern Ireland to move forward on this issue, after the struggle and battle that there has been for the best part of a decade to get to this point. We have done everything that we can. I think that we have made a very strong, robust and sound case, based on evidence and need. I also think that we have a Government in London who are receptive to our argument, and I hope that they follow through positively with a decision tomorrow that is beneficial to Northern Ireland.

Public Sector: Voluntary Exit Scheme

T4. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he expects a voluntary exit scheme to be in place, given that most Departments are reporting the need to reduce staff numbers next year if they are to meet their budget pressures and targets. (AQT 1854/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Member is right. I do not think that any Minister who has reported to their Committee on the impact of the reductions in their budget has not said that they expect to take a number of staff off the payroll. The feedback that I am getting in discussions with Ministers so far is that every one of them has wanted to discuss the issue and has wanted to understand when a scheme will come forward. They are not hugely relying on making savings next year, but they want to know that they can start to make savings next year, which will materialise in much larger quantities the year after.

I have submitted a broader paper to the Executive on restructuring and reforming the public sector; it includes a range of issues, but primarily the voluntary exit scheme. The paper outlines the hope that, with a lot of effort and work over the coming weeks and months, we could have a voluntary exit scheme in place open for applications early in the next financial year. We will then start to take the first tranche of people out of the public sector around August or September next year.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. Time is up. Before we return to the A6 debate, I ask Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

3.30 pm

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair)

Private Members' Business

A6: Dungiven Bypass

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly recognises that the A6, which passes through Dungiven, is the main arterial route between the city of Derry and Belfast and is instrumental in terms of infrastructure to support regional development and economic growth in the north-west; and further recognises that Dungiven is one of the most polluted towns in western Europe and has been waiting for a bypass for over 40 years; and believes that this section of the A6 scheme should be advanced without delay, as per the Executive's investment strategy 2011-2021. — [Mr McAleer.]

Which amendment was:

At end insert

"and recognises that, in addition to the bypass at Dungiven, there are other sections of the A6 that must be dualled and upgraded without further delay, including the section at Moneynick." — [Mr Dallat.]

Mr Clarke: I support the motion and the amendment. Like others, I listened to the debate, and many of the contributions came from the north-west. However, as many Members will know, I represent South Antrim, where the bottleneck starts on the M22. I support the principle of the motion, but I appreciate the difficulties, given the scale and enormity of the cost of the total project. That said, it has to start somewhere.

Listening to the contributions, it is interesting to hear people talking about jobs, unemployment, connectivity, infrastructure and investment. One area that has not been touched on, which is dear to me, given the area that I represent, is that, with regret, I have to say there have been a number of road deaths on the Moneynick section of the M22. People try to exit properties on to a road that was not designed for that purpose. While there are benefits for people travelling to and from Belfast and Londonderry, and that is a necessity, it has put many people's lives at risk on the Moneynick section of the road where there are in excess of 18,000 movements a day. It has made it very difficult for people exiting and entering their properties, and it has put many lives at risk. It is with regret that I have to say that I know someone who lost their life on that section of road.

So, whilst we can talk about connectivity and investment, I do not think that we should forget about the people who make the difficult journey on that section of road. I am not taking away from the Dungiven section. Unlike others, I have travelled on it on a few occasions. It is not necessary for me to travel on it very often; however, I have sympathy with those who have to make that journey regularly. I also have sympathy with the people who live in Dungiven having that level of congestion through their village. To that end, I want to put on record that I support the motion as amended.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion as amended. Some might ask why I am speaking on the A6, but I am doing so as the Deputy Chair of the Committee for Regional Development, and I think that it is important that I speak on the issue. I have travelled a number of times on the route through Dungiven from Belfast and from Derry to Belfast, and I have seen the difficulties that the residents of Dungiven have to witness almost daily. I was with my colleague here one Friday afternoon after a meeting, and I witnessed the congestion and the difficulties for residents and for travellers.

The point is that Dublin and Belfast, as well as Derry, which is up the west and north coast, are three of the major cities, but Derry and Belfast are the two key cities in the North of Ireland. It is reasonable for us to expect a high standard of road infrastructure between those two cities. On part of the route from Belfast, you first have the M2, which is an excellent road running out of Belfast. One of the things that I experienced the first time I took the journey was that you then run from a motorway into a second-class road and from that into a bottleneck in Dungiven.

I take a journey each day from Fermanagh, and I know that that is a similar distance to the journey from Derry to Belfast. My colleagues take about 20 minutes longer. The Minister, in a response to my colleague Maeve McLaughlin, said that the journey from Derry to Belfast was shorter in time than that from Enniskillen. I do not know where you got those figures from, Minister. You said that Enniskillen to Belfast takes one hour and 38 minutes and that Derry to Belfast takes a shorter time. We travel on a fairly safe road from Fermanagh. I know that there are difficulties in parts of it, but once you get to Ballygawley, you have the A4, which is a recently built road, and you are then on the M1, which is safe and fast. The new part in particular has reduced the accident rate between the A4 at the end of the M1 to the Ballygawley roundabout. But between Ballygawley, you have a motorway and a dual carriageway, yet you do not have that between the two cities.

I want to focus on one or two points. Delivering a balanced regional infrastructure should be a key objective of the Department. There is no doubt that regional disparities exist because of decades of underinvestment in the west and north-west. People will mention, and have mentioned, the A5 — I know the difficulties with that — the Dungiven bypass and the more recent difficulties with the railway line. I cannot but mention the Enniskillen bypass, and I do not want it to be waiting for it for as long as the —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I encourage the Member to come back to the A6, which is the purpose of the debate.

Mr Lynch: I am broadly coming back to it. I am coming back to the A6 and the Dungiven bypass. Reading through the papers, I see that it has been waiting for decades.

If the north-west's full potential is to be realised, investment in the delivery of those projects must be a priority for the Minister's Department. I know that he will cite budgetary constraints, and I acknowledge that there are demands and fewer resources, but, very clearly, given the financial limitations, every effort should be made to invest in productive infrastructure, which will always produce economic dividends. For example, broadly speaking, the South of Ireland has made substantial

improvements over the last decades and has a core network that is on a par with that in Europe.

I will say finally to the Minister —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Lynch: — that these priorities are very important.

Mr Ramsey: I welcome the opportunity to speak on what is a most important subject for many in the north-west. I take the point from a Member who spoke previously about the road deaths and the injuries on the A6 over the years. There was a bad crash when I was coming up here yesterday, close to the Moneynick Road. The car that I saw was in an awful state, and I hope to God that whoever was involved in that accident is OK.

As a number of Members referenced, it would be interesting to see how many serious accidents and deaths have occurred on the Derry-to-Belfast road, with the exception of the motorway, over the last 10 years, for example. I am not sure whether the Minister will have that information.

Most of my adult life has been spent in politics, including 20 years on Derry City Council. I recall an early engagement with some of the direct rule Ministers in the 1980s. Investment at that time was determined by car ownership. That determined where direct investment on infrastructure took place.

People who come from outside the north-west resent it, but at times I talk to groups about how we get a bad bounce of the ball there. The ball is not even bouncing at times, never mind getting a bad bounce. Look at the A5, the A6, the railway and the university. Look at the recent jobs announcements for Belfast. They are immense and are good for Belfast, but there is a sense that the Executive are not delivering for people in the north-west. The A6 is crucial for the economic development of the area, similarly the university. The A6 is what the business community wants and what inward investors want. We have to do it in a better way.

People in my constituency — I say to the Minister that there is no implied accusation against him — get apathetic towards politicians. They even get angered and frustrated towards us, and they are saying very clearly that the Executive and the Assembly are not delivering for the north-west. That is painfully obvious. There are groups here today ranging from St Mary's to the community and voluntary sector. There is a group from the Roe valley. Those subjects are on all their lips. They ask, "What is wrong that we cannot get our roads?"

The north-west takes this seriously. There are few local authorities throughout this island, if not the British Isles, that invest as hugely in airport infrastructure. It means so much for the region, the business community and the people in that community. Derry City Council invested immensely — beyond belief — when other people were criticising it. The future for the next generation of our young people has to include access.

Why, every time there is a major infrastructure project, does something go wrong? Is it bad luck? Is it incompetence? Is it no determination on the part of the Executive to see it through? Look at Dungiven. I visit Dungiven more often than maybe I want to, having to travel

here three or four days a week. It is not a pleasant journey. You would think that there was a race getting to Toome many's the day. When you get there, you are at a standstill for 30 to 40 minutes, bumper to bumper on the Moneynick Road. Unfortunately, there are people on the roads who take a chance and do things that they should not, and that results in accidents.

I say to the Minister that the Dungiven bypass has been on the table for far too long. There has to be a serious will in the Executive to deliver it. It is not a matter of pointing the finger at anyone, with respect to Danny Kennedy, but we get depressed as elected representatives. People on the other side of the House say, "Oh, the ones from Derry" or "The ones from the north-west", but we in the north-west deserve much better from the Executive. We deserve what was in the Programme for Government. If we are going to be true to its word, where is the regional balance when it comes to the economy and to jobs?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Ramsey: Important as this debate on the A6 is, where is the regional balance when it comes to infrastructure? We need it, we deserve it, and we should get it now.

Mr G Robinson: I am pleased to speak in the debate, as I see the A6 as a vital improvement to transport infrastructure in the north-west of the Province. The proposed upgrade will be a bonus to investors, the construction and tourism industries and road users in general. Indeed, it could stimulate the economic growth of the entire north-west of Northern Ireland if and when the long-awaited A6 upgrade comes to fruition. In my constituency, I am also very aware of the health risk that currently exists in Dungiven and would support a bypass at the earliest possible opportunity, even as a decoupled scheme. Due to the health dangers that currently prevail for residents and motorists alike, the earlier this can be achieved, the better. I travel the route on my way to the House, so I speak with intimate knowledge of where the problem areas exist. These include the Moneynick section of the A6, which has witnessed many accidents in past years.

3.45 pm

I am acutely aware that the Minister has a restricted budget, so I truly appreciate that any developments will be on the basis of finances being made available, as my colleague Mr Campbell mentioned. Every job that is attracted to Northern Ireland is welcome. The A6 would be a vital component of that job creation for the north-west and for Northern Ireland in general. I hope to see some movement, especially in regard to the Dungiven bypass in the short to medium term, and I hope that the Minister will endeavour to prioritise the scheme, for the beneficial reasons already outlined. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I am grateful to Members for what I think was a useful debate on the issue. I particularly want to thank Members for the tone of the debate; it has been largely constructive. It has also been sympathetic to me in one sense. I realise that I have not yet heard the winding-up speeches, so I will not go completely overboard, but I have asked my officials to take note of the Hansard report so that, if I do not have

time to pick up on points raised by Members, I can write to them following the debate.

I note the concerns expressed by Members, and I do indeed welcome the opportunity to debate the schemes being progressed on the A6 between Londonderry and Belfast and, in particular, a bypass at Dungiven. At the outset, I confirm that I welcome and support improvements to the A6 and, indeed, the other arterial routes across Northern Ireland. As Minister for Regional Development, I wish to see improvements across the entire road network that will enhance safety, reduce journey times, provide value for money and, indeed, support the economy. Members have expressed their views, which align with the support for the schemes from local representatives that my Department has received over the years relating to the A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dualling scheme, which includes a bypass of Dungiven, and the A6 Castledawson to Randalstown dualling scheme.

The A6 forms part of the north-western transport corridor, an element of the strategic road network between Belfast and the north-west, providing an important link for commerce and services between Northern Ireland's two primary cities. A bypass at Dungiven was included in the regional strategic transport network transport plan 2015, which was published in 2005. The scheme would reduce traffic congestion in the town and improve the poor air quality.

The investment strategy for Northern Ireland, which was first introduced in 2005, set a new, comprehensive approach to be used by government to make informed decisions on the investment priorities for Northern Ireland. The strategy confirmed plans to commence additional investment that would result in higher-standard roads, providing improved access for commercial traffic, buses and private cars, mainly on the key transport corridors connecting Northern Ireland's major cities, including key cross-border routes. This saw the introduction of a project to provide a 30-kilometre dual carriageway from Londonderry to Dungiven, including a dual carriageway bypass of Dungiven. This supports the aims of the regional transportation strategy and the revised 'A New Approach to Regional Transportation', which are reflected in my Department's vision to provide dual carriageway-standard roads on all key transport corridors. In response, my Department continues to develop proposals for a new dual carriageway on the A6 between Londonderry and Dungiven and between Castledawson and Randalstown.

The Londonderry to Dungiven scheme will provide a dual carriageway, including a dual carriageway bypass of Dungiven. A further 14 kilometres of dualling will be provided in a separate scheme between Randalstown and Castledawson. Both roads will be high-standard dual carriageways. There will be no private accesses; no central reserve crossovers; junctions will be grade-separated or left-in/left-out; and side roads will either be stopped up, diverted or linked to minimise the number of junctions. This standard of dual carriageway has considerable safety benefits for the road user.

Construction of the schemes will yield transport benefits for road users and wider economic benefits for Londonderry and the wider north-west. The transport benefits of the scheme include improved passenger and freight transport links between Belfast and Londonderry; reduced journey times on the trunk road network,

contributing to the Government's target of reducing road congestion; road safety benefits accruing from the provision of improved carriageway standard and reduced vehicle kilometres on the highway network; and a reduction in the number of accidents. I note the contributions made in respect of that particular point.

The wider economic benefits of the scheme include an increase in accessibility to the north-west for a greater number of firms and workers. Firms are more productive when they have access to a large labour market. Recruitment is quicker, and it is easier to find workers with the skill-match required.

There are, of course, health benefits with the proposed bypass of Dungiven, which would help to alleviate the current air-quality issues in Dungiven. I am aware that Limavady Borough Council was required, under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, to identify areas of poor air quality. Those areas were declared air quality management areas. Such areas are only declared where an exceedance occurs at locations where members of the public might reasonably be exposed. The western end of Main Street, Dungiven was identified as an air quality management area in March 2006, due to high nitrogen dioxide levels. Subsequent air quality action plans have examined a range of measures to improve the air quality in the air quality management area. They include traffic management, sustainable development, travel initiatives and the provision of a bypass.

Some Members asserted that they thought that Dungiven had the worst air quality in Europe. I do not think that that stacks up. I do not think, either, that it is terribly helpful in promoting Dungiven as a destination. The arguments for the bypass stand apart and are clear without, if you like, blighting part of Dungiven by saying that it is a toxic place to be.

Perhaps it would be helpful if I confirmed the current position of the A6 dual carriageway schemes. As mentioned, there are proposals to dual two sections of the A6, those being Randalstown to Castledawson and Londonderry to Dungiven. My commitment to improving the A6 can be seen through the advancement of the Randalstown to Castledawson section to be shovel-ready in 2015, so that it will be in a position to commence construction at short notice, when the necessary funding becomes available. To be fair, all Members around the Chamber accepted that the financial position is a challenge, and I hope that they will remember that as they speak to their colleagues on the Executive, particularly the Finance Minister, with whom some Members are particularly friendly. I very much hope that they will remember the DRD and Danny Kennedy when it comes to getting funding for a scheme that has widespread political support. The procurement process for this scheme is well progressed, and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful contractor in spring 2015.

But then we need the money. The A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dualling scheme, which includes a bypass of Dungiven, is also well advanced in development. It has been through a public inquiry, and the inspector has produced a report containing a number of recommendations. One of the recommendations was to examine a suggested alternative route for the Dungiven bypass that was put forward by a third party on the final day of the public inquiry, and we are therefore quality-

assuring that route. That work continues, and, when I am satisfied that all issues have been appropriately reviewed, I will issue a departmental statement.

To provide the option of advancing the Dungiven bypass ahead of the remainder of the Londonderry to Dungiven scheme, the draft vesting order, which identifies the land required to build the scheme, was published in three parts: the Dungiven bypass, Derrychrier Road to Crebarkey Road; Caw roundabout to Maydown roundabout; and Maydown roundabout to Derrychrier Road. That will enhance the flexibility of the construction programme.

The motion calls for this section of the A6 scheme to be:

“advanced without delay, as per the Executive's investment strategy 2011-2021.”

Members may be aware that the investment strategy envisages the progression of a package of high-priority schemes on the north-western and northern corridors amounting to around £390 million beyond 2015, using alternative finance. The strategy recognises that a commitment to fund the revenue consequences of this roads package will be required, so the timing depends on future resource budgets — back to money. Members will also be aware of the significant cuts proposed across Departments in the draft 2015-16 Budget, particularly in resource funding. My Department faces a 19% cut, which, if implemented, will have significant impacts on front-line services. I have, however, continued to progress the development of major road improvements that will benefit the economy of our country to the point at which they are in a position to avail themselves of funding when that becomes available. That has proved successful in the case of the A26, with a contract recently awarded, and the Magherafelt bypass, with procurement well advanced.

The process continues with the tender competition for the Randalstown to Castledawson section of the A6, and my intention is to appoint a contractor to develop a detailed design that can then move to construction as soon as funding becomes available. I have set out the progress to date on the A6 Londonderry to Dungiven scheme, but I cannot pre-empt due process and my decision on the statutory orders. If that decision leads to the publication of the direction order, delivery of the scheme will be subject to final approval of the business case and be reliant on funding being made available by the Executive.

A number of Members contributed to the debate. Mr McAleer opened the debate, I think to keep the debate going. He highlighted the strategic importance of the route and referred to the pollution in Dungiven.

John Dallat raised a number of issues. His general complaint was that the north-west was being sold short. I am working hard to ensure that that accusation will never be levelled accurately against me and will continue to do that. He asked us to consider stopping off at the Ponderosa sometime, but that is down to the personal choice of Members.

To be praised by Gregory Campbell in the current climate is quite dangerous. In some ways, it would be considered risky. However, he did at least speak up for the Minister — me — and assured me that he would speak directly to his friend the Finance Minister to see whether a more benevolent approach could be adopted to funding for the scheme and perhaps other things.

Ross Hussey, who is no longer in the Chamber, made a point about Dungiven. I do not think, however, that it is good to ridicule the area too much.

Trevor Lunn, who is in the Chamber, made an interesting contribution. He sort of accepted that there was no money. He then extolled the virtues of the Castledawson to Randalstown scheme but ended up firmly on the side of the Dungiven bypass, even though there is no money. It seemed a classic Alliance pitch.

4.00 pm

Maurice Devenney, who is, sadly, not in the Chamber at present, made his maiden speech, and I wanted to welcome him to the Assembly. I welcome his contribution; he made points outlining his support for the overall scheme and for priorities in the north-west area.

Raymond McCartney showed some sympathy towards the financial position and sought the advancement of the scheme as quickly as possible.

Trevor Clarke mentioned the very tragic issue of road deaths and the tragic loss of life that areas of that stretch of road have yielded. Of course, our sympathies will always be with those people.

Seán Lynch highlighted the virtues of the A6.

Let me say to Pat Ramsey that there is no cunning plan here. There is no conspiracy on my part to deny the north-west. I know that you did not make that allegation. However, I accept the arguments and the need for the upgrade of the A6 —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Minister's time is almost up.

Mr Kennedy: — and I hope to proceed with it as quickly as possible.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for the invitation to talk about conspiracy. However, there has probably been some conspiracy and a fair bit of cock-up over the last number of decades that has led to a very difficult economic position for the people of our city. It feels a wee bit like Groundhog Day. Everybody has been very nice and very supportive, and that is good. We know that there is the current financial difficulty — we all recognise that. However, we must recognise that this is a legacy of neglect of west of the Bann. The way in which the fundamentals of the economy have been allowed to develop over past decades is an absolute tragedy. Unfortunately we are doing nothing, or nowhere near enough, to address that and to redress the imbalance.

The Executive's investment strategy talks about balanced economic development, and it talks about Derry and Belfast being key economic drivers. That is great. There is a lot in the Programme for Government and in that particular strategy that I do not agree with, but I was glad to see that. However, I would like to see some action on the back of that. I do not put that at the feet of the Minister, because this is a far bigger issue than one Minister or one Department.

There will probably be an announcement tomorrow that corporation tax will be devolved to Northern Ireland. I have said a number of times that we already have lower corporation tax in Derry. It is called Muff, Bridgend or

Killea, or any of those places that are just on the edge of our city that already have corporation tax at 12·5%. We still do not have a significant amount of foreign direct investment and neither does north-east Donegal. Why? If you look at the north-west corner of Ireland as a whole, you will see that the road and rail network is pitiful in comparison to that in the rest of the country. Another issue is that we do not have a major and expanded university with the proper courses to attract all the inward investment that people think we are going to get as a result of lower corporation tax.

We need to be very careful and understand that, unless we invest properly and significantly west of the Bann, whether that is in infrastructure or skills, there will not be any great uplift from corporation tax for us. I have a constant running argument with Invest Northern Ireland and different Ministers in here about the fact that they cannot direct investment to wherever we would like them to put it. That is what they say. Whilst I do not 100% agree with that, I agree with Invest Northern Ireland when it said to me personally and publicly that —

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. I know that it was just in passing, but he said that Ministers say that they cannot direct investment, and then he said that he did not necessarily agree with that. Is he suggesting that Ministers should take the power to direct inward investors as to where they should go?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Eastwood: The Member probably does not read all my press statements. However, one of the things that I have put out a number of times is that, in the South, the idea is that you have targets of 50% of investment outside of Belfast and outside of Cork. Now, for some unknown reason, Invest Northern Ireland and the DETI Minister have refused even to countenance any kind of targets around balanced regional investment. That is the truth of it.

Let us just say that it is the case. Alastair Hamilton of Invest Northern Ireland has said to me, and I agree with him on this point, that it is extremely difficult to attract high-quality jobs west of the Bann unless we have connectivity of roads and rail and an expanded university that does all the courses, especially the high-tech ones, that we need to attract those kinds of jobs. For the first time in a long time, I agree with Invest Northern Ireland's assessment. If that is the assessment of the Government's chief investment adviser, why have we not done anything about it? Why have we not tackled the connectivity issue of roads and rail? I know that it has been a longer, legacy issue than the one over which the Minister has had control. Why have we not done anything about the university?

Mr Osborne, another man I rarely agree with, has announced £15 billion of roads investment for Britain. Let us see some of that coming here. If we are seriously going to stand over a decision at some point to reduce corporation tax to 12·5%, we have to do the work beside that to increase infrastructural and skills development west of the Bann. Otherwise, we will see no impact, other than the cuts of hundreds of millions of pounds that it will take to pay for it in my constituency, those around it and the constituency of Donegal North East.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is mór an t-áthas atá orm an rún a phlé inniu sa

Tionól, nó is é seach-bhóthar Dhún Geimhin an t-ábhar is tábhachtaí i mo cheantar féin.

First, I apologise for not being in the Chamber for the moving of the motion. The Dungiven bypass has been one of the most important subjects in my area for some time; it has been rumbling on for many years. Any time that I go into the street, a shop or whatever, I cannot avoid a discussion about it, because it is a running sore. There has been enough evidence and discussion of it through the years, both in the Chamber and in councils. Indeed, my predecessor spoke very eloquently about it in the 2008 Adjournment debate. The research pack will show the list of questions that have been fielded specifically on the bypass. The Minister knows that nearly every time he sees me, I have a question about it as well.

The proposal for the bypass originated in the 1960s proposed strategic roads network and was first mooted in 1965. In 1969, a very fresh-faced seven-year-old went to a public exhibition that showed the lay of the land on the bypass. Unfortunately, that same fresh-faced seven-year-old brought his seven-year-old to see a similar exhibition exactly 40 years later. That is where that was. The difference between the two visitations was that in 1969, the cost of a single-carriage bypass for Dungiven was about £1 million. The cost today of course, as the Minister well knows, is £60 million to £70 million.

Up until the point when the preferred route was announced on 6 May 2009, there were many years of inaction. Some of us — particularly people in Dungiven — feel that, since then, there has been a lot of painful inaction.

The Minister and others may not want to examine them, but a catalyst for this has been the health aspects, mainly because the air quality management area (AQMA) showed that levels of nitrous dioxide were dangerously high: 10 times more than the EU recommended level. There is anecdotal evidence of respiratory issues and indeed even — people would go as far as to say — of cancer clusters. However, the factual evidence in recent times is that I know of at least 10 or a dozen fatalities on the route of the Dungiven bypass in the past number of years. That is the reality on the short route.

People in Dungiven have of course seen bypasses at Toome and Limavady leapfrog their own. In fact, you actually go through Toome in order to bypass the bypass. That is the reality, and I see it every morning of life. I suppose that there was an expectation locally that the Dungiven bypass would soon follow, but that has proved to be a false dawn many times.

The public inquiry, which the Minister referred to, was to start in 2011, but it did not get going till 2012. Its report has been sitting either with the inspector or the Minister until now — two years-plus later. There are questions about that as well.

I know that the Minister will perhaps not have the opportunity to answer this, but the announcement that he made three weeks ago blindsided the thought process on the route of the Dungiven bypass. The preferred route, which is the one that everybody looked at and which involves much of the work, including the archaeology work and plans and so forth, is to the south of the village. I know that there were other routes to the south, but there is also a route to the north. People are asking me whether that has been costed, what distance it is, whether extra

engineering is required for bridges, whether archaeology is required, whether it can be developed, and how much longer it will take. They also ask why Dungiven was allowed to slip, especially as they see the other schemes named in the investment strategy for NI being progressed.

There has been fairly universal support for the bypass from all the councils in the north-west, despite some having their own priorities, such as Coleraine, which would like to see the A26 developed, and Strabane, which like to see the A5 developed. The chambers of commerce have been very supportive of it. I talked to Sinead McLaughlin, the president of the Derry chamber of commerce, and that chamber figured that 70% of the internal investment in Derry city comes up the A6.

I am glad to say that there has been cross-party support here today. There is a realisation of the centrality of regional development and economic growth in the north-west on the A6 and the Dungiven bypass in particular. Hopefully, the DARD headquarters will come to Ballykelly next year, and people will go down the M2 in the other direction. Any bypass there, regardless of where it goes around the town, would be incredibly healthy. People referred to the new cancer centre and, of course, the University of Ulster in Derry. I know that others brought it up today, but people have asked about all the major infrastructure projects in the north-west, be they the A5, the A6 or the railway. I know that the Minister has not looked at the Magilligan to Greencastle ferry, but we recognise it as a vital piece of infrastructure for not just tourism but the social economy in the north-west.

I am not disparaging the Moneynick section by any means. I sit in the Moneynick section for an hour every day, whether I am coming this way or going the other way. I think that my record time through Moneynick, which is a four-and-a-half mile section, is something like 52 minutes. That was just before last Christmas. I know Moneynick as well as anybody else; I know every tree and almost every docken on it. John Dallat referred to listening to traffic reports in the morning. I really do not need the traffic report, because I am stuck in the middle of it. I could probably actually give traffic reports.

I am very pleased that we have unanimity. I think that that was the word that Gregory Campbell used; I might use it again myself. Unanimity is all right, but we need action. The frustration with Dungiven is that all the other projects seem to have been advanced. People are saying, "Well, listen, even if we had the money tomorrow, we cannot do the job." That is the issue. People are asking whether the third option, which was introduced on the final day of the inquiry, has effectively knocked back the Dungiven bypass by a significant period of time. If that is the case, we need to be told. That is what people are saying to me.

I hope that the Dungannon bypass reference was a Freudian slip and that the Minister will, with his Executive colleagues, try to identify the money for the Dungiven bypass. People always talk about 40 years, but at the end of this month it will be 50 years since a Dungiven bypass was first mooted. People are at their wit's end not just because of their health but because of the fatalities on the road, life quality and even the economic infrastructure in the village. There is very little left in the town; there has been a lot of dereliction in recent years. People think that it has got to the point where it is going to be very difficult to recover, bypass or no.

I urge the Minister to work hard on this. I hope that he publishes the report at the earliest possible convenience. As I said, it has now been sitting with him for over two years. People are very interested in getting this pushed forward and in addressing the east-west divide in terms of the delivery of infrastructure.

I support the motion and, indeed, the amendment. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises that the A6, which passes through Dungiven, is the main arterial route between the city of Derry and Belfast and is instrumental in terms of infrastructure to support regional development and economic growth in the north-west; and further recognises that Dungiven is one of the most polluted towns in western Europe and has been waiting for a bypass for over 40 years; and believes that this section of the A6 scheme should be advanced without delay, as per the Executive's investment strategy 2011-2021 and recognises that, in addition to the bypass at Dungiven, there are other sections of the A6 that must be dualled and upgraded without further delay, including the section at Moneynick.

Motion made:

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. —
[Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs).]*

4.15 pm

Adjournment

Arc21 Incinerator: Mallusk

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes and all other Members who are called to speak will have eight minutes.

Mrs Cameron: I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on an extremely important issue. I welcome the opportunity to raise this on behalf of my constituents in South Antrim ahead of any planning decision by the Department of the Environment. At the outset, I declare an interest, as family members are current employees of Bombardier.

I am incredibly disappointed that, at the eleventh hour, the Minister decided that he would not be present to provide clarity to my constituents or to answer any of the questions that I wish to raise. I could understand if he came to the Chamber and could provide only limited responses, owing to the fact that the decision-making processes are ongoing, but it appears that he is hiding behind the advice of his officials and does not deem the people of south Antrim or, indeed, north Belfast, important enough to leave his office for. He did come to the House for the debate on the illegal waste dumping at Mobuoy, but, of course, that affected his own constituents. Perhaps that explains why that debate was important and this one is not.

Opposition to developments such as this are often derided as simply a case of residents being against any progress or change in their locality, but I can assure you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that this is far from a case of "not in my backyard". The proposed incinerator at the site of the old Hightown quarry is highly controversial for a host of reasons and is opposed by almost 3,000 local residents. Last year, I canvassed the doors of many of those residents during the local election campaign, and this was by far the issue that raised most concern.

I begin by taking this opportunity to praise the work of the No-Arc21 group and its tireless efforts to ensure that the issue has remained to the forefront in the area. I thank the group for its diligence and determination to ensure that awareness is raised. It has secured the support of a large number of elected representatives, including my colleague William McCrea MP, who led a cross-party delegation of MLAs in a meeting outlining opposition to the planning proposal to Minister Durkan. Members of the No-Arc21 group planned to be here for the debate, but because the time of the debate moved forward, they have been unable to get here in time.

The need to reduce landfill waste is paramount. For that reason, I find it difficult to comprehend that the focus is on developing a plant to incinerate waste, rather than on encouraging further recycling, reusing and repurposing initiatives. Although no one can argue with the need to reduce the amount of domestic and commercial waste that we send to landfill, particularly given the European

directives and the penalties for non-compliance, the proposed Hightown development, quite simply, is not safe, not sustainable and not wanted.

The area around the proposed site is intensely populated. Indeed, in recent years, several large developments have been built. Its proximity to the city centre and motorway links has meant that the Mallusk area has essentially become a conurbation of Belfast. That said, the existing road infrastructure is grossly inadequate for supporting the traffic that that increased development has brought, and it is far from suitable for handling the volume of heavy vehicular traffic that a waste disposal facility at Hightown would bring. The very obvious road safety concerns have clearly not been taken into consideration in the proposal. Whilst Arc21 has stated that it plans to upgrade Boghill Road and Hyde Park Road, that is all relative and therefore a moot point. The proposed upgrades would barely be enough to bring the road infrastructure up to the standard required for current traffic levels, let alone the vast increase in heavy vehicles that would be using the road network in the vicinity.

In an area with such a high concentration of homes and families, I have profound concerns that we are looking at potential fatalities on the surrounding roads should the development proceed, both during any construction phase and when the plant is up and running.

The environmental impact of such a development must also be considered. Pollution of the watercourse by fuel, oil and concrete have all been identified by Arc21 as potential hazards during both construction and operation. That is not to mention the impact that development of the area would have on various protected species such as otters, bats, smooth newts and marsh fritillary butterflies. The vital contribution that these creatures make to our delicate ecosystem cannot be underestimated. The destruction and devastation of their natural habitat has the potential to have wide-ranging environmental implications across County Antrim and beyond. We have enough industries polluting the Six Mile Water and other areas of south Antrim without allowing more to add to that damage.

The most worrying repercussions of the development for my constituents have to be the potential health hazards caused by small particles that are formed as part of the incineration process and released into the surrounding atmosphere. It is an undeniable fact that the health ramifications of such pollutants are often not known until many years down the line, by which time it may be too late. The dioxins produced will remain in the air and soil for decades to come and may stay in our food chain for significantly longer. I fully appreciate that incineration plants will have strict internal protocols and will be governed by stringent legislation in order to limit their emissions, but to site this plant in such close proximity to a densely populated area seems ill-advised.

Neither I nor my party is anti-incineration. We understand the need to deal with our waste in more efficient ways than we have done in the past. I could stand here all evening and put forward reasons why the Hightown site is simply not suitable for the proposed incinerator. However, the most compelling argument that I can make is the basic fact that it is not needed.

In January, the Minister of the Environment awarded planning permission to Full Circle Power to begin

development of an energy for waste gasification plant at the Bombardier site at Belfast harbour estate. Despite the protestations of Arc21 that there would be enough waste for both plants to coexist, it is a fundamental point that, whilst there is currently enough waste in Northern Ireland and the Arc21 area to feed the plants, as we move towards our waste reduction and recycling targets, this supply should become significantly less if the Department is doing the work to reduce waste to landfill and encourage greater recycling. Will my constituents be faced with a white elephant of a development once these waste reduction targets are achieved?

Not only has the plant at Bombardier gained planning permission, but it is non-controversial. It is able to handle the huge amount of domestic and commercial waste that we in Northern Ireland produce. It is willing to seek further permission to be able to process our entire landfill waste total. The plant will also serve as a sustainable energy source for the operation of Bombardier. This will enable Bombardier to reduce its energy costs and maintain its position in an extremely competitive industry, and, in turn, safeguard the future of Bombardier's 6,000-strong workforce. It is vital that it goes on record that not one single planning objection was received to the Bombardier developments.

The Arc21 proposal is very clearly a non-starter. I fail to see how any credence can be given to the proposal given the vast number of objections from local residents and, more prudently, because a non-contested, sustainable and productive plant is already agreed only a stone's throw away in the harbour estate.

I have not even begun to mention the failures of the tendering and procurement processes, which are fundamentally flawed and show inherent problems with this proposed development. Arc21 is a business and, as such, has seized on an opportunity to profiteer from our need to reduce our waste going to landfill. However, the Minister cannot allow a commercial operation to ride roughshod over the feelings of those who will have to live with the short- and long-term consequences of residing next to this mammoth intrusion into our community.

I call on the Minister of the Environment to listen to the groundswell of public opinion before making his final decision on the Arc21 proposal. My concerned constituents and the No-Arc21 group are not willing to let this go ahead without a fight. The very least that they expect of the Department is for the matter to go to a public consultation before any decision is taken.

I reiterate my bitter disappointment that the Minister has chosen to disregard such a huge number of people's opinions in refusing to be present to respond to this debate. I hope that the Minister employs a common-sense approach on this proposal, and I look forward to being able to hear a positive outcome for my constituents in the very near future.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call Danny Kinahan.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much. That was a surprise. I thought I was going to be speaking third or fourth.

I, too, very much welcome this debate and congratulate Mrs Cameron for bringing it forward. I also praise the No-Arc21 campaign. I want to pose four questions to the Minister, which I hope will be passed on to him.

Would the Department sit down and calculate the tonnage figures, when they know that Bombardier, Lisburn, possibly Maydown, and even Derrylin are part of the future of waste? If the Department sits down and does an accurate calculation, it will see that there is no need for the Arc21 plan.

I would also like to ask the Department to look at how long a contract needs to be to be financially viable, given the likely tonnage. Twenty-nine years, or nearly 30 years, seems far too long, unnecessarily long. Once again, when the Department does that, it will realise that there is no need for the Arc21 plan.

I also would like the Department to look at how a new bidder gets involved when there is new technology or more economic processes coming on board. How do you get flexibility into this so that we get a new system? Again, if you look at that, you will find that there is no need for the Arc21 plan or that it is not the right way to go forward.

All of us have looked at the changes in our own habits and waste in our own houses and we have seen new technologies come on board. We have seen incineration and a change to gasification. We have seen many new ways coming forward. If we have seen all those changes, we realise that we need something that is flexible.

As has already been raised, I would also like the Department to look at the legal position of everything that is going on. We seem to have a process that is completely flawed. Is the relationship between Indaver and Beacon legal? Councillors who are long-term members of Arc21 are taking part in decisions in their councils but are about to be members of the new super-councils. Where does that place them? Is this legal or does it add more holes to the system?

Is the funding of Arc21 with council, European and Department money all legal? There are a mass of questions that we want the Department to answer. I think that when it looks at those questions and comes up with its answers, it will realise that it is No-Arc21 that we should be supporting. I have left the Department with plenty of food for thought.

Ever since I went into politics, I have tried to base my actions on what I think is best for south Antrim and Northern Ireland, and to try to find the right thing to do for Northern Ireland. When I first heard of this proposal, I had been to Sheffield and saw how well an incinerator could work. In the back of mind was the thought that this was the right use: you were using a quarry and everything seemed to be correct.

But the more you looked at it, the worse it became, because so many details just did not work. On the very first day that we went to the presentations, the first thing that went through my mind was the roads. All the roads went through areas where many people lived, yet missing from their map was the key Mayfield Road, which was the biggest one that could have taken lorries. That showed already that the thing had not been properly thought through or presented.

Once you looked at even that, you realised that you were trying to put 580 lorries through a busy area full of people, and one that already suffers from Biffa, smells, dirt and a mass of other industrial things. That makes life difficult. If you even think it through, with the awful accident the other day with the school children in Antrim, here we have

children crossing the road from a busy home side to the side where there are businesses and industry, and we do not have crossings. There was a whole mass of things that needed to be done.

Also buried in the back of my mind was an idea from schooldays that small was beautiful, which I think Professor Schumacher said. Here we were about to create an enormous body that was going to do everything. We had the South Waste Management Partnership (SWaMP) at the time, and North West, but as they dropped out, everything was left with this one big company. That just did not seem right.

If I can put it this way, Bombardier then comes to the rescue. I need to declare an interest, albeit a vague one, in that I worked for Shorts for three years in the late 1980s, so I still have a soft spot for Shorts or Bombardier. When Belfast City Council decided to turn down Duncrue Street, I felt that that was wrong and that the lough shore was the right sort of place to put anything that dealt with waste. However, it was the council's choice.

Now, Bombardier has planning permission for a plant that can cope with the tonnage that we need it to, and, as you heard, it did not receive any objections. It is on the lough shore, where it can provide energy for owned buildings, it has the major network and the docks, and it does not need a 29-year plan. That is where the plant should be.

4.30 pm

I absolutely agree with Mrs Cameron that this is not Nimbyism. The Arc21 plan has attracted nearly 3,000 objections. If you add up the tonnage capacity required — I will not go into all the figures — the Bombardier site and Lisburn can deal with all the tonnage of the recycling waste that is suitable for them. That leaves nothing for Arc21.

Even if we locked ourselves into a contract, councils would probably have to buy in waste to meet the Arc21 targets. So it is essential that the Department looks at this properly. There is no reason why Arc21 should be allowed to go ahead with its proposal.

Something bothers me. Mrs Cameron's MP, Willie McCrea, is keen that we oppose the plan, I am keen that we oppose it, and there is cross-party agreement to oppose it. However, in the capital budget for the Department of the Environment, £50.5 million of financial transactions capital has been put aside for the project. That must have been an Executive decision. I ask Mrs Cameron to get her MP to write to the members of the Executive about that, because, at one end, all of us are saying that we do not want it, and, at the top end, we have people putting money aside so that it can happen. We should look at what we are all doing. We need to stop this happening.

I praise the No-Arc21 group, and I hope that the project stops now and that Bombardier is given the chance to deal with our waste.

Mr Ford: For the sake of Hansard, I record that I am speaking from a Back Bench as a constituency MLA.

I congratulate my constituency colleague Pam Cameron on securing this Adjournment debate. However, it is not just a constituency issue; it is a strategic issue for the whole of Northern Ireland as we look to the future, although, clearly, in the concept of the current plans for

the Hydepark site, it is very much a constituency issue for those who live in the Mallusk area.

I fundamentally support the concept of generating energy from waste. There is a limit to what can be recycled. To put it more accurately: whatever we do to reduce, reuse and recycle, there will still be some residual waste that can only be dealt with in a practicable way by deriving energy from it. It is an issue, therefore, that we have to address, and it needs to be considered urgently as we look at the targets that we in Northern Ireland have to meet, whether they are European or are linked to UK-wide taxation. We can no longer continue to landfill the amount that we currently do.

Good work has been done by Arc21, as a consortium of councils looking at the options for the largest of the three groups set up in Northern Ireland. Unlike some Members, I have no problems with the concept of the technology: the kind of health concerns that existed about incineration are no longer relevant if we use the proper modern process. Frankly, the key issues of concern in the past on dioxins should be addressed by ensuring that we remove plastics from the waste stream for reuse and recycling before they end up at an energy-for-waste plant.

In one respect, I must disagree with Danny Kinahan. He quoted E F Schumacher when he said that small is beautiful, and I agree with that as a principle in many areas. Certainly, something like composting should happen as close as possible to where it is derived and be used as close as possible to where it is processed. However, the reality of the economics of energy from waste is that we need to look to plants that are of a significant size. It is not necessarily certain that we will go with the size that is in the plan for Hydepark, but we will be looking at substantial projects. We are long past the time when individual councils, even at the scale of the new 11 councils, will be capable of managing their own waste in a meaningful way.

The key issue for me is the local infrastructure for the site that is proposed. The idea of siting an energy-from-waste plant in, effectively, a brownfield site in an old quarry has certain benefits. However, we then have to look to the issue of the surrounding infrastructure, and Mrs Cameron has well highlighted the problems of the housing development in the Mallusk area, the poor roads infrastructure and the fact that even what might have been possible for a roads layout had this been thought of before Mayfield, Alderley and that general area were developed, is simply not now a practical option for the number of lorries that would have to deliver to that site.

Ideally, of course, an energy-from-waste plant such as this should have been sited, as was originally proposed by Arc21, on the north foreshore in an industrial area. Unfortunately, that was blocked some years ago by Belfast City Council, despite the fact that, according to my memory, polling across Belfast, particularly in the Shore Road area, showed that people were broadly supportive. A majority of councillors voted against that. Yet, if we are to look to the best practical environmental option, clearly, siting a process such as this in an industrial area close to transport and communication links and where there are businesses to make use of the heat that is generated as well the electricity is a key option.

In that respect, we are certainly all aware of the plans for Bombardier's site, but I am not sure exactly where

Bombardier currently stands. There appear to be differing views on exactly what it may be capable of dealing with in the way of household waste. My understanding is that the formal planning permission at this stage relates solely to commercial and industrial waste, and, therefore, that being the option is not quite as clear-cut as perhaps some of us from south Antrim might wish it to be.

We cannot be sure, even with the potential expansion, that Bombardier would be able to handle the kinds of waste arising from the domestic sector as well as those from commercial and industrial use, but what is clear is that a site somewhere in that area, whether on the north foreshore or on the Shorts side of the river, is the best possible site for something like this. That would put it adjacent to the key transport links, including the M1, M2, Westlink and the Sydenham Bypass and even, frankly, would allow the option that waste could be compacted in the Antrim/Ballymena area, the Larne/Carrick area, in north Down and in Lisburn and moved by rail into that site. That would be a considerable benefit to those who currently see the congestion that exists on those key arterial roads. That would then also allow, as I have said, the waste heat to be used by industrial processes in that area and would ensure that we would get the best possible benefit, because we also need to be aware of the needs for Bombardier to have its own generated cheap electricity, as Bombardier Belfast competes with other Bombardier plants elsewhere in the world with much lower energy costs.

So, there is potential there, but we cannot be sure that that is exactly the solution for Bombardier. We can, however, be absolutely assured that that sort of industrial site, on transport links, not against open countryside, and where there is the best possible use of the heat generated as well as the best possible opportunities for easy communications without causing disturbance on small rural roads or in the growing suburbs around the Mallusk area, are all key reasons that point to the need to look to somewhere different.

We may not be sure of exactly what the best possible option is at this stage, but it appears to me that emerging now quite clearly is that the unfortunate way that Arc21 was forced by a previous decision by Belfast City Council to look outside the city has contributed to major environmental threat in the Mallusk area and potential significant damage to the human environment as well as the natural environment and that the Hydepark site does not appear to me to be the best practical environmental option.

It is time that we had a proper strategic rethink of the needs of Northern Ireland to best meet the needs of this community, the needs of our economy and the needs of our society in the future and not, as currently seems to be the case, Arc21 being forced down the route of the only option that it sees, when it is not the proper option either for Mallusk or for Northern Ireland.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhairle as an ábhar a thabhairt os ár gcomhair inniu. I thank Pam Cameron for bringing this important issue to the House.

We are in danger of breaking into agreement. The issues have been well covered. I will cover some of them briefly, but I think that the arguments have been well made by the previous Members who spoke. I want to thank the No-Arc21 group, which put all the work together. I have

met its members a number of times and have been at its meetings. The group gave very good briefing points for the debate, and they deserve credit for all their work. A wide range of residents is involved; you know the numbers. Some 3,000 objections have been made to the Planning Service, and that is due to rise further. I have been at meetings at which there were between 350 and 400 people, so you can see that there is a huge swell of residents who are against the waste management plant being sited on the Hightown Road or Mallusk area.

Just to put it into perspective so that we know what size of a project we are looking at, the plant has been described as a Wembley Stadium-sized project that will handle some 300,000 tons. What is confusing about it is that, when you go into the statistics, you see that there is not enough domestic waste in the whole of the North for that. I wonder why they are trying to put in something of that size. Of course, a significant amount of taxpayers' money has already gone into the preparation of the site, which, in itself, is a difficulty.

Residents and experts in the industry have made objections about the incinerator; in fact, there has been a series of objections. It is less than a kilometre from old communities and from new and growing ones, and it will, of course, affect house prices and the health and quality of life of the people in the surrounding area. I have been at the site, which is surrounded by working farmland. As some Members said, if it is needed — that is a big question — it should have been sited in an industrial site that can handle it. I repeat that the farmland is active.

As I said, we have been told by experts that between 116,000 tons and 142,000 tons of domestic waste — it varies — are produced in the whole of the North per annum; yet, this is for 300,000 tons per annum. Where will the waste come from?

The road network is inadequate. I presume that, like me, Members have been around the site and looked at it. The vehicles that will use the road will include HGVs and other industrial vehicles, as well as street-cleaning vehicles etc. That will bring its own difficulties.

I am also told that Arc21 has already started to vest land. When I was at the site on a rainy day not so long ago, people came out of their houses to talk to me. I was going up not to see them but the site. They said that they were worried about the vesting procedure. We know, through the No-Arc21 group, that the vast majority of the farmers do not want to sell. We also know that vesting is a long and arduous process.

The traffic situation will also change massively, with the possibility of well over 500 additional vehicles in the area daily. They will go through residential areas, and you do not have to use your imagination to realise that that will cause great danger to people in those areas.

On the visual impact, the site is in an area of landscape character and in proximity to another designated area of high scenic beauty. There will be a chimney stack that, at 95 metres, will be the highest building, if it can be called that, in the North. That is before we get to the plume of smoke, which may go 30 metres into the sky. You will be able to see it from a very long distance away.

4.45 pm

The length of the contract, which was mentioned, is significant and important. There will be 30-year contracts. If people buy in to that, they will have to supply the amount of waste as part of that contract. There is also an issue of waste management, especially with recycling and advancing technology. As far as I can see, there is no get-out clause for any advancement in recycling. It actually buys people and, indeed, councils into that very long contract and into having to provide agreed amounts. It will damage the recycling process and investment in it.

I think that need is also crucial. I have already gone through some of the issues on that, as have other Members. It is a huge question: is it needed? There is the Bombardier site, and there is the Lisburn site. I think that one takes 80,000 tons, and I am told that the other takes 300,000 tons. In that case, the question of the need for the site gets bigger and bigger. As Pam Cameron said, Bombardier safeguards a huge number of jobs, while this will take jobs out of the industry.

So as not to be too repetitive, I will conclude on that. It is the wrong location. I am disappointed that the Minister is not here for the Adjournment debate, so I urge him to read Hansard and to realise that this is a cross-party objection. It reflects the objections of a huge number of people in the area. I urge him to take cognisance of that before making any decision. The concerns relate to scale, visual and traffic impact, adequacy of the road network and the impact that it would have on road safety and the environment. He needs to take all that into consideration. I do not think that there is enough capacity in the area to deal with a site of this size.

Mr A Maginness: As the fifth Member to speak in the Adjournment debate, I think that there is very little meat left on the bone, but I will try my best to produce some. If I reiterate what other Members have said, it is simply to emphasise the point that there is cross-party consensus on this application. It is clear that all parties in the House, certainly the Members who have spoken, are opposed to the application. They are at one with the local residents, who are very opposed to the site and see it as a threat to themselves, their children, their homes and the basic amenity of the area in which they live and that they enjoy. They are entitled to that.

A number of issues were raised, one of which is location. The others are the scale of the plant, which seems to be extraordinarily big in all the circumstances; the inadequate road network; the inevitable adverse impact of an increase in traffic; and, of course, the visual impact, which the Member who just spoke referred to. There would be a 95-metre chimney, which, in fact, would be seen for many, many miles around. It would have a serious impact on an area that is in the countryside and is, in my view, of considerable scenic value.

In addition, we have issues with the procedures that Arc21 has gone through. I am not going to delve into those, but, even if you were to remove all the other objections and magic them away, you would still have one very substantial argument at the very heart of the application, and that is the sustainability of the project. I do not believe that it is sustainable in the medium term or in the long term, if 30 years is regarded as long term.

It is clear from the figures that we know about that over 900,000 tons of waste has been collected by local authorities in the past year. If you were to take the present project and the Arc21 area, that would absorb roughly 55% of that, which would bring you to about half a million tons. If you were to take 50% of that for recycling, composting, and so on, you would reduce that figure down to a quarter of a million tons. However, you have to add on a 100,000-ton allowance for combustible commercial and industrial (C&I) waste, which means that the total waste available for thermal treatment within the Arc21 area would be around 350,000 tons per annum.

As other Members rightly referred to, the planning approved for thermal treatment capacity within the Arc21 area at Lisburn and Bombardier right now is approximately 300,000 tons. Therefore, it seems, at least based on the mathematics of this particular project, that there is no sustainability in the short or medium term or in the long term. That goes to the very heart of the project. If it is not sustainable, even leaving aside all the environmental objections, all the objections by residents, and all the fears over health and all the rest, the project is not sustainable, is fundamentally flawed and should not go forward. It should not receive approval.

We as a region are right to adopt a process in which we will deal with residual waste. That is necessary and proper, and we have to prepare for that. I think that we have the capacity to deal with that and, in due course, that it will be dealt with, but I believe that it will not be satisfied by the particular project before the House as a matter of discussion in this Adjournment debate.

I thank Mrs Cameron for initiating the debate and for bringing it to the attention of the House. I apologise to her for not being present at the beginning of her speech, but I understand that she was critical of the Minister. Towards the end, she was equally critical because of his absence this evening. The Member should fully understand that it would be inappropriate for the Minister to attend the debate and respond to it, as it could be seen as prejudicing the process of the application. Therefore, I believe that the criticisms levelled at the Minister are, in fact, unwarranted. Either Mrs Cameron is being very naïve about the matter or she — I hope that she is not — is being very mischievous regarding the Minister's absence. I stoutly defend the Minister in his decision not to attend the debate. It would be inappropriate and could be prejudicial. Therefore, I think that he has taken the right decision.

Mr Agnew: I am happy to take part in this Adjournment debate, and I thank Pam Cameron for securing it. Those campaigning against this proposal will say that it is the wrong technology in the wrong place, and the representatives for the local area have probably covered the issue of the wrong location extensively. I will maybe focus more on the issue of the wrong technology because, unlike others here, I and my party are not only opposed to this incinerator but opposed to incineration. I will outline why that is.

As has been said, these incinerators are large. I take Mr Kinahan's point that small is beautiful. I would say that; I am 5' 3". They are large, and they need to be to be economically viable. They also need a large and consistent feed of waste and, indeed, for the investment to make sense, they need it over the long term. Everything that we are trying to do in terms of waste and the direction

of travel that we are heading in is about reducing waste, and these contracts would lock us in to long-term waste production, which is the wrong direction of travel, in my view. The former Environment Minister — he is here with us — set a stringent target of 60% recycling. That, to me, is incompatible with incineration and with such a long-term contract to continue to produce waste.

We need to move towards a zero-waste strategy. That has to be the direction of travel. To me, that is what 60% recycling targets are about. It is what Reduce, Reuse, Recycle is about. We also need to move to a situation where we redefine waste. Waste is a resource, and I suppose that part of my and my party's opposition to incineration is that it is a waste of resources. By its very nature, it destroys resources. I should qualify that because, when I say that I am opposed to incineration, I mean mixed waste incineration and the type of incineration where the feed stock is unsustainable. A wood-pellet boiler, for example, is biomass and is something that I support. It is a single waste stream and a renewable waste stream. The mixed waste that would go into the incinerator would, including the likes of plastics, be non-renewable resources. We live on a finite planet. If everybody lived the way we do, we would need three planets to sustain our lifestyle, but we only have one. We need to work towards one-planet living and seeing the waste that we produce as a resource. Moving towards zero waste is the direction of travel that we should be moving in.

Mr Ford said that plastic should be removed ahead of any incineration. Essentially, once you do that, there is effectively very little left from the residual waste stream. I agree with him on that point, but that is when the incinerators become unsustainable. In my view, they are financially and environmentally unsustainable to begin with. We should be front-ending the removal. Belfast City Council took the wise decision in the first instance, in my view, to go with a mechanical biological treatment facility when an incinerator was first proposed so as to extract more recyclables and more resources from the waste stream. That is the way we need to be heading, and we need to move towards a stage where we are recycling and finding uses for the resources that come through our waste stream, rather than locking ourselves into lengthy contracts to feed incineration and to put at risk the efforts that we are making in terms of recycling, reducing and reusing.

That includes engaging with supermarkets and those who create the waste, including households, to see how we can front-end the reduction, but we have done that, to a large extent, with the improved recycling rates in councils. Of course, more needs to be done. Credit to Banbridge District Council, which is very close to meeting the 60% target for recycling. Other councils need to step up. We need to look at supermarkets producing less waste. Indeed, I think that Europe has now seen its first package-free supermarket. That is the type of thing that we can look at moving towards.

5.00 pm

As I said, incineration is the wrong technology. Clearly, for this particular proposal, it is the wrong technology in the wrong location. Indeed, it seems as though there is a race to be the first Arc21 area and have the first incinerator facility, whether it is Bombardier, Lisburn or this proposal.

There is a race, and it seems to me that Arc21 is coming third in that race. Regardless, it is a race to the wrong solution.

Mr Attwood: I welcome the debate, and I acknowledge Mrs Cameron's tabling of it. As everybody else has said, I first want to acknowledge the people who are campaigning in Glengormley, Hightown and the adjoining areas, because they are good people. They have good arguments and are running a good campaign. At a public meeting in March or April, which was attended by 200 or 300 people, I said then — and I will say again now — that I think their argument and their campaign will prevail.

I agree with Mr Maginness about why Mr Durkan, the Minister, is not here. My advice to him, and to anybody in this situation, is to adopt a very precautionary approach. There is a company in Northern Ireland at the moment that is taking legal proceedings against two Ministers. One happens to be a DUP Minister. According to one media report a couple of weeks ago, that company, in terms of its fracking ambition, aims to sue the Northern Ireland state for billions of pounds. It was Mrs Cameron's colleague Mrs Foster whom they named in that regard, as I understand it. Having gone after the Enterprise Minister, they now intend to go after the Environment Minister on the very same issue.

We should not create any exposure to our Government or to any of our Ministers in respect of planning matters, given that, when it comes to planning applications, like Tamboran and fracking, and like the Arc21 proposal, there are huge international corporate interests and institutions in the background. They are looking for opportunities to trip people up in order to create opportunities to have access to legal remedy.

In all these circumstances, given what has happened in respect of Tamboran over the last few weeks, and given the corporate interests — and I know well about them, because I met them when I was Environment Minister — it is very wise to adopt a highly precautionary approach when it comes to public debate about the matter if you are the Minister, although that does not apply to the rest of us. I urge people to recognise and acknowledge that as the wise course of action. I have no doubt, knowing Mark Durkan, that he would like to be here and be involved in this public debate, but the wise course of action is to adopt a slightly different approach.

I endorse all the arguments, and will maybe add to one or two of them. This is not the place for the project. It does not have community and political support. It does not have the roads and other infrastructure. It is not the appropriate environment, given the heritage value of that particular area. For what it is worth, my sense of things is that Arc21 is not an organisation that has the capacity to deliver a viable project. That is my view based on the knowledge that I have gathered over the last three or four years. We will see whether that view prevails in the fullness of time.

I was the Minister who agreed to the north-west planning application for a gasification plant — it was not incineration; it was gasification — because I accepted that, when you interrogate the evidence, you realise that, as waste volumes increase over the next 30 years and even as recycling might speed up, there will still be a strategic gap, which has to be disposed of in the most responsible way. In my view, a gasification plant that had waste coming

in, that had that waste recycled, with the residue going into gasification and the bottom ash then being used for further recycling processes, was a valid approach. I stand by that decision.

Steven Agnew's point was a valid one. Given that we cannot go to landfill, we do not want buckets, volumes and mountains of black bin bags lying here, there and everywhere because there is no other way to dispose of them. Noting that point, and given that recycling volumes are increasing and that the strategic gap is reducing, it was a valid point made by Mr Agnew's about interrogating the evidence to see what other remedy there might be for the disposal of that which remains. I hope that the Minister and the Government will continue to do that.

In doing so, will we face up to some wider responsibilities? Will the Assembly endorse statutory recycling targets? That is not the big ambition that I tried to articulate when I was in the DOE, which Mr Agnew referred to. Will we endorse statutory recycling targets so that, when it comes to the disposal of waste, we are challenging ourselves in a big way to have big ambition by putting statutory recycling targets in law, on the far side of which there will be more discipline and rigour? I say to Mrs Cameron that my sense, frankly, is that there will be other Ministers in the Executive who would resist a statutory approach because they think that it would somehow tie the hands of the farming or other industries. Will we face up to the challenge that Mr Agnew rightly put to the Assembly or will we not?

Mr Kinahan rightly referred to the fact that £50 million was somehow allocated to the DOE in the draft Budget without the DOE knowing anything about it. Who allocated that £50 million? It was the Finance Minister. So we have Mrs Cameron rightly making an argument about Arc21, when, at the same time, the DUP Finance Minister puts in a Budget line, without reference to the Minister of the Environment, of £50 million. What was that £50 million for? It was to subsidise the capital costs of Arc21 up on the Hightown Road. Will someone explain to me how you can reconcile an argument against Arc21 when a Budget line has been created without the knowledge or consent of the Minister of the Environment? We know who else endorsed that draft Budget, which included an allocation under financial transaction tax of £50 million to an Arc21 project that, in my view, should not be supported.

Given this small island, will we recognise that the only coherent, long-term approach to dealing with waste will be through an all-Ireland strategy? The resources of this part of the world do not recognise the border. The disposal of waste should not recognise the border either in having a responsible, integrated, all-Ireland recycling and waste strategy. Otherwise, we are pretending to people that we are dealing with the threat of waste to this island.

Adjourned at 5.09 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 8 December 2014

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The first item on the Order Paper is a motion regarding DUP Committee membership. As with similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion and there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Alastair Ross replace Mr Sammy Douglas as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee; that Mr Sammy Douglas replace Mr Ian McCrea as a Member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges; and that Mr Sammy Douglas replace Ms Paula Bradley as a Member of the Committee on Procedures. — [Mr Weir.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The next item on the Order Paper is a motion regarding SDLP Committee membership. As with similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion and there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Seán Rogers replace Mr Colum Eastwood as a member of the Committee for Education. — [Mr Ramsey.]

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Environment

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the nineteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in environment sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Thursday 13 November 2014. The statement has been agreed with Minister Kennedy.

Danny Kennedy MLA, Minister for Regional Development, and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Alan Kelly TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, who chaired the meeting.

Ministers welcomed the presentation from Co-Operation Ireland in relation to its recent scoping study outlining the opportunities for greater North/South cooperation in the area of waste management.

Ministers also welcomed the publication of the Northern Ireland waste prevention programme 'The Road to Zero Waste' on 30 September 2014, which focused on using materials more efficiently and not sending waste to landfill or other disposal.

This will impact favourably on the economy, help to promote and support green jobs, protect the environment and conserve resources.

The Council noted the proposed package of legislative measures that the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) is preparing on household waste collection. It also noted the publication of Ireland's latest national waste prevention programme, Towards a Resource Efficient Ireland; the final report on the review of the producer responsibility initiative (PRI) system in Ireland; and the national hazardous waste management plan for Ireland.

Ministers noted the intention to make legislation in Northern Ireland before the end of the year to ban separately collected food waste being dumped in landfill and on the regulations that the Irish Government recently introduced on the traceability of waste to counter the trade in stolen metal.

The Ministers welcomed the ongoing work on the development of a new used tyre scheme in Ireland, which may inform the development of a complementary scheme here in the North.

The Council noted that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has in place a programme of work for 2014-15 that was agreed with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and Dublin City Council. The first of those repatriation sites was commenced in August and completed in November. Ministers also noted that Dublin City Council has established a framework agreement for the disposal of repatriated waste and has completed a public procurement process for the haulage of excavated waste to authorised facilities. It was reported that resources continue to be targeted into joint enforcement action against illegal operators, including carrying out coordinated inspections and exchanging intelligence and information on problem areas.

Ministers discussed the negative impact of fuel smuggling on the environment. They commended the action of agencies on both sides of the border, with the recent finds of an illegal fuel plant in County Monaghan and a large amount of toxic waste in south Armagh.

Ministers noted the ongoing opportunities for cooperation on EU funding, including Horizon 2020, the LIFE Programme and INTERREG V. Those opportunities also involve transnational and interregional programmes, including a joint €72 million INTERREG VA bid that is being pursued covering the terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments. The Council noted that a Horizon 2020 workshop related to climate change, environment, resource efficiency and raw materials was to be held in Derry on 20 November 2014, which would bring together parties from both jurisdictions to encourage and support those who may decide to enter into a joint project.

Ministers welcomed the recent announcement confirming the success of a Horizon 2020 cross-border project worth €3.5 million. The project, which is now at grant preparation stage, aims to establish a training network for specialists dealing with the remediation of contaminated land.

Ministers also welcomed that collaboration will continue to maximise drawdown of EU funding and encouraged officials to seek new opportunities for potential projects that can attract EU funding.

Ministers noted that the contract for the all-island air quality research study into airborne pollution from the combustion of residential solid fuels, in particular smoky coal, was awarded in February 2014. The Council noted that officials are considering an interim report, which will be presented to Ministers in the near future. Ministers noted that the study is due to commence its second and final phase before the end of the year and is expected to be completed in the first half of 2015. A final report will be presented to a future NSMC environment meeting.

The Council noted the continuing collaboration on the second-cycle river basin management plans (RBMPs) under the EU water framework directive (WFD). Ministers welcomed the publication in Northern Ireland of the synopsis of responses to the consultation on significant water management issues reports and the publication in Ireland of the consultation document on the timetable and work programme for the development of the second-cycle RBMPs.

We welcomed the collaborative work on development of the river trusts, including the cross-border River Blackwater trust and the Erne Rivers Trust, as well as the

revised WFD governance arrangements put in place in Ireland.

Ministers also welcomed the continued coordination on the clean coast and coast care schemes and the cooperation on the development of programmes of measures for the marine strategy framework directive.

Ministers noted that the contract for the all-island research project into the environmental impacts of unconventional gas exploration and extraction — fracking — has been awarded.

The Council noted that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) held its 2014 national information day, titled "Horizon 2020 Societal Challenge 5", on 2 October and that it published its research strategy for 2014-2020, with the evaluation of the first call for proposals under way. The Council welcomed the fact that the NIEA and DECLG are exploring the possibility of a joint Life programme workshop in 2015. We also welcomed the continued collaboration between the EPA and the NIEA to identify emerging research needs and strategic planning of research funding programmes, with European funding remaining a high priority for joint actions.

The Council agreed to hold the next environment sector meeting next spring.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): The Minister mentioned that the meeting received a presentation from Co-operation Ireland on its recent scoping study outlining the opportunities for greater North/South cooperation on waste management. Obviously, it is a very important issue, particularly now with the continuing constraints on the DOE budget. Can the Minister elaborate a bit on the study? What sort of work does Co-operation Ireland hope to explore?

Mr Durkan: I thank Ms Lo, Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, for her question. The Co-operation Ireland study is primarily a baseline analysis of waste management data and policy in both jurisdictions. The analysis has identified opportunities — as Ms Lo has pointed out do exist — for central and local government cooperation on regulation of priority waste streams, approaches to waste prevention, managing waste as a resource, reconciliation of data sets, and cross-border movements and disposal of waste. It is quite a comprehensive piece of work. I believe that it highlights and identifies a number of opportunities for enhanced collaboration going forward.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. It is good to see that there is at least some progress being made on cross-border movement of waste. However, there is still quite a large backlog. When will the next phase of repatriation take place and to what extent will it happen?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the question. He is quite right: although there has been progress, and that should be welcomed, it has not been as quick as some of us might like it to be.

We have now cleared 10 of the 17 sites that had been identified. The majority of sites have therefore been cleared. However, the majority of waste remains. Most recently, a site was cleared just last month. The next site will be cleared early next year. That will leave six sites remaining, but those six sites represent almost two thirds of the volume of waste that was illegally dumped here. We

continue to work closely with the Government in Ireland on the matter. It is something that they are addressing, albeit not as quickly as we would like. It is something that we are keen to assist them with. A huge cost is attached to the repatriation of waste as well. That has been compounded somewhat by the fact that, I think, the only landfill site to which the Irish Government can currently repatriate that waste is in Dublin. There are huge transport costs associated with that.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My question relates to the environmental protection section of the Minister's statement. Can he tell me whether, before the second and final phase of the all-island air-quality research study is completed, Ministers will engage directly with key stakeholders, including coal importers and distributors and those organisations that seek to combat fuel poverty?

12.15 pm

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McElduff for that question. I assure him that, before anything is implemented, I will be in full consultation with anyone and everyone with an interest in whatever it might be that is going to be implemented. However, we are years away from the implementation of any recommendations in this report. We have not yet even seen the final report.

At the meeting, I raised some concerns I had around differences between how data is measured in the North and the South; there are already some inconsistencies in the report. That is not to ignore the fact that there is a problem with airborne pollution on the island. It was highlighted in the media last week as well, with some asthma and other respiratory condition support organisations calling for a ban on smoky coal.

I have already engaged with representatives of the coal industry — and I will do so again today, as chance would have it — and port and harbour commissioners across the North, who depend very heavily on the export and import of coal.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his statement and answers thus far. Will he provide the House today with an update on the all-Ireland research project on unconventional gas exploration and extraction?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. The research programme to which Mr Eastwood refers is being funded by the Environmental Protection Agency; the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources; and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency under my Department. It is scheduled to run for 24 months, after which it will report its findings, which is likely to be in the latter half of 2016. The two-year research programme will further the understanding of the potential impacts on the environment and on human health from unconventional gas exploration and extraction — or fracking — projects and operations, including construction, operation and aftercare.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his statement. I note the all-Ireland air quality research study launched in February that the Member for Sinn Féin referred to. At 42%, Northern Ireland has one of the worst rates of fuel poverty in the whole of the European Union. Does the Minister accept that a ban on smoky fuels, not just smoky coal, could make those matters worse here in Northern

Ireland? What discussions has he had on that issue with the Department for Social Development and groups interested in tackling fuel poverty?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for her question. As I outlined in my answer to Mr McElduff, I have difficulty accepting other issues flagged up in the report, although they are maybe more stylistic issues than substantive ones.

Obviously, I am extremely aware of the problem that fuel poverty is here in the North for so many of our citizens. I lament the fact that it is more of a problem here than it is anywhere else on these islands. That is largely attributable to the fact that we do not have one single Department responsible for tackling it; someone deals with energy, I deal with the environmental impacts of energy, and DSD deals with poverty and fuel poverty. That makes it very difficult to have a joined-up approach, and it is why we have singularly failed to address fuel poverty here.

I have received a letter from the Minister for Social Development on fuel poverty and the potential impact of any ban on smoky coal on fuel poverty. I will happily meet the Minister to discuss that further.

Lord Morrow: I noticed that the Minister's statement today contained 23 noting and welcoming aspects.

He referred to the negative impact of fuel smuggling on the environment. Will he tell us whether there were any debates, discussions or expressions of concern or regret about how few people who are engaged in these activities are being brought before the courts?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. I assure him that such regret, frustration and anger was expressed at that meeting by me, Minister Kennedy and, obviously, Minister Kelly. I was there in my capacity as Environment Minister. I very much regret the cost not just to my Department but to the environment. Over the past two years, the NIEA spent £900,000 on cleaning up after fuel launderers. That does not go anywhere in trying to calculate how much money these people are ripping off the Exchequer and undercutting and undermining legitimate businesses. The Government in the South have similar difficulties. It would clearly be in our interest, therefore, to apprehend and arrest those responsible and to stop them doing what they are doing.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister's statement referred to the ongoing work on the development of a new used-tyre scheme in the Republic of Ireland. Will he inform the House what that is all about and what impact it could have if a similar scheme were brought into Northern Ireland?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, the scheme in Ireland is still under development. It has not been finalised yet, so I am reluctant to go into full details. However, a key element will be producer responsibility. I would very much like to replicate that in legislation up here so that you have a way to track tyres from manufacture to disposal. I believe that that would be a powerful weapon in tackling the issue of waste tyres and their mishandling, which has been raised by Members from every party in the Chamber over the past number of months.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his detailed statement. It is important that there is cooperation between North and South on European funding, and his statement

referred to collaboration. Will he expand on the type of collaboration that might be useful in drawing down additional European funds?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Maginness for that question. In recent years, my Department has shown its strong commitment to increasing engagement with Europe through the establishment of a small dedicated EU team in our environmental policy division. Part of the role of the EU team is to support and encourage the drawdown of European funding related to environmental objectives. To date, the team has provided support to a range of projects, working with partners in local and central government, the not-for-profit sector, the business sector and the research sector.

In relation to the largest EU funding stream — Horizon 2020, which I mentioned quite a bit in my statement — the EU team has held three information workshops for stakeholders. I opened the most recent of the workshops in Magee a couple of weeks ago, specifically to facilitate engagement with local and cross-border stakeholders in the north-west. The team has also provided briefings to individual stakeholders and small groups on the available funding streams.

In relation to the drawdown of funding by the Department itself, my officials proactively engage with fund coordinators at local, regional and national level to secure funding from the 2014-2020 funds to deliver a range of environmental outcomes. These outcomes relate directly to targets that will be embedded in the new Northern Ireland biodiversity strategy and the appropriate management of habitats and the freshwater and marine environments.

The funding programmes that provide opportunities to support environmental outcomes that the Department is engaging with are INTERREG Va, the Atlantic Area transnational cooperation programme, the Northern Periphery and Arctic cooperation programme, the rural development programme, LIFE integrated projects, LIFE traditional projects and Horizon 2020. Collectively, these projects could deliver up to €80 million in direct funding of environmental measures and up to a further €200 million through indirect environmental outcomes, especially from agri-environment measures.

Mr Wilson: Despite the Minister's assurances that he has an open mind on the outcome of the air quality report, the fact that he describes household coal as smoky coal may be an indication of the direction in which he is going.

Is he aware of the concerns that, if he goes down the road of banning household coal, it will increase fuel poverty? It is the kind of fuel that is used by tens of thousands of fuel-poor people in Northern Ireland, and that would require considerable investment in their heating systems.

Will he explain to us why, if he is concerned about air quality, it is only household coal that is being given the emphasis here and not peat as well? Is that because he had his eye wiped by Ministers in the Republic who realise that the peat industry is important to their industry —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. Is there a question coming sometime soon?

Mr Wilson: — and, therefore, have excluded it from the report? What will he do to remedy that situation?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. I think, Minister, that there may be at least one question in there.

Mr Durkan: Hopefully, there will be just one answer as well. I assure Mr Wilson that I am well aware of the concerns that he outlined in his speech. I outlined in an earlier answer to Mr McElduff and Mrs Overend the concerns that I have about the content of the report and how that has been presented to date. Whether that is amended between now and the final report remains to be seen. However, again, let me reassure Mr Wilson and everyone in the House that I am fully aware of the issues that he referred to.

Mr Campbell: The Minister mentioned fuel laundering and fuel smuggling. He will be aware, as my honourable friend mentioned, of the lack of arrests in relation to these issues. At the next NSMC meeting, will he ensure that the police here in Northern Ireland and the guards in the Irish Republic are aware of the public concern about plants being uncovered but nobody behind them ever being brought before the courts?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. I think that he deliberately waited until the Minister of Justice came in before he asked me that. I have outlined my concerns as Environment Minister, primarily the cost of this crime to the environment. Persistent offenders are causing this damage to the environment and this cost to the public purse of clean up.

I have, on more than one occasion, made representation to my right honourable friend here, the Minister of Justice, on the issue, and my counterpart in the Republic has raised it with the guards. There needs to be more cross-departmental and cross-border work on the issue.

Mr Allister: The statement refers to the recent find of a large amount of toxic waste in south Armagh. Is it the case that the scale of the toxic waste found was so disproportionate to the plant that it is suggestive that it was a collection point for toxic waste from multiple plants?

Can he comment upon the speculation that, in consequence, the raiding of those premises was on foot of an arranged tip-off so that the public purse would stand the expense of disposing of the toxic waste?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. As far as I am aware, the public purse always bears the cost for the disposal of this waste.

Mr Allister: A collection service.

Mr Durkan: Yes, that is how it seems. The find in south Armagh to which the Member refers was inordinately huge compared with recent finds, which were also extremely expensive to clean up but paled in comparison with this one.

I am not in a position to say whether that waste all came from one plant or whether it came from multiple plants. However, it is often the case that sludge is found separate from any plant. As the Member describes, it is a collection service; like someone leaving a bin out on the side of the road that we, in the NIEA, have to collect at a huge cost.

12.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Regeneration Bill: First Stage

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to introduce the Regeneration Bill [NIA 32/11-16], which is a Bill to confer functions on district councils in relation to regeneration; to amend the Social Need (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and Part 7 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 in relation to the functions of the Department for Social Development; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Serious Crime Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I beg to move

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Serious Crime Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 6 November, dealing with: the proceeds of crime as contained in chapters 3 and 4 of Part 1 of the Bill; proposed changes to the Serious Crime Act 2007 as contained in clauses 45-49; the possession of a paedophile manual in clause 66; and female genital mutilation in clauses 67-70; and agrees that the Westminster Parliament should consider amendments to the Bill to make explicit in statute common law safeguards (R v Waya [2012] UKSC 51) in relation to the exercise of confiscation order powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

The Serious Crime Bill deals with a wide range of matters. A number of the issues require legislative consent if they are to be extended to Northern Ireland.

First, there are provisions on the proceeds-of-crime legislation. These proposals are not a fundamental change; rather, they are a tightening of aspects of the current system so that it operates as originally intended. Extension to Northern Ireland would ensure consistency, as far as possible, in the operation of this complex legislation. At the request of the Northern Ireland Executive, the Home Office proposes to add to these amendments by introducing a statutory protection regarding proportionality in calculating the amount of a confiscation order.

Secondly, the Bill proposes to consolidate the financial reporting order within the serious crime prevention order (SCPO), increase the penalty for failure to comply and extend the time limit and range of serious offences that can be caught.

Thirdly, female genital mutilation has been an offence since the introduction of the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003. The Bill's provisions introduce a number of additional and new offences as part of a general move to strengthen the law on that crime across the United Kingdom. These cover the provision of anonymity for victims; the introduction of an offence of failure to protect for parents; and the introduction of female genital mutilation (FGM) protection orders, which can contain prohibitions, restrictions or requirements that the court considers appropriate to secure the health, safety and well-being of the girl. These protection orders are a civil procedure and so fall to the Finance and Personnel Minister, who has given his full support to the proposal. The Bill will also extend the prosecution of FGM offences committed outside the United Kingdom to include people habitually resident in the UK, whether as perpetrator or victim. A further proposal regarding mandatory reporting is still under local consideration across a number of interested Departments.

Finally, there is the issue of paedophile manuals. A new offence aims to criminalise the possession of material containing practical advice on how to commit a sexual offence against a child. That would deal with a gap in the law.

There are a number of reasons why I am asking for legislative consent for these proposals. First, those I have

consulted, including the police and the Public Prosecution Service, have said the proposals would be beneficial and that they would welcome them. Secondly, the crimes being addressed by the Bill are those that cross jurisdictions and therefore need to be tackled in, as far as possible, a consistent fashion across the United Kingdom. Organised crime knows no boundaries and needs to be addressed in a combined, joined-up way.

Thirdly, as well as that policy reason, there are timing factors. The nature of the provisions are such that it will be important for judicial and law enforcement consistency for them to come into force as early as possible and at the same time. Given the current demands on the legislative programme, the earliest an Assembly Bill could be introduced to achieve the same ends would be 2016. It would, therefore, be to our great advantage if we were to implement these provisions in a more timely fashion.

Finally, there are procedural advantages. As we have seen with the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill, there are considerable complications in managing the combination of reserved and devolved measures in legislating both at Westminster and in this House on the same general subject. I appreciate that the Assembly's preference is to legislate on Northern Ireland matters where possible and, indeed, that would be my own preference. However, in this instance, for the reasons I have outlined, with the support of the Executive and the Justice Committee, I ask that the Assembly supports the terms of this legislative consent motion.

Mr McCartney (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mise ag labhairt thar ceann an Choiste ar maidin. I will speak on behalf of the Committee for Justice.

The Committee was advised in July 2014 that the Minister of Justice was proposing to bring forward a legislative consent motion (LCM) for the devolved aspects of the Serious Crime Bill, which had been introduced in the Westminster Parliament on 5 June 2014. At that stage, the Committee noted the details of the Bill, which will provide additional legal powers to deal with the threat from serious and organised crime, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, organised illegal immigration, child sexual exploitation, high-value fraud, counterfeiting and cybercrime, all of which affect this jurisdiction and operate on a cross-jurisdictional and international basis.

The LCM was laid in the Assembly on 10 November. As outlined by the Minister of Justice, it will enable the Serious Crime Bill to cover four areas, powers for which have been devolved to the Assembly. These include proceeds of crime legislation, serious crime prevention orders, female genital mutilation offences and a new offence criminalising the possession of material that contains practical advice on how to commit a sexual offence against a child. The Committee has previously supported legislative measures to strengthen the notification arrangements and monitoring of sex offenders and, therefore, welcomes this new offence.

While the Committee is of the view that it is preferable for the Assembly to legislate on devolved matters, given the cross-jurisdictional nature of the crimes being addressed in the Serious Crime Bill, the difficulties in managing

the combination of reserved and devolved measures if legislating at Westminster and the Assembly on the same general subject and the need for the measures to come into force at the same time for judicial and law enforcement purposes, the Committee agreed at the meeting on 19 November 2014 that it was content to support the legislative consent motion. The Committee subsequently provided all MLAs with a copy of its report on the LCM. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Mr Wilson: I welcome the agreement from Sinn Féin on this legislative consent motion on the Serious Crime Bill. I especially noted that one of the reasons that Mr McCartney gave for the Committee's support and, indeed, his acceptance of its report was "the cross-jurisdictional nature" of many of these offences. It just strikes me as a bit odd that when a legislative consent motion was sought for the National Crime Agency (NCA) on the very basis that the crimes were of a cross-jurisdictional nature, Sinn Féin and the SDLP did not find it worthy of —

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: I will, yes.

Mr McCartney: Perhaps the Member, not being a member of the Justice Committee and, perhaps, not following the debate, particularly in relation to the NCA, does not know that our issues around that are about accountability. Indeed, if he read the judgement last week in a London court about the NCA, then perhaps he too would have a look at some of the commitments that were supposed to have been made in England, never mind those that were supposed to have been made here. If he does so, he will see that we are well justified in not supporting the transfer of the NCA because of issues around accountability.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. I can see this debate going everywhere. I encourage the Member to stay on the subject.

Mr Wilson: It is not going to go everywhere, Mr Deputy Speaker, but it is worth pointing out that the rationale behind this is that there are issues of a cross-jurisdictional nature and a legislative consent motion has been accepted in relation to the Serious Crime Bill but has not been accepted in relation to other legislation that was dealing with exactly the same kind of problem that we are facing here.

The Minister mentioned — this is really the only reason that I wanted to speak on this, although I was glad to get the opportunity to once again highlight the inconsistencies from those in the Assembly who appear to be supporting the criminal class in one way or another — that one of the issues that would be covered by the Bill would be the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and the ability to bring in money from the proceeds of crime. However, he added another sentence: "as far as possible". Really, I would like the Minister to indicate, when he sums up, whether even the parts of the Serious Crime Bill that deal with the proceeds of crime will be impaired in some way by the fact that we are not part of the National Crime Agency. Indeed, is that what he meant when he talked about them applying to Northern Ireland "as far as possible"? If that is the case, whilst I welcome the legislative consent motion, it would appear that the Westminster legislation will be less effective in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr Dickson: The Bill, as the Minister outlined, covers a number of areas from dealing with the proceeds of crime to the protection of children. On the former, I welcome the greater powers for law enforcement agencies to effectively pursue and bring to justice members of organised criminal gangs. Like the Member who spoke previously, I think that the operation of the National Crime Agency is a key part of the UK legislation, and our efforts against serious organised crime would be greatly aided if those who are blocking its operation in Northern Ireland were to drop that opposition. That would be extremely helpful to the Bill.

I particularly welcome the provisions in clauses 66 to 70, especially those dealing with female genital mutilation. This will help us to better protect the most vulnerable. A week rarely goes by now when we do not hear on the news terrible stories of abuse. By adopting these legislative changes, we are firmly saying that those activities will not be tolerated by this Assembly or Northern Ireland society. These are important provisions, and I believe that they are a step forward in dealing with serious crime. I encourage Members to support the motion.

Mr Ford: I thank the three Members who contributed to the debate and, as I said earlier, the Justice Committee and the Executive for their support and consideration of these issues.

I should particularly highlight the fact that, I believe, Mr McCartney made his first formal response to a ministerial proposal as vice Chair of the Committee, and his support is therefore particularly welcome on these issues. We normally hear him only second; on this occasion, we heard him first. Both he and Mr Dickson gave fulsome support for the proposals that are before us.

Really the only issue that was raised was that raised by Mr Wilson when he quoted me as having said, "as far as possible". I should stress, first of all, that the issues in this legislation, as far as they relate to the Proceeds of Crime Act, are related to criminal confiscation and not civil recovery. Therefore, they are powers that are available in Northern Ireland. "As far as possible" was merely, from my point of view, expressing the fact that legislation is not identical across the United Kingdom. Aspects of the legislation in England and Wales differ from that in Scotland and in Northern Ireland. It was simply a slight technical term. I was not suggesting that there is a problem with its operation but merely that the legislative basis is not identical across the three jurisdictions because that is what devolution is about. I hope that I can reassure Mr Wilson on that point. I hope that I have not now upset Mr Maginness by saying that.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for giving way. It is just on the point raised by Mr Wilson in relation to NCA. I know that the Minister would like to see the NCA fully endorsed by all parties in the House, including the SDLP, but will he agree that there are discussions ongoing in relation to the NCA — they may be drawn out, but nonetheless they are ongoing — around the whole issue of accountability, and once accountability has been agreed, the NCA should come into being in Northern Ireland with its full operational strength?

12.45 pm

Mr Ford: If Mr Maginness felt obliged to defend the SDLP's position, I am happy to allow him that intervention to do so. However, as far as I am concerned, 14 months on from the coming into operation of the NCA, with a significant amount of work done by my officials and, indeed, significant lobbying on my part with the Home Secretary, I believe that we have made major steps forward. Like other Members, I would like to see the accountability to ensure that the NCA's role is in support of the PSNI and does not subsume the role of the PSNI. I believe that we have made significant progress there.

I trust that the ongoing and somewhat extended discussions with the SDLP and Sinn Féin will terminate shortly and that we will see the NCA operating in a way that supports efforts against organised crime in this jurisdiction, with all the costs that we see to the work being done by the PSNI and the dangers to people in this society through a variety of organised crime that has been highlighted on numerous occasions. However, I suspect that, if I go on much further, Deputy Speaker, you will tell me that I am digressing from the topic.

I welcome the support from four Members for the principles of the LCM and recommend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Serious Crime Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 6 November, dealing with: the proceeds of crime as contained in chapters 3 and 4 of Part 1 of the Bill; proposed changes to the Serious Crime Act 2007 as contained in clauses 45-49; the possession of a paedophile manual in clause 66; and female genital mutilation in clauses 67-70; and agrees that the Westminster Parliament should consider amendments to the Bill to make explicit in statute common law safeguards (R v Waya [2012] UKSC 51) in relation to the exercise of confiscation order powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

Modern Slavery Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I beg to move

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Modern Slavery Bill, as brought from the Commons to the House of Lords on 5 November 2014, dealing with enforcement powers in relation to ships, as contained in clauses 37, 38 and 39 of Part 3 of the Bill and Part 3 of schedule 2 to the Bill; the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, in Part 4 of the Bill; and transparency in supply chains, in Part 6 of the Bill.

The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill tabled by Lord Morrow has made good progress through the House, and, indeed, we expect to complete its Final Stage tomorrow. It is important legislation that will help to reinforce our response to human trafficking and slavery. My proposal that these further measures in the Modern Slavery Bill should be extended to Northern Ireland is intended to complement the provisions in Lord Morrow's Bill. They will help to ensure that the arrangements in this jurisdiction are improved to address human trafficking and slavery, to protect victims and to bring perpetrators to justice. We want to ensure that they are underpinned by the most comprehensive and effective package of legislative provisions possible.

The provisions deal with three key areas. The practical limitations of the existing powers of law enforcement to tackle human trafficking and slavery offences at sea were highlighted by a recent case in which a UK-flagged vessel suspected of being connected with human trafficking was anchored outside UK territorial waters. In that case, police were unable to board the vessel until it sailed into territorial waters. The Home Office has advised that it is aware of similar incidents in recent years. The Modern Slavery Bill therefore sought to close that potential loophole and clarify law enforcement's powers to act at sea where there is suspicion that a human trafficking or slavery-type offence has occurred. The Bill includes provisions to create new enforcement powers, but they were limited in extent to England and Wales only when the Bill was introduced.

I have engaged with the Home Secretary and the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Justice on the development of a comprehensive package of maritime enforcement powers that would cover the whole of the United Kingdom. The Bill was subsequently amended to include those new powers. Essentially, there are two distinct elements. First, the Bill now provides general enforcement powers that can be exercised by constables operating within their respective jurisdictions or in international waters and by enforcement officers, such as officers of the UK Border Force, who are well placed to identify and respond to suspected cases of trafficking at sea. The general powers include specific provision for PSNI officers. The Bill also makes it clear that the authority of the Chief Constable is needed before an enforcement officer may exercise the powers in Northern Ireland waters. The Bill also makes provision for powers to be exercised in hot pursuit situations, that is where a vessel is pursued from international waters or from another UK jurisdiction. Together, the package of powers is intended to ensure that traffickers could be apprehended anywhere in UK territorial waters or in adjacent

international waters. It would enhance the effectiveness of our collective response to these crimes.

As I noted, I have been mindful to preserve the PSNI's primacy in Northern Ireland waters in all but hot pursuit situations. I am satisfied that this strikes the right balance. The Chief Constable and the Policing Board agree that extending the powers to Northern Ireland would enhance our capacity to respond to these crimes and bring perpetrators to justice. I have also ensured that appropriate accountability arrangements broadly mirroring those for mutual aid are in place where operations take place in our waters. To summarise, the powers will assist law enforcement in bringing to justice those responsible for trafficking and exploiting other human beings.

The second area covered by the LCM is the proposed extension to Northern Ireland of the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner under Part 4 of the Bill. Members are well aware of the reasons why I believe Northern Ireland will benefit greatly from the oversight that the commissioner offers. The proposal received overwhelming support, with 30 of 34 responses to the public consultation supporting it. I hope, therefore, that Members will support it, not least because just last week the House voted to remove from Lord Morrow's Bill clause 26, in relation to a Northern Ireland rapporteur, in favour of the UK-wide commissioner.

As I have said before, a commissioner operating across the entire United Kingdom will provide an effective oversight model for all relevant bodies operating on these issues in Northern Ireland whether devolved or not. The commissioner's role is to encourage good practice in the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of slavery and human trafficking offences and in the identification of victims. In doing so, the commissioner may carry out research, consult, make reports, make recommendations to public authorities, provide information, education or training and work in partnership with other persons in the UK or elsewhere. That latter power is especially welcome in the context of the particular challenges posed by traffickers operating across our shared land border. I am encouraged that Kevin Hyland, the commissioner designate, is already engaging with such cross-border issues and has agreed to address next month's cross-border conference on forced labour hosted jointly by my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality.

After significant lobbying with the Home Secretary and her team, the Bill makes several specific provisions to cover Northern Ireland interests. They include a requirement to consult the Northern Ireland Minister on the appointment of the commissioner; consultation on the strategic plan; powers for the Northern Ireland Minister to commission ad hoc reports; powers of redaction, where needed; and annual reports to be submitted simultaneously to Ministers in each jurisdiction. There will be a requirement on my Department to lay the strategic plan and annual report before the Assembly, and there will be powers to specify in regulations the public authorities in Northern Ireland that will be under a duty to cooperate with the commissioner. The provisions, if agreed, will ensure that there is a comprehensive, coordinated response and consistent, joined-up oversight across the United Kingdom to reinforce and improve our collective response to modern slavery. Again, I trust that we will have the Assembly's support.

The final area that the LCM covers relates to new provisions to enhance transparency in supply chains under clause 51 of the Modern Slavery Bill. That clause will place a requirement on commercial organisations operating in the UK and supplying goods or services to prepare a slavery and human trafficking statement for each financial year and to publish it on their website. The current expectation is that the measure would capture approximately 1,000 of the largest commercial organisations operating in the UK. However, the detail of the level of the threshold is to be established in regulations after consultation with the devolved Administrations and business. The slavery and human trafficking statement would set out the steps that the organisation had taken in the financial year to ensure that its business and its supply chains were free of human trafficking and slavery, or, where no such steps have been taken, there would be a statement that the organisation had not taken any such steps. I have no doubt that public pressure would then come into play. Once businesses are required to disclose what they do to tackle human trafficking and slavery, consumers and campaigners across the United Kingdom will have a better understanding of what action business is taking and can call for more action if they think it is needed.

The provision has been the subject of considerable lobbying by NGOs. The Home Office has also been engaging with the business sector, and there is broad support for the measure. Given the large size of the companies that will be affected by the clause, it is likely that very few will be operating here that are not also operating in the other UK jurisdictions. Thus I believe that a UK-wide response would be the most effective and appropriate way to legislate on the issue, so I am keen to see the provision extend to Northern Ireland. I trust the House will support it.

I am confident that, taken together, the three provisions will further strengthen the response to modern slavery and human trafficking in this jurisdiction in conjunction with the proposals before the House in Lord Morrow's human trafficking Bill. I, therefore, seek the Assembly's support for the LCM.

Mr McCartney (The Deputy Chairperson of the

Committee for Justice): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Committee was advised in July that the Minister was proposing to bring forward a legislative consent motion for the transferred aspects of the Modern Slavery Bill, which aims to enhance the effectiveness of the legal framework for tackling human trafficking and modern slavery offences and to improve the protection for, and support provided to, victims of such offences.

Modern slavery can take a number of forms, including sexual exploitation, forced labour and domestic servitude, and victims come from all walks of life. Victims are often unwilling to come forward to law enforcement or public protection agencies, not seeing themselves as victims or fearing reprisals from their traffickers, and those who come into contact with them do not always recognise them as being victims of trafficking.

As we are all aware from the Assembly's consideration of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill, modern slavery is a particularly brutal form of organised crime, in which people are treated as commodities and exploited for criminal gain. The Committee heard about such experiences at first hand from a number of victims, and, in

particular, from one victim of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The Minister outlined the provisions in the Bill that are covered by the LCM. The first area will introduce new enforcement powers for ships in order to tackle human trafficking and slavery where it occurs at sea. The Committee noted that the Minister had consulted the Chief Constable and the Policing Board on the proposed powers, and both agreed that they would be beneficial and would enhance our capacity to respond to human trafficking and slavery crimes and assist in bringing perpetrators to justice.

The second issue covered by the LCM aims to fill the current information gap around the overall corporate response to tackling slavery in supply chains and to encourage companies to take meaningful action. Departmental officials advised that they had had initial engagement at official level with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development on the proposal. The Committee noted that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment indicated that it is content in principle with the proposal to extend the provision, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is satisfied that the provisions would not raise any departmental issues for them.

The third issue covered by the LCM relates to the extension of the office of the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner to the North. It is an issue that the Committee has given extensive consideration to, and the Chair covered it during the various stages of the Human Trafficking Bill.

When the Committee considered the clause at Committee Stage, there was clear support for the concept of an independent oversight mechanism to provide effective monitoring and accountability arrangements. The key issue was whether having a local rapporteur or an independent anti-slavery commissioner was more appropriate. The commissioner was seen to be beneficial, given the clear international nature of, and dimension to, human trafficking and the fact that such a commissioner could look comprehensively at the actions of all the organisations and agencies involved in tackling trafficking in the North and could link to the British Home Office, the Human Trafficking Centre and the Gangmasters Licensing Authority. A local rapporteur would not be able to do that, and a commissioner might not have considered the specific needs of the North and its particular challenges, including the land border, as it is called, with the Twenty-six Counties.

There was also concern, as initially drafted in the Modern Slavery Bill, that the commissioner would consider only law enforcement and not areas such as victim support, which it was intended that the rapporteur in the North would consider. At that stage, the Committee agreed that it supported the principle of having an independent body to monitor and report on the response to human trafficking. In the absence of further information on how the commissioner would operate and on the extent to which the post would meet the particular needs of the North, it agreed to support the provision in the Human Trafficking Bill for a local rapporteur. The Committee also agreed to consider the matter further once clarity on the remit and responsibilities of the Anti-slavery Commissioner was available.

1.00 pm

More recently, on 5 November 2014, the Committee was briefed by departmental officials on the LCM and on how the Anti-slavery Commissioner would consider the interests of the North, including a requirement for the British Home Secretary to consult devolved Ministers, including the Minister of Justice, on the appointment of the commissioner; a duty on the British Home Secretary to consult devolved Ministers before agreeing any strategic plan or annual report; and a power for the Justice Minister to be able to request ad hoc reports on any matters. Reports by the commissioner will be jointly submitted to the British Home Secretary and devolved Ministers, and there is a statutory duty on the Minister here to lay the reports in front of the Committee.

Given all those considerations and, indeed, that individual parties were then able to take up positions on the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill, the Committee subsequently agreed, at the meeting on 19 November, that it was content to support the legislative consent motion. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Speaking in my capacity as an individual MLA, I would have raised the point that we believe that Lord Morrow's Bill would have been strengthened by a local rapporteur, but those points are now on the record.

Lord Morrow: I am very glad to be able to speak in favour of the LCM before us today on powers in the Modern Slavery Bill. It is quite fitting that we are debating this LCM one day before the Final Stage of the passage of my Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill. It is clear to me that the changes to the Modern Slavery Bill that the passage of the LCM before us today would allow will complement the provisions of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill. They will help to improve the response of our society to the awful crimes of human trafficking and slavery and, as a consequence, are to be commended.

I should say — and Members will not be surprised to hear me say this — that I am of the view that the provisions of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill are considerably better in many respects than those outlined in the Modern Slavery Bill, especially with regard to the area of support for victims of trafficking, the introduction of guardians for separated children and our measures to reduce demand for trafficking. That said, we are gaining the best of all worlds through this LCM. We are working with the rest of the United Kingdom where it is beneficial to do so while going further than the rest of the UK through our own legislation.

I will not look to comment on all aspects of the LCM today, although I want to make it clear that I support it in its entirety. I want to focus on two particular aspects of the LCM: the measures that establish the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner and that will apply to Northern Ireland; and the provisions to enhance transparency in supply chains. Members will be aware that, in the original version of my Bill, there was provision for a Northern Ireland rapporteur. I agreed to remove the provision at Further Consideration Stage last week due to the introduction of the Anti-slavery Commissioner through the Modern Slavery Bill, the details of which are set out in the LCM. The general functions of the commissioner,

as the Minister set out, are to encourage good practice in the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of slavery and human trafficking offences and the identification of victims of those offences.

I want to be clear that I retain a number of misgivings about the role of the Anti-slavery Commissioner. The Minister is aware of those concerns and understands where I am coming from. I am particularly concerned about the operational independence of the commissioner from the Home Office, his lack of status with regard to promoting best practice in the support for victims and what level of interest he will take in Northern Ireland. I hope to be able to raise some of those concerns in another place as the Modern Slavery Bill progresses through its parliamentary stages at Westminster.

However, despite those misgivings, it became apparent to me after a lengthy period of interaction with the Minister and his officials that the right course for Northern Ireland was to come within the ambit of the UK-wide Anti-slavery Commissioner. That was for four main reasons. First, it is manifestly apparent that the crimes of human trafficking and slavery are no respecters of borders and there is wisdom in having a single commissioner to consider the entirety of the UK's response to that crime.

Secondly, the fact that the commissioner could scrutinise practice in areas that are not devolved in Northern Ireland, especially that of immigration, makes a UK-wide Anti-slavery Commissioner a more attractive prospect than a Northern Ireland rapporteur. Thirdly, I appreciate that we are working in financially stringent times. The Department of Justice's budget is under considerable pressure, and the Minister outlined to the House that it would be considerably cheaper to be part of the UK-wide Anti-slavery Commissioner than to introduce a rapporteur exclusively focused on Northern Ireland.

Fourthly, the Minister and his officials, to their credit, gained a number of important concessions from the Home Office on how the Anti-slavery Commissioner would function in Northern Ireland. The Minister was not able to deliver everything that I would have liked on the commissioner, but I think that we got the most that we could have hoped for in the circumstances, and I commend him for that.

I have questions for the Minister that I want him to consider in his response to the debate today. First, how often does he envisage the Anti-slavery Commissioner coming to Northern Ireland? Will it be every month, every two months or every six months? Secondly, does he have any ideas about what kind of reports the Department would like the Anti-slavery Commissioner to produce? Thirdly and crucially, how will he ensure that the commissioner considers the nature of cross-border trafficking between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland?

I am very glad that Northern Ireland will be covered by the provisions seeking to enhance transparency in supply chains. A number of stories have been reported in the British press about the presence of modern-day slavery in the supply chains of major firms in the United Kingdom. Those firms by no means support such dreadful practices but often do not realise that some of their suppliers are employing such methods. Having considered the proposals in the Modern Slavery Bill, I think that they strike a good balance in encouraging businesses to take

meaningful action against modern-day slavery in their supply chains while not overburdening businesses with regulation. It would be helpful if the Minister could outline how many businesses his Department estimates would be affected in Northern Ireland by the new provision.

The Minister of Justice and his officials have been working on the LCM for quite some time, and it has not been easy for him to negotiate some aspects with the Home Office. I offer my congratulations to him on getting to the point of having the LCM approved by the House today.

Mr Dickson: I will be very brief, but it is important to note the important areas that the Bill covers, and, indeed, the complimentary way in which Lord Morrow referred to it. I particularly welcome the Bill in relation to shipping. I recently had to write to the Home Secretary about concerns that I raised about security at our ports and the frequency of inspections. I appreciate that the Bill does not specifically deal with that issue, but the extra powers to stop, board, divert and detain ships will no doubt aid efforts against serious and organised crime gangs exploiting the seas and our ports.

I particularly welcome the provisions on the appointment of an Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, which will complement and enhance our efforts to tackle human trafficking, among other things, the functions encouraging good practice in prevention, detection and investigation, and prosecution. The provisions will help us to improve security and protect the most vulnerable. I encourage Members to support the motion.

Mr Ford: I thank the Members who contributed to the debate. I suspect that it is more than a coincidence that, as Lord Morrow reminded us, we have the Final Stage of his private Member's Bill tomorrow. We will debate the fine detail of that Bill tomorrow, but I have no doubt that he is right in principle when he says that, with the Modern Slavery Bill, we are getting the best of both worlds: cooperating with the other UK jurisdictions when it is appropriate and going beyond that for something better, whilst we might not entirely agree on the definition of "better" in this place.

Apart from the comments just made by Mr Dickson, very little reference was made to the issue of enforcement powers at sea. I take it, therefore, that we are fully agreed on that. Transparency in supply chains has attracted relatively little debate, yet it is of significant concern to a number of our NGO partners. Specifically on that point, I cannot give Lord Morrow any idea of the number of businesses among the UK's thousand largest that we currently believe would be affected, but the answer to the question that he did not ask, which was how many operate exclusively in Northern Ireland, is, we believe, probably none. It is therefore entirely appropriate that we link in to the UK-wide arrangements for that. However, as we see how the regulations develop, we will know exactly the answer to that question. I have no doubt that he will follow that through, whether in this place or in another place.

The key issue that raised interest was the matter of the Anti-slavery Commissioner and the role of the independent commissioner in Northern Ireland. I am grateful to Mr McCartney for the way in which he explained his party's previous support for the concept of a Northern Ireland rapporteur, but his willingness to accept that the significant concessions that we achieved in discussions with the

Home Office, as highlighted by Lord Morrow, have made for a much better arrangement than was originally proposed, is welcome. Certainly, when I saw the first draft of the proposals from the Home Office, I saw that what was there would have been unacceptable. It may not be everything that we would want, but I believe that we now have the opportunities to use the independent commissioner in Northern Ireland in a way that will enhance our fight against slavery and human trafficking.

As to the three questions that Lord Morrow asked on that, I am not sure whether he expected me to have the answers on the hoof, but I will try. He asked how often I expect to see the Anti-slavery Commissioner in Northern Ireland, and the answer is this: as often as is reasonable. The commissioner was prepared to travel here last week. It turned out that the only group that he would have met comprised officials from the DOJ and me, so I thought that a phone call was more appropriate than asking him to jump on a plane. However, he has indicated his willingness to be involved, and, as I said earlier, he will take part in the cross-border conference due to take place next month.

To some extent, that answers the third question raised by Lord Morrow: the commissioner is fully aware, from his previous role in the Metropolitan Police, of the importance of the entire bundle of relationships within these islands, and he is fully aware of the cross-border issues that we have that other regions of the UK do not have. I think that he will certainly be prepared to ensure that he follows those through. The fact that he has the power to cooperate with organisations outside the UK is of significant benefit. I have no doubt from my contacts with the Department of Justice and Equality in Dublin that it will be keen that its officials cooperate with him as well.

Lord Morrow also asked what kind of reports I expect. I think that that will be the interesting point as we see the work done by officials from the Organised Crime Task Force and by the DOJ's engagement group, which is comprised predominantly of NGOs with concerns about human trafficking and modern slavery. As to what kind of reports we collectively wish to commission from him with particular regard to Northern Ireland as well as the wider reports that he is preparing for us, that is an open question. There is currently no restriction on what we might seek to ask in that respect, save for the fact that I am conscious of Lord Morrow's kind references to the budget of the DOJ: if we commission additional reports for Northern Ireland, the DOJ will pay for them, so we will not necessarily be able to commission that much.

Lord Morrow: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Ford: Sorry, I will let Lord Morrow heckle me more loudly, as I missed that.

Lord Morrow: I am sorry. I said that I hope that I have not been too kind.

Mr Ford: I was going to say, in summing up, that I am grateful for the extremely kind remarks that Lord Morrow has made because, as I have said on previous occasions, he wanted to see the colour of the Home Office's money before he withdrew his proposals for a Northern Ireland rapporteur. He was quite right in that, but I believe that the good work done by my officials — I claim some small credit for that myself — meant that the Home Secretary significantly modified her proposals to the extent that we will see a valid, UK-wide role that will mean that Scotland

and Northern Ireland will benefit from the work of the commissioner. From my contacts with Kevin Hyland already, I believe that he intends to carry that through. I think that we can, therefore, have a degree of confidence in the proposals, especially as we abolished the post of Northern Ireland rapporteur last week. On that basis, I commend all three sections of the LCM to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Modern Slavery Bill, as brought from the Commons to the House of Lords on 5 November 2014, dealing with enforcement powers in relation to ships, as contained in clauses 37, 38 and 39 of Part 3 of the Bill and Part 3 of schedule 2 to the Bill; the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, in Part 4 of the Bill; and transparency in supply chains, in Part 6 of the Bill.

1.15 pm

Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

That the draft Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

This statutory rule is made under powers contained in the Energy Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which prescribes that these regulations must be laid in draft for approval by affirmative resolution of the Assembly. The draft regulations provide the statutory basis for the introduction of the Northern Ireland domestic renewable heat incentive (RHI). Policy proposals for the development of the Northern Ireland RHI were subject to public consultation last year. The consultation highlighted the need for further work to finalise the policy position and to draft these regulations. This has taken longer than I would have liked, but I am pleased to introduce the scheme now, and I hope that all Members will be supportive.

This legislation will provide the necessary powers for my Department to implement the domestic RHI scheme. The RHI will support generators of renewable heat in the domestic sector through upfront and long-term incentive payments that are designed to cover the additional costs involved in renewable technologies, as well as to provide a favourable rate of return for investors. Although our focus is often on renewable electricity generation, heating and transport are our two largest energy needs. Ensuring a more competitive and diverse heating market in Northern Ireland is therefore a key priority. In order to reduce our current reliance on fossil fuels, heat from indigenous and renewable sources must be promoted. To incentivise a switch to renewable heating technologies, the domestic RHI will provide households with upfront payments followed by seven years of tariff payments.

The domestic RHI will replace the grant support for householders currently available through my Department's renewable heat premium payment scheme, which I launched in May 2012. Through that scheme, over 1,200 renewable heat installations have been supported, and this represents a total investment of over £3 million. Householders who availed themselves of the premium payment scheme will be able to transfer across to the new domestic RHI scheme.

We already have a very successful non-domestic RHI scheme in Northern Ireland, which has been in place since 2012. Applications are currently running at 4% of all UK applications, well ahead of the expected 3%. I hope to bring forward proposals to extend the non-domestic scheme in 2015. The regulations laid today are in relation to the domestic RHI, but there is one non-domestic issue in the regulations. The very last regulation is in relation to an issue that was brought to me about Carbon Trust loans and the RHI. A number of local businesses in receipt of 0% Carbon Trust loans could not avail themselves of the non-domestic RHI because their loans were classed as state aid. The regulations include an amendment to the non-domestic RHI to facilitate the payback of grants or aid. This will enable applicants to pay back their loans and become eligible for the RHI.

It is expected that the extension of the RHI to the domestic sector will increase the number of properties switching to renewable technologies and help achieve our target of 10% renewable heat by 2020. In addition, it is expected that the RHI will provide other, wider benefits in the form of fuel diversity, lower emissions and, importantly, jobs, particularly in association with the installation of the new technology.

The launch of the domestic RHI in conjunction with the grant support already in place represents up to £25 million of funding to 2015, with a further budget profile in annually managed expenditure until 2020. That amount demonstrates the national Government's commitment to increasing levels of renewable heating. Our targets in the Programme for Government have to be met, as do our European Union targets nationally, towards which we make a small contribution. It is accepted that it is a small contribution; however, it is one we still need to make.

These regulations will support the introduction of the domestic RHI and set a clear framework for the scheme, including how payments will be calculated and made, the conditions of the scheme and eligibility standards.

The domestic RHI scheme — as was the case with its predecessor, the renewable heat premium payment scheme — will be administered in-house by DETI, which is the most cost-effective option for delivery.

In conclusion, I ask that Members support the passage of the regulations. If they do, I will launch the domestic RHI scheme as soon as possible.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na moltaí seo a chur os ár gcomhair. I thank the Minister for bringing the proposal to us. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment welcomes the introduction of the Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (NI) 2014.

The Committee recognises that, although Northern Ireland has no binding targets under the EU renewable energy directive, we are expected to contribute to the Westminster share of that target. As part of that share, the strategic energy framework commits the Department to achieving 40% of electricity and 10% of heat generated from renewable sources by 2020. However, as the Minister informed the House last week, the 40% target is due to be reviewed. To assist in increasing the level of renewable heat to 10%, the Westminster Government made £25 million of funding available to the Executive.

The introduction of the renewable heat incentive has provided a structured means to provide long-term guaranteed financial assistance for renewable heat installations. The incentive is designed to provide a cost-effective option for consumers to switch to renewable sources of heat. It also provides an option for any consumer to avail themselves of a source of heating that can lead to lower CO₂ emissions, increased fuel security and an increase in local employment opportunities in the green energy sector.

The 2012 RHI regulations represented the first phase in a two-phase approach to incentivising renewable heat generation. Phase 1 concentrated on non-domestic installations, and, in the intervening period, the

Department has introduced the renewable heat premium payment scheme for domestic installations, which the Committee considered to be a fair and equitable approach in the intervening period until the development of a domestic renewable heat incentive.

At the time that the 2012 regulations were introduced, the Department informed the Committee that phase 2 of the scheme was to be introduced in the summer of 2013. The Committee has closely scrutinised the development of the renewable heat incentive since that time and has requested and received regular updates from the Department. The Department informed the Committee in October this year that the renewable heat premium payment scheme had received more than 2,000 applications with almost 1,500 offers issued by energy division, representing support of around £2.7 million and a total investment of £9.2 million.

The regulations will provide the legislative basis for the domestic renewable heat incentive, and that is to be welcomed. The Department has informed the Committee that the renewable heat incentive will have scheduled reviews built in to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. The Committee will pay particular attention to those reviews and will continue to scrutinise the implementation of the non-domestic and domestic aspects of the scheme, especially in areas relating to eligibility criteria, compliance of participants, accreditation, metering and tariffs.

The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment therefore supports the Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and recommends that the regulations be affirmed by the Assembly.

Mr Dunne: I, too, support the statutory rule and recognise its importance. Following the renewable heat incentive scheme in November 2012, it is important that a similar scheme is introduced for the domestic sector, as often the domestic is secondary to the commercial and industrial sectors.

Given that 98% of our heating fuels are imported fossil fuels, it is imperative that we support any initiative to encourage the greater uptake of renewables. That will also help to meet the 10% renewable heat target in the Programme for Government. The scheme, which has a number of key features, includes tariffs that have been specifically designed to bridge the financial gap between heating systems and will bring real benefits to those seeking to develop a renewable heat system. Another positive factor is the fact that the funding for the domestic RHI scheme will not impact on consumers' energy bills.

It is important that we have stability and certainty in this sector for domestic and non-domestic users, and this is a step in that direction. I welcome the rule and am happy to commend it to the House.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an méid a dúirt sí inniu. I thank the Minister for what she said today, and I support the rule that she is bringing forward.

Phase 2 includes new technologies in the non-domestic sector and the introduction of an RHI scheme for domestic customers to replace the temporary scheme that was in place and was attractive for domestic householders. I suppose that this puts it on a more permanent footing and

gives greater clarity to customers and those in the sector on what will exist in the future. The public consultation took place on phase 2 between July and October 2013, and much of the focus in the consultation responses was on the domestic sector and the opportunities that lay there. From a consumer point of view, the big focus that individuals and consumer advocates had was on the ability of householders to pay heating costs, which is a serious problem, particularly at this time of year. One of the biggest problems that householders face is growing heating costs, so I welcome the support that is being provided for domestic households to embrace renewable forms of heat generation. It is certainly more sustainable and more affordable. It is a small start, but I hope that it can be a catalyst for greater growth in the sector in the future.

The soaring cost of energy along with the continuing pressure on falling and stagnant household incomes presents great difficulties for many of our citizens, households and businesses. We have a complete over-reliance on fossil fuels for the creation of heat and electricity for our homes. The third aspect of that is transport, and that is where we need to see government support. We have seen some support across all of those areas, and that needs to be maintained.

The warm homes scheme helped people to reduce their bills through greater energy efficiency measures, and it is proposed to end that scheme in March. We need to explore whether that could be extended beyond March, because it is questionable that councils will be ready to go with affordable warmth from 1 April. Bryson has told me that it is about to put its staff in Fermanagh on protective notice, and that means that there may be a gap in provision between the ending of the warm homes scheme and the full roll-out of affordable warmth. I take the opportunity to appeal to the Minister to raise the matter with the Social Development Minister and the Environment Minister to see whether that very valuable service can be retained.

The boiler replacement scheme has been fairly unsuccessful. It is hard for people who are fuel-poor or live in a poor household to avail themselves of that scheme. The numbers who have signed up for it are fairly low, and, although there is considerable demand for it, only around 5% of those who make an enquiry can or do get it. The terms of the boiler replacement scheme need to be reviewed, and it needs to be part of a much broader package, such as that proposed through the green new deal scheme, that would encourage people to invest in energy efficiency and energy conservation measures or to move across to renewable energy. This is a small step in the right direction, but the fact that people who want a boiler replacement have to put either £1,000 or £1,500 of their own money up front is a huge disincentive for some, particularly when you look at the payback time of moving from oil to gas or renewables. The fact that there is not a loan of £1,000 to support people in poor households to move across to benefit from such a good scheme is a bit of an anomaly.

The Minister proposed to bring forward an energy Bill, which would have been significant legislation for her Department. For one reason or another, including some of the implications of what happened at Westminster with energy policy and other matters, that is not going to happen. However, at some stage in the near future, the Minister needs to provide clarity on what legislation she

intends to take forward to deal with energy-related issues between now and the end of the mandate.

In terms of support for large energy users through the scheme, it is concerning that reports came out the week before last from the regulator that some of our large energy users pay the highest electricity costs in Europe. They are now paying more than any other region in Europe. We want to see sustainable energy for all our customers, whether that is a domestic household or a large energy user.

If something is not done to tackle the high cost of electricity, which the Committee has raised on a number of occasions, there will be serious job losses across the sector. It is discouraging potential manufacturing companies from basing themselves here.

1.30 pm

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: Happily, Sammy, yes.

Mr Wilson: The Member used a phrase beloved of all politicians when they are not really sure what their policy is: "Something needs to be done". Perhaps he would tell us what the "something" is that will reduce costs for large non-domestic energy consumers while not passing it on to domestic consumers.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for his intervention. The Committee covered this in detail through phases 1 and 2 of our recent inquiry, which was debated last week with phase 3. One of the things that the Committee asked to be done was for the Department and the regulator to explore a possible scheme that would take the NISEP scheme and retail charges out of every customer's bill. We cannot simply hand money to large energy users because it would have state aid implications. I do not think that it is fair that we take money off them and hand it on to domestic customers, as there would be a knock-on impact, particularly in fuel-poor households. There are opportunities. I was not advocating that we do that; I was advocating that the Department and the regulator bring forward a paper on what such a scheme would look like, whereby the Executive actually put some money in themselves instead of funding for a NISEP scheme or the energy savings opportunity scheme (ESOS) that the Energy Bill proposed and that they fund that instead of it being added on to every unit of electricity. We do not have enough detail on it yet, but there is work that could be done to tease out what it would look like.

Mr Frew has a solution for constraint charges: the erection of an overground North/South interconnector. I think that the erection of an underground North/South interconnector along the route of the A5/N2 would solve many of those problems. There are huge issues with how the electricity industry here is regulated. I do not think that it is delivering for customers at the minute. Unfortunately, generators are running rings round the regulators North and South, and much more needs to be done to sort that out.

I move on to global matters. The reduction in crude oil prices has been heavily raised, although prices have gone down. With regard to petrol and diesel, the British Prime Minister, the British Chancellor and Danny Alexander have all raised the issue of how the global price of crude oil has dropped, but we have not seen a knock-on impact on —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. I advise the Member to come back to the debate.

Mr Flanagan: I am coming back to it. We have seen those Ministers applying pressure to fuel companies and the knock-on impact on the price of petrol and diesel, but we have not seen any reduction in the price that customers here pay for gas and electricity, despite falling prices. We have to ask why that significant fall in prices has not been passed on to hard-pressed consumers. The Utility Regulator has not done enough to pass those savings on, so that, despite the fall in global and wholesale prices, the price reduction has not been passed on to consumers. It certainly should have been at this stage.

There is a knock-on impact on non-regulated supply companies that take their prices from regulated firms, which are the prices that customers pay. I am tempted to talk about the impact of fracking on current prices, but I am sure that you would not let me, Mr Deputy Speaker. We need to look at where long-term future prices are going. Despite the present short-term reduction in crude oil and wholesale gas prices, the trend is very much upwards. The price of fossil fuels will continue to rise once fracking companies realise that it is not making them money, as the price of oil and gas has fallen because OPEC countries and companies know that it is in their interests not to increase supply at the minute. The long-term price is going up; that is why a scheme like this makes sense. I encourage people to look at the long-term projection for the cost of oil and gas as opposed to taking a short-term view.

As regards how we reach the challenging 10% target, which is the driver for the renewable heat incentive scheme, the public sector needs to take the lead on this. We need to see public-sector buildings and organisations making the change to renewable forms of energy, particularly heat. The fact that this Building is still heated with gas baffles me; I do not understand why we have not moved to a renewable form of heating for this Building. One of the reasons that I was given in the past was from the former Minister of Finance and Personnel, who told me that there was no room on the Stormont estate for a shed to store biomass to feed a boiler. Such attitudes need to be addressed. There is plenty of room here if somebody wanted to put up a shed and put a bit of timber in it to keep a boiler going. I do not think that that is the problem.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. I think I have given the Member plenty of room for flexibility. I wish that he would now do what he promised and return to the debate.

Mr Flanagan: I thank you for your guidance.

This scheme applies to the public sector, and public-sector organisations can avail themselves of it. We need to see more work being done to encourage public-sector organisations, local authorities and others to make the change and invest in renewable heat generation. If we expect businesses and domestic households to make the change, the public sector needs to take the lead and show that this makes sense.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the statutory rule. We as a party support it. It is good to see us encouraging switching to new technology. It is also good to see new clear frameworks, eligibility standards and jobs coming into the technology world. Many people in my constituency have used the boiler replacement scheme. We should do all we

can to help people to heat their home and to especially have alternatives when one scheme or type of fuel gets more expensive than the others. That is what we should all push for.

I have one or two questions. When the Minister is responding, will she confirm whether we will support the use of air-source heat pumps for domestic purposes? The Member who spoke previously touched on this and said that the previous renewable heat premium payment scheme provided a one-off payment of £1,700 to domestic consumers. Will the Minister indicate what financial incentive there is? Are we looking at any? The impression I got from the previous Member who spoke was that we were not. What financial incentive will be offered to domestic users to help them to install renewable energy? Will we help them with loans or something else? Will it be as generous as the previous scheme?

I note that the Minister said that the Department would be running this. Did it consider Ofgem or other possibilities for that? It may well be that the Department is the best, but I am always slightly sceptical, because, when we try to do things ourselves, we tend to be that little bit slower. Being agile and trying to put things in place that mean that we can act quickly are essential. In my brief time on the Committee, I have heard the manufacturing industry say that energy is one of its three key costs. As the Member who spoke previously said, we really need to find a way to tackle it. Before Mr Wilson asks what my plan is to do that, I will tell him that it is to look at how we use better the small amounts of money that we have so that we can share. That means changing the regulations so that there are different ways to lever money on the back of what is being paid. I have not been on the Committee long enough to see all the different ways, but there must be ways. I know that Scotland has clever ways through its financial trust. I will say this with a smile, but surely there is a way to use all the paperwork that we all get to heat the Building.

We support the regulation.

Mr Wilson: First, I will make it clear that I do not share some Members' enthusiasm for the use of renewable energy. That is mainly because, as I have pointed out time and again, renewable energy by its very nature is quite expensive and therefore has caused problems for domestic householders who have been hit by fuel poverty and for businesses. I am glad to see that the Minister is looking at reviewing the targets in response to the difficulties that have been caused.

I am pleased to see what the Minister has done. Although this is about domestic incentives, I am pleased that the Minister has used the opportunity of the regulation to smooth out an anomaly. If we are to have renewable energy, we should at least not impose further distortions on the market. There was a distortion on the market, whereby those who tried to do what the Minister sought to achieve — getting the targets for the use of renewable energy up — took loans from the Carbon Trust at an early stage.

As a result, they were not eligible to apply for the non-domestic incentives, because, as she pointed out, there was an issue with state aid. That, of course, distorted competition between those that were eligible for the incentives and those that were not. Although it was only a small number of businesses involved, they were very

often competing with other businesses in the same sector and not able to access the same support for their heating, especially if their business was very heat-intensive. One business that contacted me is a nursery business that has a greatly intensive use of heat, especially early in the new year when it will be starting to bring on plants in glasshouses etc. A lot of heat is required for that. The incentives distorted the market, because some businesses had already got a Carbon Trust loan and therefore could not apply for any incentives to put in equipment in order to use renewable heat. The Minister has responded to that and removed the anomaly. Perhaps she should let us know when businesses will be eligible to apply.

In closing, I will mention that many people ask what use the Assembly is and what is done. The minutiae of government, which can have a huge impact on businesses, individuals and employment, can often be easily overlooked when it comes to the kind of reporting that goes on. I would like to congratulate the Minister. The issue was brought to her attention. I know that it does not affect a lot of businesses, but it is important to those businesses that are affected. It is important to the people who work in those businesses. She has responded quickly. That is the kind of fleet-footedness that we want to see in government here. I thank the Minister. Although this is about domestic incentives, she has used the opportunity to relieve a problem that was causing difficulties for a small number of businesses in Northern Ireland. That has illustrated, once again, the value of having this place, where issues are looked at in Committee, responded to by officials and then brought to the Assembly by the Minister.

Mr B McCrea: When we get towards the end of the term and are approaching Christmas, there is a danger of getting bogged down in what appears to be “minutiae”, as Mr Wilson called it. Having listened throughout the debate, this is one of the more significant bits of business that the Assembly will transact in the entire session. I am really very pleased that the Minister has brought it to our attention.

When we look at the regulations, there are a number of points to be made. One of the key ones is that heat and transport are a bigger part of our energy consumption than just about everything else. We tend to talk a lot about electricity, particularly if it comes from wind farms or the like, and there are certain problems with that. Our key challenge is to do with heating. I will put some things out there, but one of the things that I would like to hear about from the Minister concerns being joined up on tackling fuel poverty.

When people talk about the cost of renewables, one of the issues raised is that not all renewables cost the same amount of money. Gas is one of the most cost-effective sources of energy at the moment, but, of course, not everybody is connected to gas pipelines. Mr Kinahan talked about air-source heat pumps. I wonder whether he was also minded to include ground-source heat pumps. When you look at the cost of installation and the ongoing costs, you will see that heat pumps are even cheaper than gas in the longer term. Therefore, if you want to do renewables, that is a cost-effective solution. Furthermore, heat pumps were invented by a man from Northern Ireland known as Lord Kelvin. I say “invented”; rather, he worked out the theoretical background to them.

On the issue of trying to get joined-up working to support the domestic initiative that the Minister has announced

here today, the University of Ulster is, of course, our lead on energy matters through Horizon 2020.

They will have been able to draw down I think £11 million from European sources: not from the Assembly, not from Westminster, but from European sources, of course with the assistance, I am quite sure, of DETI in the proposals, so — *[Interruption.]* — If you will excuse me. Yes, very bad. I do apologise.

1.45 pm

The key point, though, having got people’s attention, is that there are areas where we can take research that has been developed in the University of Ulster coming through Horizon 2020, which we are all agreed that we should try to do more of, and let us see if we can get more —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. Now that the Member has switched off his mobile phone, could I encourage him to get back to the subject?

Mr B McCrea: Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take guidance from you, of course, but I do think that this is absolutely germane to the point. I hope that the Minister will be talking to her colleagues in the Strategic Investment Board about how we might use the financial transactions capital to assist in other incentives for domestic encouragement. That should be tied in with the research that we do for the university.

I will just conclude by saying where we might have industrial support. We have Emerson, Kingspan, and the people in Newry, Glen Dimplex, all of whom have got low-energy and low CO2 heat equipment available. But you run into a problem when you try to adopt that as part of the scheme that the Minister is going to bring forward because it is not clear that the domestic electrical connections will be strong enough to support this equipment.

We need to do a bit of work on that. We can bring down the power utilisation of this equipment or strengthen the grid. We had a discussion about who would pay for the enhancement of the grid.

This is important, because fuel poverty affects our people significantly. These initiatives are good for not just the climate but they offer a way of bringing fuel relief to those most in need. Secondly, it should not go beyond notice that at a time of real austere financial conditions, the Prime Minister is announcing flood defences. We are spending money on flood defences when we could be spending it elsewhere. That is an indication of the climate change issue.

Finally, it was announced recently that China and the US voluntarily agreed that they would do something about climate emissions. That is why the initiatives that are being announced by the Minister are significant. They are not just something tagged on at the end of business. It is a really important thing and I look forward to seeing how it develops. I wish her well with her initiatives.

Mrs Foster: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank those Members who contributed to the debate, sometimes going way beyond what is in front of us, but still important to address. I thank the Chair and members of the Committee for their scrutiny of these matters.

I will pick up on a few issues that were raised. In relation to Mr Flanagan’s comments about Bryson staff in Fermanagh, he will not be surprised to know that that is an issue I have been aware of. I raised it with the last

DSD Minister, and commitments were given in relation to allowing those people in Fermanagh, who do an absolutely marvellous job from Fermanagh House, to stay in position until the new system came online in March 2015. I hear what the Member is saying about the readiness of that scheme in 2015. It is certainly something that I will be speaking to the new DSD Minister about.

He mentioned the boiler replacement scheme. One of the attractions of that scheme, which was a point also made by Mr Kinahan, is that there is a payment up front in relation to the domestic RHI, depending on your technology. You will get help initially and then be able to avail yourself of the seven-year tariff incentives.

With biomass boilers and stoves, you get an upfront payment of £2,500, which helps you to purchase the equipment, and then you get help for seven years. That is a good way to bring in the domestic RHI. It is done differently in Great Britain, which just has the tariff incentive but does not have the upfront payment, which I felt was needed.

I will not get into the wider issues about falling oil costs and upward price trends, because I am sure that the regulator will want to look at those issues herself. Suffice to say that I am not sure that the generators will agree with Mr Kinahan's view; it is not the impression that I am getting from them. It is important, however, that we have steady prices. The last thing we want with electricity prices are spikes and valleys, because they lead to a lot of uncertainty for consumers. The regulator has been trying to deal with those issues.

Mr Kinahan asked whether air-source heat pumps are included in the domestic RHI. Air-to-water heat pumps are included, but air-to-air heat pumps are not. Air-to-air heat pumps are not included because concerns were raised about their efficiency and use. They have not been included at this stage, but that does not mean that we will not include them later. Air-to-water heat pumps are included, and again there is an upfront payment of £1,700, followed by the tariff.

I have addressed installation costs.

Did we consider Ofgem to administer the scheme? We did, but we felt that DETI was better placed to deal with the Northern Ireland situation. I have to say to the Member that "agile" is not a word that I would use to describe Ofgem. I have had a number of complaints from people who have put solar panels in place through Ofgem and have not been paid yet.

Mr Wilson referred to the Carbon Trust loan. I am indebted to officials for allowing me to include that in the regulations. I felt that that was the best way to give clarity, because there had been a bit of toing and froing over whether it was state aid and how to deal with it. So I am pleased to have been able to help businesses that have had difficulty with that issue.

I very much agree with Mr McCrea that this is important legislation, which we have been waiting on for some time. I am delighted that we can deal with the issue today. If the regulations are agreed today, it is my hope that the domestic RHI can begin immediately.

I encourage the House to support the regulations. They will help us to have more fuel diversity in our heating market, allow us to be more competitive and to look to the future

with confidence. I thank Members for their contributions and urge them to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Committee Business

Food Hygiene Rating Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 8 May 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Food Hygiene Rating Bill (NIA 41/11-16).

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Food Hygiene Rating Bill passed its Second Stage on 11 November 2014. It should, under the 30-working-day rule, complete its Committee Stage on 13 January 2015.

The main objective of the Bill is to introduce legislation that will make it mandatory for food businesses to display their food hygiene rating stickers, which will be supplied after inspection by district council food safety officers. That will ensure that consumers are provided with information about food hygiene standards in places where they eat out or shop for food.

The Committee, at its meeting on 5 November, agreed to call for written submissions from interested organisations and individuals. Although the proposed Bill is likely to be straightforward legislation, a number of issues will need to be explored in more detail. The Committee feels that it is essential that it is afforded the time to exercise its scrutiny powers to the full. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I ask that the House support the motion to extend the Committee Stage to 8 May 2015.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 8 May 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Food Hygiene Rating Bill (NIA 41/11-16).

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until then.

*(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker
[Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair)*

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

OFMDFM: Financial Cuts

1. **Lord Morrow** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what impact the recently announced financial cuts will have on the delivery of departmental services. (AQO 7216/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): The draft Budget proposals for OFMDFM include resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) allocation of £65.4 million, in comparison with the 2014-15 opening budget of £65.8 million. This is a reduction of 0.6%. The allocation includes £5 million which is ring-fenced for the historical institutional abuse inquiry and an allocation of £3 million for the Victims and Survivors Service. The impact, however, on the remaining areas of the Department's budget is a reduction of £8.4 million or 12.8%. Additional pressures of £1.7 million have also been identified, and that gives a total estimated pressure for 2015-16 of £10.1 million.

While the draft resource budget will allow the Department to make progress on a number of priority programmes, there will be very significant pressures across the Department's activities, including its arm's-length bodies. To deliver those further reductions, the Department will scrutinise its entire budget, including staffing, administration costs, funding for arm's-length bodies and funding for programmes. Within the Department, reductions of this magnitude will require cuts in staffing, and the proposed voluntary exit scheme will be important in that regard. Action will also be required to constrain costs and reduce discretionary spend. Funding for arm's-length bodies and programmes will also be impacted upon, and the emphasis will be on ensuring that statutory responsibilities are discharged, contractual commitments met and Programme for Government and ministerial priorities progressed as far as possible within the available resources.

While the Department will seek to ensure that impacts on front-line services are minimised, it will not be possible to fully protect budget areas from the impact of the proposed budget reductions.

Lord Morrow: I thank the deputy First Minister for his reply. In relation to the historical institutional abuse inquiry, which, I understand, is not scheduled to report until 2017, is it likely that that report will be another that is shelved due to lack of funding?

Mr M McGuinness: The draft opening budget of £65.4 million for the Department includes an allocation of £5 million for the historical institutional abuse inquiry — funding which previously would have been received in-year. The historical institutional abuse inquiry has been operating since 1 October 2012. In April 2014, the chair asked for and was granted an extension of 12 months in

view of the increasing complexity of the inquiry, and it is now, as the Member said, expected to report by January 2017. This has been, along with support for the Victims and Survivors Service, a huge priority for the Department. We recognise that the historical institutional abuse inquiry has an onerous task and huge responsibilities, and I think the fact that we have been in a position to prioritise support for both the historical institutional abuse inquiry and victims and survivors is a very clear indicator of how much priority the First Minister and I place on the outcomes of these important exercises.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Does he support the proposal for five-party Budget talks with Downing Street and the Treasury? Does he agree with me that these talks should take place now, this week, so that London will acknowledge once and for all the particular financial needs of people here in Northern Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: The First Minister and I have long since recognised the importance of challenging the way in which our block grant in particular has been dealt with over the four and a half years that the coalition Government have been in power in London. It was at our initiative that we brought the five party leaderships together at a meeting in Stormont Castle during the last couple of weeks to discuss a joint approach to the huge challenges that all our Departments face as a result of the austerity agenda being deployed by the coalition Government. We recognise that, this week, there is an opportunity to put directly — I think that it is much more powerful if it is done with the five parties represented, as opposed to just the First Minister and me — what we think is a very powerful case in relation to the particular, exceptional challenges that we face here. The problems that we face here are completely different from the challenges in the north of England, in Scotland or in Wales, and it has to be recognised that the strategy being adopted by the coalition Government is detrimentally affecting the work of our Executive and the Assembly.

The short answer is yes: it is much stronger if we are united. My sense of the discussions that the First Minister and I have been involved in is that we have a united approach among the five main parties in the Assembly.

Mr Kinahan: Does the deputy First Minister agree that all Ministers and Departments should agree to choose priorities or look at ring-fencing those services that each Department delivers that affect health and safety and, particularly, the risk of death?

Mr M McGuinness: The draft Budget, which is out for consultation, presents huge challenges for every single Department in the Executive. None of us is under any illusions about that. It is also very important to remember that, when people speak about the challenges that we face and talk about cuts from the Executive, the cuts are actually being made in London. The decisions are being made in London by the coalition Government, and they are dictating the ability of our Departments to deal with the huge challenges that we face across a range of issues. Of course, the Member will be very conscious that, prior to the last general election, the Ulster Unionist Party effectively signed up to what was a very negative, austere budgetary agenda that was coming down the tracks at the behest of the coalition Government. With the resources

that are available as a result of the cuts from London, Departments will obviously have to decide how to prioritise to ensure that we deliver, as best as we possibly can, support for front-line services.

Corporation Tax

2. **Mr McQuillan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what importance they place on the devolution of corporation tax powers in achieving the Programme for Government 2011-15 target of rebalancing the economy. (AQO 7217/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Securing powers to lower corporation tax is a key priority for the Executive to promote the growth of the local economy. We believe that the devolution of rates-setting powers would enable us to rebuild and rebalance the economy towards greater private sector and output growth. Reducing the corporation tax rate should increase foreign direct investment and domestic investment, expand our economy and bring greater numbers of higher value-added jobs. There should be linkages to the wider economy through increased spending, growth and rising incomes, and this should result in a larger private sector.

Any future decision to reduce the corporation tax rate here will mean a reduction in the Executive's budget. The published autumn statement states that the Government will introduce legislation in this Parliament subject to satisfactory progress in the cross-party talks.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. What is he doing to achieve this and make sure that we do get corporation tax devolved?

Mr M McGuinness: I think that I have done quite a lot. I have been involved in all the discussions and have worked with the First Minister, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the previous and the current Finance Ministers. I think that it is clear to everybody that there is cross-party support in the Executive, certainly among the major parties. I know that there is one or maybe two discordant notes, but the overwhelming majority of Members recognise that the prospect of us being in a position to create anything in the region of 50,000 new jobs would be of tremendous benefit to our people. Even against the backdrop of a world economic downturn and lack of corporation tax powers, we have, over the past couple of years, managed to bring in more foreign direct investment jobs than we have at any other time in the history of the state. Just think what we could do if we had a lower rate of corporation tax. I know that there is a debate about it out there at this time, given the backdrop of the cuts that have come from London. People are talking about affordability, but, for us, it is about getting the power, and then our Executive will decide how we use that power.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer so far. In what circumstances does he feel it would be possible to make changes to the corporation tax rate if, and when, the power is transferred to the Executive?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said, the important thing at this point is to get the power transferred. When that is done, we can decide on how and when it can be best utilised. Obviously, we must be satisfied that the prevailing economic conditions are conducive to any change in the

rate. In the current context of savage cuts to our block grant, it is clear that the issue will need to be satisfactorily addressed. Nevertheless, I am in favour of all powers being repatriated from London. I noted George Osborne's comments during his autumn statement, but it is the Assembly and the Executive who should decide the terms and conditions of when any changes to the corporation tax rates are made. It is a big issue.

As I said earlier, there is a big debate going on out there; many different voices have been raised. I think that is good; it is absolutely essential that people have a very clear understanding of what we are getting ourselves into. In any circumstance where a power is devolved, the ability to use that power in whatever way we want resides with the Executive. I do not think that the Executive that we are part of is going to be in any way foolhardy about how we would utilise such a power. I know that the big debate is around whether we can afford it vis-à-vis the way in which Departments have been cut over recent times, but we are going into important talks over the next couple of days. We are speaking with a united voice in relation to the need for David Cameron to recognise that, when he comes here, he does not come as someone who is facilitating talks, but as a player in the talks and one with a particular contribution to make.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the deputy First Minister as well. He made reference to David Cameron coming this week. Has any clarity been sought from the British Government, particularly with regard to their position in Europe and the implications it may have? The Irish Government have consistently portrayed themselves and the levers that they have at their disposal as being the gateway to Europe. One of those levers is reduced corporation tax. In the event of Euroscepticism prevailing, has the Minister made any assessment of its effect, positive or otherwise — I think it would be mainly negative, even with corporation tax renewed here in the North — in that we would be a fortress and not a gateway to the rest of Europe?

Mr M McGuinness: Our focus, as always, is on how we can lower the unacceptable rate of unemployment that exists. Over the past 22 months, we have been very lucky that we have managed to lower the unemployment figures each month, but much more work needs to be done, particularly west of the Bann. The challenges that we face are challenges that require the support of different institutions. I know that when the First Minister and I have travelled for what has been a very successful exercise in attracting foreign direct investment from the United States, nearly all the major businesses that we have spoken to in the United States have talked about the importance of the relationship of this island with Europe. So, a debate in England on the prospect of a withdrawal from Europe is big stuff as far as we, Scotland, Wales and the South of Ireland are concerned.

My own view is to agree with Nicola Sturgeon, the new First Minister of Scotland, that, in the event of a referendum, the devolved Administrations should have the right to their own referendum. Speaking personally, I do not think that there is any doubt whatsoever how the people of the North would vote: they would vote for us to continue with what has been a very productive relationship

in respect of foreign direct investment with the United States and also with the European Union, which has been very supportive of us for a very long time.

2.15 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I want to make the point that Members should put their question and be as direct as possible. Ministers have two minutes to answer, but Members do not have two minutes to get round to asking their question.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the deputy First Minister. The deputy First Minister rightly points out that there is tripartite agreement on getting corporation tax devolved, but there is probably no agreement as to what to do with it. In light of the First Minister's comments about the functionality of the Assembly and Bro McFerran's comments about whether Northern Ireland is ready for it, does the deputy First Minister feel that the Assembly needs to be reformed to make it ready and functional for corporation tax?

Mr M McGuinness: I know that the Member has his own, quite legitimate, agenda in relation to his Bill, and he has discussed it with the First Minister and me, as well as with other parties in the Assembly. I hope for a successful outcome to the talks this week. It is vital for the institution, for the Executive, and for the people out there who are looking for leadership from their politicians to get an agreement.

In trying to reach agreement, we have already achieved considerable agreement, particularly around budgetary issues. The fact is that all the parties in the Assembly are in favour of having the power to decide on the level of our corporation tax. Do we have the ability to deal with that? Absolutely. I think that we have. However, the talks this week will tell the tale whether the institution goes forward or does not go forward in the medium and longer term. So, there are big challenges, but, in the context of knowing what to do with having the power devolved to us on corporation tax, I do not think that anybody in the Executive is under any illusions about how we need to take that forward. We have a plan that I think has the overwhelming support of the business community.

Equality Obligations: OFMDFM

3. **Mr I McCrea** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department's equality obligations are to the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland. (AQO 7218/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, junior Minister McCann will answer the question.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Section 75 of the NI Act 1998, together with schedule 9 to the Act, place a statutory obligation on public authorities in carrying out their various functions to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation. It is also between men and women generally, between persons with a disability and persons without a disability and between persons with dependants and persons without dependants.

In addition, without prejudice to that obligation, public authorities are also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group. The statutory obligations are largely implemented through equality schemes approved by the Equality Commission and by screening and carrying out equality impact assessments on policies. All Government policy is developed in the context of the equality of opportunity provisions set out in section 75(1) of the NI Act 1998.

Mr I McCrea: Gerry Adams made disgraceful comments when he said:

*“The point is to actually break these b*****s... And what’s going to break them is equality.”*

Can the junior Minister, on behalf of the deputy First Minister, categorically state whether they agree with those sentiments?

Ms J McCann: Gerry Adams has already clarified his position on those comments. In terms of OFMDFM’s responsibility, we are certainly committed to equality and will continue to work for the removal of any barriers that prevent it. That equality has to go right across the board. It is about social equality, economic equality and cultural equality. No one should be trying to put up barriers or to prevent equality legislation being brought forward in any way.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. One of the outstanding issues from the St Andrews Agreement is the single equality Bill. Will one be brought forward soon?

Ms J McCann: The Member makes a very valid point. At present, anti-discrimination legislation in the North, as I said, covers all the elements that I discussed in my previous answer. There is a lot of equality legislation out there, and there was a lot of support for a single equality Bill to be brought forward. That is because the idea of harmonising all the existing provisions into one piece of legislation through a single equality Bill and extending and updating it where appropriate seemed to be the best way forward. While it has not moved forward since 2006, I hope that there is still agreement to take that single equality Bill forward.

Mr Lyttle: Does the Minister agree that the politicisation of equality provision as a Trojan Horse is unacceptable? Will she take the opportunity to reject those comments?

Ms J McCann: I do not think that any politicisation of any issue on equality is acceptable. Equality is, as I said, a basic human right for people. I think that everyone should be treated the same. We should respect and be tolerant of people and respect diversity. We need to be enforcing all equality legislation that is there now in any way that we can, and we need to ensure that it is monitored and that all equality legislation in central government, local government and, indeed, any public bodies is adhered to. I believe that nobody should use equality in any way for political reasons.

Mr Allister: Given the imperative and the guidance issued by the Minister’s party president, does she really think that anyone will believe her protestations that she is not using her office to use equality as a Trojan Horse to advance the republican strategy? If she is not, will she repudiate, without equivocation, all those remarks?

Ms J McCann: I will say to the Member, as I said in my previous answers, that the equality agenda needs to be totally adhered to by all. I believe that it is only through the process and the equality agenda and, indeed, through progressing issues like a bill of rights for the North, where everyone will be entitled to equality —

Mr Allister: Another Trojan Horse.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms J McCann: Nobody should be putting up any barriers to bringing forward equality legislation and, indeed, the equality principles and the ethos of equality. In my view, it is the only thing that will challenge bigotry, intolerance and the disrespect that many people have for other people’s culture, religion and sexual orientation. In my mind, it is the only way that we can ensure that people are treated with respect and dignity.

Gulladuff Hall/South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society

4. **Ms Overend** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department, or its arm’s-length bodies, has provided or administered funding to Gulladuff Hall and the South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society. (AQO 7219/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Neither the Department nor any of its arm’s-length bodies has provided or administered funding to Gulladuff Hall or to the South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society.

Mrs Overend: I thank the deputy First Minister — *[Interruption.]* Should I go ahead? Is that fine, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker? I thank the deputy First Minister for clarifying that. Does he agree that the revelations in the BBC ‘Spotlight’ programme merit a serious investigation into just how that hall and the South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society were funded?

Mr M McGuinness: ‘Spotlight’ made an allegation that Sinn Féin was engaged in some form of fraudulent activity. That is not the case. Sinn Féin could have developed the site and rented it back to representatives, just like many other parties. In that case, local people, including Sinn Féin members, took the decision to develop the site for wider community use. That is a sustainable approach to community development. In the programme, three of the four trustees acknowledged that they, not Sinn Féin, owned the site. Of course, the BBC relied on one trustee, who is now a member of a so-called republican organisation, Republican Sinn Féin — a dissident group. That member, at a public commemoration in Derry city just a few short years ago, publicly called for my execution. I think that the attempt to smear Sinn Féin is very clear for all to see. That is not what we expect from impartial journalism.

Mr Allister: Who is getting the rent?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. I will take action if people are going to shout from a sedentary position. The rules are very clear, and no one in the Chamber should be under any misapprehension about that.

Ms D Kelly: I note that the initial question asked about arm’s-length bodies, but will the deputy First Minister indicate whether any moneys from the social investment

fund are being targeted in the geographical area where the two organisations are based?

Mr M McGuinness: How money is targeted in social investment fund areas is a matter for the groups that were established to prioritise the benefits to the local community through funds from the social investment fund being utilised for the purposes of support for that community.

I have been in Gulladuff Hall quite a number of times. The hall is used extensively. I was there recently, when a member of the local community had died. The congregation at the church went back to the hall, where they were provided with sustenance. I have been at many other venues in the south Derry area, such as GAA clubs, that provide a similar service.

It is very wrong for people not to recognise the massive contribution that those halls and support services make to the local community. It is absolutely essential that those communities be supported and have people in them who are in a position to provide not just a venue but support for them, particularly at a time of grief.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Given that the original question dealt with allegations levelled in the 'Spotlight' programme, will the deputy First Minister give us his views on those allegations?

Mr M McGuinness: Many of the allegations contained in the programme were neither factual nor impartial. Take the Gulladuff centre as one example. As I said, of the four trustees, three said that the building was not owned by Sinn Féin and that Sinn Féin did not own the site. However, the BBC decided to rely on one trustee, who was on public record not so long ago, at a public event in Derry — in the cemetery in Derry, I think that it was — as calling for me to be executed. I think that that raises all sorts of questions about how impartial the journalism was in all of this. The BBC should correct that.

2.30 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends the time for listed questions. We now move to topical questions.

Ashers Bakery: Conscience Clause

T1. **Mr Dunne** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they believe that, given the launch today of a private Member's Bill to include a conscience clause, the Equality Commission should now withdraw legal action against Ashers Bakery pending the outcome of the legislative process. (AQT 1861/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, junior Minister McCann will answer this question.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for his question. I am aware that some discussions took place between the Equality Commission and the bakery prior to the civil case being taken. The main issue is the extent to which suppliers of goods and services can refuse service on the grounds of sexual orientation, religious beliefs or political opinion. I think that the civil case will determine whether any discrimination has taken place.

Mr Dunne: I thank the junior Minister for her answer. Does she agree that the Equality Commission should withdraw its legal action pending against Ashers Bakery at this time?

Ms J McCann: It is not up to OFDMFM to agree or disagree with the Equality Commission. It is its own body and it has an independent role to advance fairness and equality for all. It is also responsible for implementing legislation on all those cases and challenging discrimination. We have to leave it to the Equality Commission because, at the end of the day, that will be where it will see whether discrimination happened. I am sure that the Equality Commission will have taken whatever measures it could have before entering into that case.

Talks Process: Timely Conclusion

T2. **Lord Morrow** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how confident the deputy First Minister is that the present talks will be concluded within the timescale outlined by the Prime Minister, David Cameron. (AQT 1862/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: The time frame for the talks was determined by more than David Cameron. It appears to me, from the discussions that I have been involved in, that there is universal agreement that, if these talks are not concluded before Christmas, there is little or no prospect in its aftermath of our finding a way forward. It is absolutely vital that we conclude these discussions. I would like to see that done by the end of this week and that is what I am aiming for.

The fact that the Taoiseach and David Cameron have announced that they are coming here on Thursday is a very clear indication that people recognise that we are coming to the crunch in relation to these talks. It is not as if we are coming at all of this afresh. We have been round the mulberry bush with this for the last year and a half with the Haass/O'Sullivan discussions and the progress that was made there. The issues are very clear for all the parties. We all know what the issues are. The added complication is obviously the budgetary situation; the austerity agenda embarked upon by the coalition Government, which has a dramatic impact on a society emerging from the sort of conflict that we have emerged from over the course of recent times.

If there is a will, there is a way to ensure that these discussions are successful. People outside are crying out for that and they are crying out for leadership. From our perspective in Sinn Féin, and in the course of the negotiations that we were involved in with the DUP and other parties in the St Andrews and Hillsborough talks, the past record of achieving things has been good. The last two years have been terrible and we rapidly need to put an end to that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Mr M McGuinness: We need to ensure that we are all working very closely together over the next few days.

Lord Morrow: I have listened carefully to what the deputy First Minister has said. If the success of these talks depended on his revealing his past involvement in illegal activities, would he still be confident of success?

Mr M McGuinness: I am always confident of success, and I have been around the political process for long enough to know that the events of the last 30 or 40 years do not all come to my door. They come to the doors of many parties and participants, not least the British Government,

previous Administrations in the North and those who supported the activities of the British Army, the RUC and British military intelligence. There was arms importation, collusion, manipulation of loyalist death squads, so it was down to many others. We must recognise, as we did during the Haass negotiations, the need for solutions and the provision of a menu of options for people to access so that they can find out the truth of what happened, for example, to their family. That is the big challenge for us all. We went into the Haass negotiations on the basis of our position on the three main issues: the past, parades and identity. We compromised, but, sadly, others were not able to meet us in that compromise, which provided a way forward. I made it absolutely clear during those negotiations that, if we provided mechanisms to deal with the past, I for one would advocate that republicans and, indeed, others should contribute to a successful outcome that would deal with the whole issue of the past.

Corporation Tax: Diverted Profits

T3. **Mr Lunn** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the announcement by the Chancellor of an increased tax on diverted profits will impact on the new arrangements for corporation tax in this part of the country. (AQT 1863/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: All that remains to be seen. We are all conscious that the devolution of the power will mean that a very important discussion has to take place not only at the Executive but between the Executive and the powers that be in London, including the Treasury. As many Members will know, we have been involved in discussions on corporation tax over the last couple of years. Any complication that might flow from that will have to be addressed by the Finance Minister, the Enterprise Minister, the First Minister and me.

Mr Lunn: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Is it the intention that profits earned on production in Northern Ireland will be taxed in Northern Ireland, and, flowing from that, does he anticipate that we may have the option of an increased tax on diverted profits along the same lines that the Chancellor has suggested for Great Britain?

Mr M McGuinness: Power over taxation rests with the Treasury and other institutions in England. From our perspective, we are keenly interested to see how that will be dealt with. I will not go into the detail of the discussions that we have had with the Treasury and others in the course of this exercise, except to say that there is a debate about fiscal levers and how they could be utilised to our advantage. That does not mean to say that there is an accord between each of us on how to deal with it; that would be the subject of negotiations and there would need to be agreement between ourselves and London. One issue that has been raised recently is that if we managed to create tens of thousands of new jobs and put people into employment, the taxation raised from that would be the subject of considerable discussion on how we could benefit.

Talks Process: Outcome

T4. **Dr McDonnell** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they agree that the outcome of the talks process must be comprehensive and provide a conclusive agreement on the way forward for all the issues that are

on the table, not just finance but the Haass bundle, the structures and functions and the unfinished business of the Good Friday Agreement. (AQT 1864/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: I absolutely agree with the Member. Any agreement short of a comprehensive one will be held up to public ridicule. We face huge challenges. As many people know, there are budgetary challenges, but there are also challenges in how we deal with the past, the whole issue of identity and parades. We just have to look at what happened on the streets over the past two years. I certainly do not want that to be repeated. That was specifically over the flag protest and the protest over the whole issue of parades. I have a very strong view that all of us in these institutions have a duty and a responsibility to agree a comprehensive way forward on all these very difficult issues, which, if not dealt with, could conceivably jump up to bite us in the coming years. The community deserves better than that.

Dr McDonnell: I ask the deputy First Minister for his assessment of whether the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach are in a position to help us over the line, come Thursday, or will it take a bit more time?

Mr M McGuinness: We should aim to get this done for the weekend. I heard the First Minister say on BBC radio, just an hour or two ago, that, if enough progress was made and it took another day or two, we could live with that. I could live with that, but we cannot live with it going past Christmas, and that appears to be agreed by everybody. So there is a big challenge for all of us to get this done. One of the biggest challenges is for David Cameron to face up to the case that the First Minister and I, and other parties, have made in relation to the budgetary decisions that the Government have made and the austerity agenda that is impacting so negatively on our situation.

It is also important to say that the First Minister and I had a useful discussion on the margins of the NSMC meeting in Armagh on Wednesday: for example, when I raised the issue of the Irish Government's funding commitment to the A5 road scheme, I got a very encouraging answer, which I and, no doubt, the First Minister will continue to explore with the Taoiseach. He certainly gave a very strong indication during our deliberations in Armagh that he recognises that budgetary issues will have to be dealt with, by him and the British Government, during our talks in the next few days.

Social Investment Fund: Ring-fenced

T5. **Mr Spratt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the deputy First Minister will confirm that social investment fund money is ring-fenced and will not be subject to departmental cuts. (AQT 1865/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I ask junior Minister McCann to take this question.

Ms J McCann: We are dealing with Budget pressures because of the cuts to the block grant. Some £3.6 billion has been taken out of the Budget in previous years, and 2015-16, the last year of the four-year Budget cycle, will definitely be the worst year. We hope that the social investment fund will go forward. I know that 23 projects have already been signed off, and others are waiting to be signed off. They are projects that will make a big

difference in communities and have been developed from the community side up. We are hopeful that we will be able to deliver those. However, unless we get the economic injection that the deputy First Minister talked about, we will face more economic constraints than we have probably ever faced before. While we are trying our best to ensure that the projects from the social investment fund go forward, there is a danger that a lot of programmes, projects and essential services for people on the ground — front-line services — will be affected.

2.45 pm

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I inform Members that question 14 has been withdrawn.

Fire Safety: Rural Areas

1. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the proposed cuts to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service will increase safety risks in the community, particularly in rural areas. (AQO 7231/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): As part of the Department's planning process for 2015-16, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has been asked to develop a range of savings proposals that could deliver the best possible outcomes under three scenarios — 5%, 10% and 15% reductions. The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service will be required to risk-assess and prioritise savings proposals on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery before submission to my Department.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he believe that firefighting, very much a front-line service, should be classed as a front-line service and, therefore, be exempt from any cuts?

Mr Wells: The difficulty that I face is that the new budget for 2015-16 that I received as part of the October monitoring round has assessed firefighting and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service as a non-front-line service. I understand why the Member has great difficulty with that. Indeed, I know that those who work for the Fire Service have a very different view. The problem is that, whilst we were awarded an extra £200 million, we have to find £50 million savings in what are termed non-front-line services. There is actually a very small proportion of my budget where I can find that £50 million. If I were to accept that the Fire Service is front line and should not be subject to those reductions, it is extremely difficult to see where we would find the rest of those savings. Indeed, the Executive endorsed that definition as part of the draft Budget for 2015-16. The Executive believe that the Fire Service should not receive the same protection as front-line health and social care elements mostly delivered, of course, by the five trusts. That is consistent with the decision taken on other front-line services, such as the Police Service.

Ms P Bradley: What proportion of the Fire Service's costs are staff related?

Mr Wells: Eighty-three per cent of the total cost of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service are staff related, with the other 17% taken up with items such as training, uniforms, publicity, equipment etc. That makes the decision on how to achieve those savings even more difficult, because any form of staff reduction has a commensurate cost. Therefore, I accept that the Fire and Rescue Service has difficulties with that. Indeed, I am meeting the chairman of the board, Mr Joe McKee, this afternoon. I have already had discussions with the unions, and individual firefighters have approached me about this. I am under no illusion as to how difficult an ask this is for the Fire and Rescue Service, and I accept that it is causing severe problems. Mr McKee has made it very clear that some of what we are asking will be exceptionally difficult to deliver.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. Has the Minister met members of the Fire and Rescue Service and members of the Fire Brigades Union? If he has, will he detail the outcome of those meetings?

Mr Wells: As I mentioned in response to the previous question, I am due to meet the chairman of the Fire and Rescue Service Board this afternoon. I have had meetings with union representatives, and I intend to see other stakeholders in that sector to talk through the various options. There are suggested reductions that can be made on issues such as commercial contracts, temporary promotions, overtime and natural wastage but, beyond that, it is difficult, at the moment, to see how we can take things much further.

The difficulty is that I have to find the £50 million, as things stand, in my budget. I have only a very limited number of arm's-length bodies that I can approach in order to achieve those savings. Unfortunately, the Fire and Rescue Service falls into that category. It will be a difficult debate and discussion between my Department and the arm's-length bodies over the next three months. I do not want us to underestimate for one minute how difficult this will be to achieve. Other organisations such as the Public Health Agency and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council are also involved here. We have great difficulties, but we simply have no option but to balance the books for 2015-16 by finding this £50 million.

Mrs Dobson: Does the Minister agree that cuts to the Fire Service would have a more momentous impact than cuts to most other public services, especially on farms and in rural areas, where we have seen far too many farm deaths in recent years? What further scope for efficiency does he believe exists in the Fire Service without touching those vital life-saving front-line services?

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for her question; I know that she is basing it on her understanding of the rural community. At the moment, the Fire Service has a budget of £74 million. I assure her that whatever is agreed will be risk-assessed to make certain that we do not introduce any form of unsafe service in Northern Ireland. I suppose that the exercise at the moment is to see how far we can take savings without straying into that territory. I appreciate that, in rural areas, the Fire Service goes way beyond simply firefighting and vehicle rescue. For instance, it goes into situations where farm accidents with slurry tanks have occurred. We therefore value that work enormously. Again, I have to keep emphasising that we do not want to be here. We do not want to be asking the fire service to make these

very significant cuts. We will discuss with it how they can be done while maintaining public safety. That will be a very difficult balancing act.

Domiciliary Care: Northern Trust

2. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the rationale for the restriction of domiciliary care packages in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQO 7232/11-15)

Mr Wells: The health service is facing significant financial pressures. I think that I should put that line before every answer that I give today. It is therefore important that trusts take appropriate measures to achieve financial break-even. In seeking to deliver this very challenging objective, there is a need to make some changes in domiciliary care spend based on reassessing current needs and reprioritising services. All trusts, including the Northern Trust, are reviewing their domiciliary care provision to ensure that highest-priority needs are met within the current resources. Day-to-day implementation decisions are taken on the basis of a professional assessment of individual need and associated risk.

Mrs Overend: Enabling older people to remain in their own home for as long as it is safe and possible is logical and saves huge amounts of money, not least to the public purse. Does the Minister not see the major flaws in the current proposals, especially in areas where he still allows a totally unfair ban on admissions to many care homes across Northern Ireland?

Mr Wells: First of all, our commitment to the Northern Trust at the moment is to 4,778 care users, who receive 48,000 hours of care a week. That is quite a significant input. Indeed, overall in Northern Ireland, we now have 25,330 clients in receipt of domiciliary care services. That is 5% more than in the equivalent period in 2012. The commitment is very much there to continue the service.

I will answer the Member's specific question. During the October monitoring round, £8 million more was allocated to Transforming Your Care implementation for 2014-15. Those moneys will support a wide range of measures that will help to meet the care needs of our growing and ageing population. I can bring the Member right up to date regarding the Northern Trust specifically. In October 2014, 265 people in her trust area were awaiting full care packages, and 207 were awaiting part packages or transfers between providers. Funding has been sourced for all those packages, and the commissioning process is ongoing. The issue that she has raised is being dealt with. There is a commitment to help the Northern Trust through the extra allocation.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will he provide an update on the HSCB review of domiciliary care?

Mr Wells: As I mentioned, a review of domiciliary care right across Northern Ireland has been initiated by the Health and Social Care Board as part of TYC. I remain committed to TYC. As the Member will know, a fundamental part of TYC's recommendations is that care should be transferred, where possible, to the home, so that the home is the hub. The aim of the review is to obtain a better understanding of how the domiciliary care market operates and identify best practice in the various models

of delivery to shape the future direction and operation of domiciliary care services.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Minister not recognise that this is yet another attack on the elderly and infirm? It comes on the back of the reduction of meals on wheels, particularly in rural areas. What he proposes applies to not just the Northern Trust but other trusts. It will end up with more of our senior citizens going into hospital, which is something that we are trying to avoid.

Mr Wells: I hear what the honourable Member for Strangford says. He is also campaigning against cuts being made to other parts of the budget under contingency savings. The difficulty is that, if, for instance, we were to protect Dalriada Hospital, which is in Mrs Overend's constituency —

Mrs Overend: No, it is not.

Mr Wells: Sorry, it is in the Northern Trust, not her constituency. If we are unable to make the £500,000 savings there, the trust is forced to look at other contingencies, which often means looking again at domiciliary care. This is not an attack on elderly people. My Department finds itself in the very undesirable position of having to save £70 million by the end of March out of a very small slice of the Budget. Staff wages, salaries and pensions account for 63% of my budget. Another 12% is contracts that I cannot break. I am left with a very small proportion of my budget from which to find significant savings in a very short period. One of the things that can be done is the slowing down of the delivery of domiciliary care packages. Do I like being in this position? Definitely not. Is it counter-strategic? It is, but we have no option because of the difficult financial situation we find ourselves in.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. Thanks to the Minister for his responses. One of the difficulties that I have encountered in the delivery of domiciliary care packages has been the capacity of some private providers to deliver. That is in circumstances where the finance existed, including a recent case of very complex needs, where, despite numerous representations to the trust, they simply could not get anyone in the private sector to deliver. Has the Minister or his Department done any evaluation of the capacity of private providers to deliver care packages?

Mr Wells: The honourable Member makes a sensible comment. We are experiencing staff shortages in parts of Northern Ireland. A current study has shown that we could be 500 staff short of what we need to provide domiciliary care in the next 10 years. Attention is being given to increasing training opportunities to encourage people to come into the domiciliary care market.

In most boards, about two thirds of provision is carried out by private contractors and firms that provide it on behalf of the trusts. It is surprisingly difficult, given that we are in a very difficult recession, to attract people into that essential service. We are looking at that as part of the review. It is a very important issue. As the economy hopefully continues to improve in the foreseeable future, it will become more difficult. In my constituency of South Down, it is proving more and more difficult, particularly over the Christmas period and the July holidays, to get staff to cover shifts. That issue is being taken seriously by the trusts and the Department.

Minor Injuries Unit: Bangor

3. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact on the local community of the closure of the Bangor Hospital minor injuries unit and GP ward. (AQO 7233/11-15)

Mr Wells: As the honourable Member for North Down knows, I announced on 28 November 2014 that I have asked the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to ensure that the minor injuries unit (MIU) at Belfast community hospital remains open —

Some Members: Bangor.

Mr Wells: Bangor. Sorry. I have also asked the trust to keep — *[Interruption.]* Keep Belfast as well.

I have also asked the trust to keep the option of access to beds at the Bangor site under constant review. The trust has a range of intermediate care options available, but, clearly, if additional capacity is required in the future, reinstating beds in Bangor is one option that could be considered. I trust that the Assembly will understand that I am mindful that the matter is before the courts, and that limits very considerably what I can say.

3.00 pm

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer and, of course, congratulate him on his decision to keep the MIU in Bangor open. I am glad that some Ministers listen and take appropriate action.

Can he give us an assurance that, while the Bangor GP beds are still under review, the Ulster Hospital will have the resources to meet any rise in demand for such facilities? It is our main hospital, as he appreciates.

Mr Wells: As the Member is aware, I have allocated £5 million additional funding to address winter pressures in delivering unscheduled care. The money will be used to improve patient flow from emergency departments and to expand capacity as required over this winter period. The South Eastern Trust has taken steps to mitigate any impact that the temporary closure of the GP wards in Bangor Hospital might have. In addition to improving efficiency and increasing community services, the trust continues to monitor closely the impact of the contingency plans. The trust has been progressing plans to improve unscheduled care over the winter period and has started a review of the model of care for older people. The trust is also working, as part of an integrated care partnership, to develop new models of care in line with Transforming Your Care.

Mr Cree: Minister, although the decision on the minor injuries unit is welcome, it is regrettable that you did not show the same good judgement with respect to the intermediate care beds. Can you explain why you accepted the South Eastern Trust's proposal to close the MIU in the first place? When will the 20-bed unit be restored?

Mr Wells: I hate to sound negative in answering the Member's legitimate questions, but, as he is very aware, the issue is before the courts. Anything that I would say on that specific question might be used by one side or the other in that court debate. Therefore, on this occasion, I will have to present what is, in cricketering terms, a very straight bat and say that I cannot go any further on that specific question than the answer that I have already given.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his decision to keep open the minor injuries unit in Bangor. Obviously, a compelling case to maintain it was put forward. What changed between the initial decision to close the unit temporarily and his new decision?

Mr Wells: Again, this is only in relation to the minor injuries unit. I received quite a large amount of lobbying on the issue from Members right across North Down. One of the issues that I took into account was that, if we kept the MIU in Bangor available, that could relieve the midwinter pressures on other hospitals; for instance, Ards Hospital and the Ulster Hospital. It was done for that reason. However, I have to make it clear that the South Eastern Trust still has to find the savings outlined in the contingency plans. Therefore, the difficulty remains of finding the money that would have been saved through the temporary closure of the MIU. That money has to be found from somewhere.

Health and Social Care Board: Employees

4. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current number of employees of the Health and Social Care Board. (AQO 7234/11-15)

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for raising the question, because it brings to the fore issues that have been mentioned in the media and by other MLAs. The Member will be aware from my previous correspondence with the Health Committee that the increase in staffing levels in the HSCB, as commented on in the media and by the Committee, is of concern to the Department. When our front-line health and social care services are under pressure to identify significant savings, it is imperative that the administrative support given to those services be subject to the same degree of scrutiny. For this reason I announced last week that I had asked my permanent secretary to conduct a fundamental review of the administrative structures in our health and social care system. A particular focus of this work will be on the relationship and avoidance of duplication between the Department, the Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency and the trusts.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the Minister for that answer. I appreciate and welcome the review that he intends to bring forward. Can he also accept that the number of people employed by the Health and Social Care Board has gone from 365 in March 2011 to 525 in March 2014? That is an increase of 160, and I know and he knows that those are purely administrative posts and represent an increase of around 30%. Bearing in mind that the annual budget for the Health and Social Care Board is about £20 million, 30% of that represents a substantial amount. Will the review look hard at that and at the issue around the Business Services Organisation, which has put on several hundred people, again on the administrative side? Those are issues —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Keep questions brief, please.

Mr McGimpsey: — that require urgent examination.

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. For his benefit, I will read into the record the whole-time equivalents because I think that is the best

way to compare like with like: 2008-09, there were 621; 2009-2010, 522; 2010-11, 427; 2011-12, 458; 2012-13, 483; and 2013-14, 549. In that, there are 80 temporary positions on fixed contracts. Once those contracts and work have been carried out, those individuals will leave the board's employment. When you factor in those numbers, it is not as dramatic as it seems. Indeed, the board has kept within its admin budget throughout the CSR period. We also have to be fair to the board and say that new projects such as Transforming Your Care, the integrated care partnerships and other functions have been transferred to the board, which is new work that has to be carried out.

I still accept the Member's premise that we need to look at every aspect of administration in the health and social care system. Mr Eastwood alluded to the painful decisions that will have to be made in the Fire Service. We have also heard about the stresses of domiciliary care. It is incumbent on us, when we are doing that, to make certain that the board provides the best possible value. We will look at every level of administration to see if there are efficiencies that can be made. I would say, though, that the Health and Social Care Board has accepted a budget that will lead to a delivery of £600,000 of savings for 2014-15.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. Given that the Minister alluded to increased administration costs and, indeed, I think, the complexity of governance in the health system, does he intend to make any legislative changes in the review of health and social care?

Mr Wells: That is a legitimate question. The problem is that it is only seven or eight years since we had the last fundamental review of structures in health. We had the reduction from 18 trusts to five, we reduced the number of boards to one and we had the PHA, so we have had major change. I do not know whether it is an appropriate time to initiate another major structural change after such a short period. One argument that could be made is that the present structures have not had time to show whether they are an efficient model. We have to be fair to all concerned. Therefore, whilst it is vital that we look into the administrative costs of the board and other organisations, I do not think it is the right time for another fundamental review of the system, particularly with budgets being reduced so dramatically. However, it is a legitimate question, and I would want to satisfy myself, after the permanent secretary's report is issued, that all the administration that we have is money well spent. I would rather see that money going to the Fire Service, domiciliary care, the cancer centre or to all sorts of other procedures where there are so many competing demands for that income.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister outline the time frame he envisages for the review of administrative structures?

Mr Wells: We are placing quite a high expectation on the permanent secretary. We want his study to run parallel to the consideration of our final budget for 2015-16, allowing its findings to be factored into my determination of how funding is allocated to bodies in the health and social care system. We are talking about three or four months, which is extremely demanding.

Before we come back to the House with our views on the HSC budget for the incoming year, we have to be able to stand over the levels of administration. If there are too many layers of administration, we need to make proposals

to deal with that. I remind Members that administration is 90% personnel. The vast majority of costs involved in administration come from the people who sit at desks carrying it out. If you were to make any radical change in administration, it would mean voluntary redundancies. We have to have a system in place that allows that to happen. Even if the permanent secretary's report recommends fewer staff, it would be three years before we made any savings, because we would have to pay the affected staff their redundancy packages. That is our difficulty, particularly with administration. It is not the quick fix that most people think it is, because, under the present Civil Service and trust arrangements, asking people to leave is difficult and expensive.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, I am sure that you are aware of people who have taken their redundancy package and been re-employed within a matter of days, perhaps in a very similar job. Will you assure the House that any examination of the organisation or any structural change to staffing will look across all the arm's-length bodies and the trusts, the board and the Department to ensure that there is no duplication of service provision?

Mr Wells: The permanent secretary's study goes across the board, as it were, through all the organisations. Three years ago, the Health Committee decided to look at the administrative costs of the five trusts. We went in with great enthusiasm, and I remember — at the time I was the Chair — expecting to find vast layers of administration that we could take out of the system. When we looked at the figures, the position was not as it had seemed. We came up with a figure of 4.1% as being the average percentage of administrative expenses in the five trusts. That compared very favourably with trusts in the United Kingdom and throughout Europe, so the huge savings that we had anticipated were not there. We continue to pile on extra responsibilities — for instance, through Transforming Your Care. Somebody has to deliver those fundamental changes in the structure of health service provision; it cannot be done by volunteers.

I am content that, in many cases, we have the right numbers. Equally, I am certain that the permanent secretary will reveal areas where savings can be made. Even if those savings are radical, they will not meet the fundamental shortfall that we have next year from carrying forward £160 million of unmet need. We have no money, but we require about £110 million for the development of new services. Administration expenses are not the golden bullet; they are not the savings that can bring about a radical increase in available resources. We will have to look at much more fundamental issues.

Health: Budget

5. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the current counter-strategic measures adopted in relation to his departmental budget, for his assessment of the impact that these measures will have on future budgets. (AQO 7235/11-15)

Mr Wells: I thank the honourable Member for South Belfast for asking that question, because it is very topical and requires a public airing.

I accept that many of the savings proposals that are required to be implemented to secure financial balance in 2014-15 are counter-strategic. However, they represent

the measures that are capable of being delivered on the ground in the remaining months of the financial year. I would not normally support such measures, but there are simply a limited number of areas where cash savings can be extracted from the system at such short notice. Indeed, I mentioned those areas earlier.

Many of the pressures in 2014-15 are also being addressed through non-recurrent means, such as monitoring round funding, which means that we roll forward those unmet needs into 2015-16. Those will have to be addressed next year. I do not think that Members really understand that, if you get £60 million in the October monitoring round to meet needs, that £60 million does not continue into the following year; it meets the need for that financial year, and you start from scratch the following year to find more resources to get the same £60 million in that year.

The draft Budget for 2015-16 is out for consultation, but, as things stand, my Department will need to deliver challenging efficiency savings of £160 million to meet the existing costs of service provision.

3.15 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have to apologise that we are almost out of time for listed questions, but, if you present your supplementary, it will receive a written answer.

Dr McDonnell: Thank you. Following the Chancellor's recent announcement of additional funds, will the Minister now undertake a fundamental review of contingency plans in the various trusts?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, Minister, but we are now absolutely out of time. That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to topical questions.

Organ Donation Day

T1. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he supports Organ Donation Day, which will take place this Thursday. (AQT 1871/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am a very enthusiastic supporter of Organ Donation Day, which is due to be held on 11 December. This is a tremendous idea, and I was delighted to be at the launch last week. This is part of our Speak Up and Save a Life campaign, which encourages people to talk to family and friends about their organ donation wishes. I urge every Member of the Assembly and anyone who is listening to the debate to have that discussion with your family on 11 December. If you are minded to leave your organs for donation to help others, make that decision very clear to your family so that, should the worst situation occur, they are very clear about your decision.

I will give the example of a young gentleman from Coalisland who died in tragic circumstances in a car accident several years ago. He had made his wishes clear to his family, and six of his organs were taken for donation. Two of those organs saved lives, and the other four enhanced lives. It was a traumatic situation for his family, but at least they had some reassurance of knowing that the loss of their loved one had meant so much to many others.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answer. Further to that, what progress does he consider has been made by

the recent Public Health Agency (PHA) public information campaign?

Mr Wells: I am delighted to say that new registrations added to the organ donor register for residents in Northern Ireland increased by 1,300 in the last 12 months. At the end of September 2014, we had 597,144 people registered, including me, which represents an increase of more than 100,000 compared with five years ago. Real progress is being made, and I thank those who made the decision to allow their name to be entered on to the register. However, I say to all those people and to those who have not registered, make your views known to your family now so that, if the worst happens, you can provide life to others. Progress is being made, but we still have a lot to do, and there are still people dying needlessly in Northern Ireland because a donor is not available. We have to do everything that we can to overcome that situation.

The Cottages Respite Care Facility, Derry

T2. **Ms Maeve McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he will deal with the proposed cut to the vital service provided by the Cottages respite care facility for people with learning disabilities in Derry, a proposed cut that has attracted recent public criticism. (AQT 1872/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am very aware of the situation at the Cottages facility in Londonderry. Indeed, I have been lobbied by several MLAs and will have an emergency meeting this afternoon with MLAs, led by Mark H Durkan, to discuss this very important issue. As the Member will know, it is a six-bed unit that provides regular short-term respite for children aged five to 18 years with varying degrees of learning disability and associated conditions. The honourable Member for East Londonderry Mr Campbell has paid tribute to the work undertaken there.

The Western Health and Social Services Trust has advised that the nature of respite provision to families is changing and that new personalised provision is needed to meet specific and unique needs. To ensure this, the trust has to make certain that these services are designed accordingly. Coupled with providing services within the commissioned level of funding and the increase in demand, the trust is reviewing its respite services.

I am aware that this is a very difficult issue in the north-west and that a lot of folk are concerned. I became aware of it only very recently and am very keen to hear the views of MLAs, including the Member, as a representative for Foyle, on the issue. I see today's meeting as being the first of several dealing with this very important issue.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister. I was not aware of the meeting, but I will certainly take the opportunity to attend now. The trust indicated, in a meeting with me on Thursday, that the savings from such a reduction would be in the region of only £30,000 or £40,000 — quite minimal savings in the scheme of things. I suggest that, in light of that and the upheaval that it proposes to cause to families and their family members, the Minister now halt the reduction to the service.

Mr Wells: I do not know whether the lady has been invited or not; that is entirely in the hands of those who called the meeting. She may be aware that the Cottages is a six-bedroom facility, but it has only four beds that are deemed

suitable for children with complex needs. Avalon House, which is an alternative provision, has an eight-bed facility.

The trust is currently consulting staff at the Cottages, and that consultation will end on 17 December, so it would not be proper for me to make known any views about the service apart from the fact that many have indicated their high level of satisfaction with it. The trust will also be engaging with individual families and has been engaging with families over the past week. We are very much in that important consultation period. Now that it has been drawn to my attention by a number of Members, I will take a personal interest in it, but, as I said, at the end of the day, it is the trust's decision as to what is best for these highly vulnerable children and to make certain it has the best provision for them. I thank the Member for raising the issue, because I think it is very timely.

Alcohol: Minimum Unit Pricing

T3. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of recent University of Sheffield research into minimum unit pricing for alcohol. (AQT 1873/11-15)

Mr Wells: The survey is very timely and important. It shows that alcohol abuse in Northern Ireland is costing the Assembly and Executive £900 million a year; that £240 million of that is levied on the health service; that over 12,000 admissions to our hospitals every year are as a direct result of alcohol abuse; and that, sadly, 230 people die as a result of alcohol abuse in Northern Ireland. But much more shocking, I think, is the fact that alcohol is now 62% more affordable today than it was 30 years ago. We simply have to do something about the outbreak of binge drinking in Northern Ireland, which is leading to all these problems.

We as a society cannot afford to continue to pick up the bill for alcohol abuse. If I had that £240 million that is being wasted in dealing with alcohol abuse in my budget, my position would be much stronger today, and I would not be having all these painful questions being asked of me. Therefore, I welcome the report; it gives a scientific basis, and I am working with the Department for Social Development to ensure that we can implement a discussion paper to go to the Executive and then to public consultation on minimum unit pricing for alcohol in Northern Ireland. My colleagues in the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, all looking at the same research, have made the same decision.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive response. Will he outline the steps that would be required for minimum unit pricing to be introduced in Northern Ireland?

Mr Wells: The licensing of alcohol establishments and licensing policy fall between the Department for Social Development and the Department of Justice, but it is quite clear that it is possible to enact legislation that will make it a condition of one's licence, be it for an off-licence, a supermarket, a pub or whatever, that all promotions and all activities that sell alcohol below the minimum price, be it 45p or 50p or whatever, will be in contravention of their licence.

When one understands that 20% of the drinkers in Northern Ireland consume 70% of all the alcohol sold, one understands that there is something seriously wrong with

a society that allows that — and also allows alcohol to be sold significantly cheaper than bottled water, or a two litre bottle of cider to be sold for £2. When that is happening, is it any wonder that our A&Es are clogged up on a Saturday or Sunday night by people who are heavily intoxicated? I believe this is a no-brainer. I believe the statistics show that we must do something about this, and I am depending on Members backing me on a policy that may not be particularly popular but which will bring real health and social benefits and, of course, help our police service in Northern Ireland.

Health: Community and Voluntary Sector Contribution

T4. **Ms Sugden** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the role of the community and voluntary sector in filling the gaps left by very stretched health and social care public services. (AQT 1874/11-15)

Mr Wells: I think that I know the direction in which the honourable Member is taking the question. I must say that she asks very incisive questions for written answer of me very regularly and has ruined many a Saturday night as I tried to deal with her answers while watching 'Match of the Day'.

I am sure that she is concerned about the fact that, until this week, no decision had been made on the funding of the 68 voluntary bodies that are funded by my Department. I am glad to tell her that the decision has now been taken. Funding will be reinstated and all those groups will be paid in exactly the same way as in previous years, and they can expect to receive the remainder of their payments very soon. That indicates just how important I see the role of the voluntary sector within health and social care delivery.

Ms Sugden: I welcome the Minister's response, because I too believe that the community and voluntary sector has a place within the public services. What does the Minister feel that its role in mental health will be in the future?

Mr Wells: We will have a fundamental review of how we fund the voluntary and charitable sector in Northern Ireland. It has grown up over the years with various ad hoc requests for funding. Various Ministers, including Mr McGimpsey and Ms de Brún, have acceded to various requests, but there has been no coherent policy to see how that is delivering the best value for money on behalf of the state. I believe that we give something like over £4 million every year.

Some of the organisations are large British-based charities with Northern Ireland offices and have quite high levels of resources and others are small charities that are entirely based in small communities in Northern Ireland. We have to decide what is the best use of a significant amount of taxpayers' money to complement the work of the Department. That is an ongoing part of our policy. However, I can assure the Member that, this year, none of the charities will notice any difference and will get exactly the same funding as in 2013-14.

Alcohol: Christmas Consumption

T5. **Mr Ó Muilleoir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he agrees that event organisers and the drinks industry could do more at this

time of year to urge sensible drinking, given that we are coming to a time of year that is sadly associated with the excessive consumption of alcohol, which puts great pressure on our accident and emergency departments. (AQT 1875/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is an awful pity that we have had to go towards the implementation of minimum unit price legislation. It is very sad that the supermarkets and some club owners have not voluntarily decided to step in and say that enough is enough and that they are causing huge problems.

When we realise that, over Christmas, 80% of those who report to A&E at weekends after midnight are under the influence of drink and are there because of drink, we can see the huge problems that that is having for our health service. We then wonder why we have difficulty in getting middle-grade doctors to staff those late-night shifts, when they have to deal with the abuse that they receive from those who are intoxicated.

I ask pubs, clubs, off-licences and supermarkets to get their act together and introduce a voluntary minimum unit pricing structure, so that no one is being undercut, and to try to act responsibly. They should do that rather than sending lots of mainly young people out on a Saturday night with vast quantities of drink that they will consume through pre-loading or "prinking" as it is called — pre-drinking — and then go out to clubs or pubs afterwards. It simply cannot be accepted any more that we allow our young people to destroy their lives by binge drinking. We also have a huge increase in liver cancer as a result of that. To me, it all points in one direction: either the industry self-regulates and introduces minimum pricing or I, with the Department for Social Development, will do it for them.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Míle buíochas. Thank you, Minister. I know that Tennent's NI has voiced support for the minimum pricing of alcohol, and I know that many event organisers are very circumspect about how they organise events at this time of year. Will you take the opportunity to join me in commending our front-line staff in accident and emergency departments who are put through hell at this time of year, which is a time of celebration, by having to deal with people who present drunk at A&E?

Mr Wells: Indeed, I concur with that comment. I got a very supportive letter from the managing director of Tennent's Northern Ireland immediately after the announcement of MIU. Therefore, I would like to think that MUI — sorry, whatever it is, and that is me only on water. *[Laughter.]* I wish that other drink companies were as responsible. I am also waiting to hear from the small number of supermarkets in Northern Ireland that are still selling alcohol as a loss-leader: maybe at 35 pence or 40 pence a can.

3.30 pm

I pay tribute to those members of our medical staff who will face a very difficult Christmas. People will come in worse for wear, and those staff will take abuse, violence and extreme bad manners. We as a society have to stop that happening. All the scientific evidence shows that, if you make the price per unit higher, demand and consumption reduces significantly, unlike what happens with cigarettes, where I do not believe that happens. Therefore, we have to do something to protect those health service workers who are having a very difficult time. If we do not do something, we are going to find it increasingly difficult to keep those

A&Es open, because staff, particularly nurses, simply will not take on the role of being abused for several hours at the weekend.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That brings us to the end of Question Time.

Assembly Business

Una Crudden

Mr McCarthy: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. When the Health Minister is here, will he join the rest of us in offering our deepest sympathy to the family of Mrs Una Crudden who sadly died at the weekend? Every Member will know how Una fought gallantly. She was more often in this Building than some of the rest of us.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has been given some latitude. That is not actually a point of order, but I will allow the Minister to respond.

Mr Wells: The honourable Member is absolutely right. I should have paid tribute to the enormous contribution that Una Crudden made to the ovarian cancer campaign. I regarded her as a friend. She was a wonderful campaigner, and she achieved so much in her life to further the cause of those with ovarian cancer.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I think there will be agreement with those comments across the House.

Committee Business

Insolvency (Amendment) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 13 March 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill (NIA 39/11-16).

I inform the Minister and the House that it is unlikely that the Committee will require the entire duration of the extension period to consider the Bill. However, given the considerable workload of the Committee, the extension until 13 March 2015 is being requested at this stage as a precautionary measure. Go raibh maith agat. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 13 March 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill (NIA 39/11-16).

Private Members' Business

Children's Services Co-operation Bill: First Stage

Mr Agnew: I beg to introduce the Children's Services Co-operation Bill [NIA 44/11-16], which is a Bill to require Northern Ireland Departments to discharge their functions and cooperate with one another in order to contribute to the achievement of certain specified outcomes relating to the well-being of children and young people, and to amend the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Cost of Division

Mr Principal Deputy 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 to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Lyttle: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the financial and economic impact of continued division in Northern Ireland; calls on the Executive to conduct formal audits of their budgets and publish their assessment of the impact of societal division; and further calls on all Departments to actively encourage desegregation and promote cohesion, sharing and integration within their policies and spending plans.

I propose the motion on behalf of the Alliance Party. It maintains our call on all Executive Ministers to identify the financial cost of division to the public purse in Northern Ireland and to take decisive action to address that morally and economically unjustifiable waste.

The Executive and the Assembly know that the OFMDFM-commissioned Deloitte report, which was some time ago now and requires updating, estimated that the financial cost of division to the public purse in Northern Ireland could be over £1 billion a year. The extent of that financial cost is put into sharp focus by the scale of the current financial challenge faced by the Northern Ireland Executive. We have a Budget black hole in the region of £800 million, and we have Ministers briefing Committees and the media on unprecedented cuts and voluntary redundancies to public services, which will undoubtedly impact on the community and voluntary sector and the private sector.

It is clear that there is not only a moral but an economic imperative for Ministers to get serious about identifying and tackling the financial cost of division to each Department in Northern Ireland. Indeed, it is an expressed commitment of OFMDFM's Together: Building a United Community strategy that an impact assessment of the extent to which all government policy contributes to tackling division be developed. I had hoped that we would hear today from a number of Ministers on progress in that regard, and I look forward to hearing from junior Minister McCann from OFMDFM.

Alliance Party Ministers in the Department of Justice and the Department for Employment and Learning have begun to implement that type of approach in order to ensure that all policies encourage sharing over separation.

The costs of division in Northern Ireland are visible at all levels of society. At individual and regional levels, we have seen lost lives, damage to homes, injury, illness, damage to physical infrastructure, restricted inward investment and a loss of human resources through emigration. Division has also led to duplication, or even multiplication, of service delivery for people who live side by side, with limited integration or sharing.

'A Shared Future', the good relations policy for Northern Ireland set out a vision of a shared and inclusive society and stated clearly:

“Separate but equal is not an option. Parallel living and the provision of parallel services are unsustainable both morally and economically.”

However, the costs of division remain. We have segregated housing, separate education, less-efficient public service provision, high policing and security costs, and opportunity loss. Some examples of that include the policing of civil unrest and security threats, which could be as much as £500 million a year. We also have duplicate goods, facilities and services for separate sections of the community. Those include prisons, schools, surgeries, jobcentres, community centres, leisure centres, and even bus stops and bus routes. Those costs are borne not just by the public sector but by the private sector.

One of the most significant areas of duplication is in our education system, where delivery is substantially distorted by division and separation. Some estimates calculate that we have in the region of 50,000 to 80,000 surplus places a year, which could cost in excess of £300 million a year. We have four teacher-training colleges in Northern Ireland for just 1.8 million people.

There is also a strong correlation between division, poverty, deprivation, educational under-attainment and economic inactivity. We have clear examples of the cost of division through housing segregation. That comes on top of issues such as interfaces, buffer zones and the security adaptation of properties, as well as blighted or segregated land. We also see additional public transport costs and an increased carbon footprint in Northern Ireland, which is the largest in the UK.

There are also opportunity costs. It is widely recognised that a region of 1.8 million people will require inward investment in addition to the promotion and support of indigenous enterprise and export in order to generate sustainable economic growth. The absence of political consensus, and civil unrest, have intermittently but undoubtedly limited investment and affected the economy, employment opportunities, skills development and life chances here in Northern Ireland. We need political stability and community cohesion to generate the sustainable economic development that we require to improve living standards and achieve the full potential of everyone in Northern Ireland. In a globally competitive economy, we need to avoid additional costs for our service industry and ensure that we attract visitor numbers and highly skilled labour to Northern Ireland.

Whilst it is true that the Executive's failure to reach an agreement on welfare reform has exacerbated the budgetary crisis, it is estimated that the penalties from welfare reform are responsible for around one third of the financial challenge facing Northern Ireland at this time. Previous Northern Ireland Executives have failed to fix the roof while the sun was shining, and the longer it takes to tackle the cost of division, the further the waste will be of our scarce public finances that are desperately needed for front-line services and economic recovery. It is essential that the Executive and Assembly acknowledge the financial and other cost implications of division in Northern Ireland and commit to addressing them.

We want to see all Departments conduct formal audits of their budgets and publish their assessments of the impact of societal division. We want them to commit to presenting a practical and costed plan to tackle those issues

immediately and embed them in the next Programme for Government.

Every single Minister has a key role to play in ensuring that their Department takes a proactive role in tackling our divided society and promoting a shared future. If we take action on this now, we will be able to better invest in public services and economic growth for the future. It is indeed an Executive-wide approach that is needed to tackling division and separation in our society, and we want to see a robust set of targets for implementation on those issues.

One of the most significant areas of duplication is in our education system, and we believe that there is a need for a shared and integrated education Bill to ensure that the public's desire for integrated and mixed education is followed through by the Assembly. Indeed, shared education that commands sustained contact is also of great benefit to pupils.

Research consistently suggests that opportunities for sustained contact between people from different backgrounds can facilitate positive change and reduce division in our community. That needs to take place in shared organisations, shared buildings and shared physical space if we are to deliver the type of mixed neighbourhoods, mixed schools and mixed workplaces that the majority of people in our community want.

Creating a shared future is one of the greatest challenges that this society faces. We can ignore that challenge or we can get on with doing our best to just manage the division, divert scarce resources that could be put to much better use, and fall short of achieving our full potential. Or, we can tackle that challenge head-on and build a new Northern Ireland in which people can live, learn, work and play together in safety and in which we can deliver sustainable peace and prosperity for everyone in our community.

Mr Moutray: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate this afternoon. The DUP will continue working to break down the barriers that still exist between Northern Ireland's two main historical traditions. We will also strive to prevent new ones developing with our minority ethnic communities, who are an integral part of building a new Northern Ireland. Indeed, the House will be all too aware of the ongoing discussion this week at a high level to try to bring about real progress on the thorny issues that exist in Northern Ireland, and I sincerely hope that the efforts will not be in vain and that an agreed outcome will be achieved. I believe that the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy was merely a starting point and has been built upon by the Together: Building a United Community initiative in this Assembly term.

Immense savings can be made across the public sector by greater integration and tackling historical divisions. We believe that savings resulting from greater sharing should be reinvested in communities to make real differences for future generations. The 2007 Deloitte report, 'Research into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide', suggested that Northern Ireland could be spending up to an additional £1.5 billion per annum on its public services.

While we believe that that figure might be inflated and is realisable only in the longer term, clawing back even a fraction of that sum could have a massive impact on our shrunken budgets in these tough times.

3.45 pm

Facilities, services and goods, including schools, GP surgeries, job centres, Housing Executive offices, community centres, leisure centres and, as was said, even bus stops, are duplicated to accommodate separation. It is normal and appropriate for all children to go to a local primary school together, as they do to preschool. The opportunity to be educated together can play an essential part in a reconciliation process here.

We support the concept of shared spaces, but, as we saw in Portadown yesterday, shamefully, shared space has been denied for 6,000 days to the No. 1 District Orange Lodge by the Parades Commission. In north Belfast, the Protestant/unionist/loyalist community is told that it can use the arterial route to leave the area but not to return home. That section of the road has a health centre, a post office, a library and an ambulance station — a textbook example of what should be shared — yet the Alliance Party acts as a cheerleader for each and every decision of the Parades Commission that entrenches segregation. Perhaps, in the spirit and letter of the motion, it will audit itself and end its support for the atrocious decisions taken by the Parades Commission.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion. A range of reports have been commissioned that seek to quantify the cost of division in our society. In fact, there are many cynics in the media who would say that a whole industry has been created doing just that. What we do know is that the case for greater investment in real initiatives aimed at tackling societal divisions needs to be made — initiatives such as T:BUC, the social investment fund, community relations and the range of services aimed at supporting victims of the conflict and dealing with legacy issues.

No one can deny that there are costs associated with division, but, instead of dealing with the symptoms such as cost, we must deal with the causes. They can be dealt with only by real leadership being shown by all our political parties in the current talks process as well as by key civic actors and influential voices. Comprehensive agreement via the current political talks process involving all parties will go a long way to tackling the costs of division. We know that the causes of such costs include legacy issues, social and economic inequality and the failure of politics in not having key agreements implemented. Issues such as dealing with the past, contentious parades and parity of esteem for identity all need to be addressed and agreement reached. Long-standing issues of disadvantage and alienation also need to be dealt with as part of the process of tackling divisions in our society.

I welcome today's debate, because it gives me an opportunity to bring to the fore issues about the division of Ireland. Many of the reports carried out to date refer to costs incurred due to the unnecessary provision of services for communities that live side by side but do not integrate, but what about the costs of dividing our country? What about the cost of duplicating almost every public service on a small island containing fewer than seven million people? What about the cost of running two health services? What about the cost of running two education systems? What about the cost of running two police services?

The year-on-year cuts to the block grant by the Tory Government in London will in no way aid those whose mission is to deal with the causes of division genuinely and effectively and, in turn, the related costs to our society. Sinn Féin wants Ireland, North and South, to be self-sustaining for the economy and public services. We believe that the economy can and should grow significantly when the costs of partition are removed and the full potential of an integrated island economy is unleashed. A strong economy can support comprehensive public services. A new agreed and united Ireland will allow for the development of fully integrated public services throughout the island for the benefit of all its citizens. I ask the Alliance Party Members who tabled the motion to clarify whether they recognise the cost of partition as one of those embedded costs of division that need to be dealt with.

Tory welfare cuts will in no way assist us in our endeavours to tackle the causes of sectarianism and division in our society.

Investment in education and innovative training, well-paid employment opportunities and a social fabric that enriches the life experiences of the majority of our citizens are what will make a difference. I call on all Members committed to the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent binding international agreements to redouble their efforts to advance the political work necessary to genuinely tackle the root causes of division.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Alliance Party for tabling the motion, which is, I think, a sensible one. It is important, at this time of budgetary constraint, that we analyse and interrogate all budgets. Had we been doing that for the last number of years, we might be in a better position. It is important that we do it with an eye to the cost of division and segregation, because it is clear that we are double spending in a number of ways. It is also clear that we have not come anywhere near as far as a lot of people would have hoped 16 years ago in breaking down some of the barriers that still exist in our communities.

The promise of the Good Friday Agreement was one that everybody, or at least the vast majority of people, bought into. They almost turned away from politics and asked the politicians then to "finish the job", as Bill Clinton said. Unfortunately, we have left people waiting for far too long.

We have continued a situation whereby our communities are divided, and I think that we send out the wrong messages from this place every single day. We have power-sharing structures, but I am not so sure that we have power-sharing in spirit. People see that and are fed up with it. The public want us to break down the barriers, not only in communities but in the House, in government and in politics. They get fed up when we constantly retreat to our own positions. We are all of us very good at demanding our rights, whether it is about parades, flags or anything else, but we are not always as good at living up to our responsibilities, and, in my view, rights and responsibilities go hand in hand.

Some of the language that comes out of this place, whether it is about rewriting Irish history or Greek mythology, or about holding up pots of yoghurt, does nothing for its image as an institution. Neither does it do anything for the image of the North of Ireland. I think that we have become a laughing stock. We often hold ourselves up as some kind of example for the rest of the world, but I think that we should

follow the example that we set for ourselves in 1998, follow through and finish the job. There is an opportunity in the talks process this week to find a comprehensive agreement around these issues. It has to be comprehensive because, if we as politicians do not lead by example very soon by standing up and living up to our responsibilities, the public will have moved on from us and from this process. That would be a very dangerous situation.

I recognise the work done on the 'Peace Monitoring Report', which recognised a lot of the good work that is going on in my city and yours, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. It spoke of the good work done on the City of Culture and the work done before that. It is important to recognise and remember that the City of Culture allowed an opportunity to give expression to a lot of the good work that was going on in communities and had been going on there for years, probably since the 1980s during the height of the Troubles, when we were power-sharing in Derry long before this place had even thought about it. That work, whereby you are able to have the biggest festival of Irish culture on the same street that held the biggest loyal orders parade in the whole of the North the day before, shows a city able to move forward. It is a city that is engaged in a culture of constant conversation, and that is a lesson that can be learned right across the North.

That same report also reminded us that peace walls have doubled in number since 1998. That is a very visible example of how we need to move forward and catch ourselves on, and it is a very stark message to all of us to make sure that we finish the job and get on with sorting out the issues here.

I have a couple of seconds left to mention that many minority ethnic communities have joined us in the North of Ireland, and we have not looked after them or welcomed them very well at all. Some of the same people who are going around attacking their houses —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Eastwood: — have been attacking members of different communities in this society for far too long.

Mr Cree: The Ulster Unionist Party fully supports the creation of a Northern Ireland that is prosperous and at peace with itself. We want to build a society in which all our citizens have a stake and in which they can live and work wherever they choose. The Ulster Unionist Party supported the Belfast Agreement because we wanted to open up a better path for the people of Northern Ireland. We wanted to end the decades of violence and offer the prospect of a new society, free from fear and suspicion, in which the people of Northern Ireland could make common cause in building a better society in which to live and bring up their families.

Whilst equality legislation has played a major role in ensuring that workplaces are much more reflective of society, it is, indeed, a source of deep regret that 16 years after the Belfast Agreement we are still faced with so much segregation in public housing and with the ugly scars that peace walls leave across the landscape in many urban areas, particularly in Belfast. I note, following Mr Eastwood, that there were 88 such walls in Belfast in 2010.

We also face the cost of duplication of services, where community divisions have resulted in two sets of facilities being provided in close proximity, often at great expense.

We also need to recognise that certain political parties thrive on division. The last thing they want is for a united community to develop, because such a community would threaten their electoral support. The language of "curry yoghurt" feeds off the idea that equality is being used as a Trojan Horse to break these b's. We have heard that very recently. Quite simply, the two big parties in this Chamber need each other. They gain electoral strength from their claim to represent the narrow, sectional interest of their side of the peace line. Neither the DUP nor Sinn Féin has any pretence of appealing beyond its own voting bloc.

The Ulster Unionist Party believes that the Union is for everyone, be they Protestant, Roman Catholic or anything else. We are a unionist party, not a Protestant party. We value the diversity of the modern United Kingdom and the multi-ethnic, multi-faith society that has developed since the mid-20th century.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, we believe that it is essential that the society of Northern Ireland evolves and proves itself capable of assimilating those who have arrived from other countries. We are convinced that the United Kingdom offers the people of Northern Ireland — all the people of Northern Ireland — the constitutional arrangement that best guarantees social freedoms and economic prosperity.

Sectarianism is a toxic legacy of the Troubles. It is not only morally wrong, but extremely costly, as other Members have indicated. Of course we should look at departmental budgets to see what can be done to ensure that increasingly scarce resources are deployed in the manner that ensures the most effective return. We are in government to deliver for the people of Northern Ireland. All waste and duplication must be eradicated as a matter of principle and urgency. The current economic climate and the expectation of further restrictions on government spending means that it is only prudent to trim any fat that can be found.

We need, however, to be mindful of the reality of the situation in which we find ourselves. Northern Ireland is a divided society. We endured 30 years of a serious terrorist campaign, and many urban areas were scarred by communal violence. This has left a legacy of fear and suspicion, and peace walls protect areas and people from attack. We must take care to encourage and support moves to end division and bitterness and to support cross-community initiatives, but we must ensure that we bring people with us.

For example, those who live closest to peace walls are often those most fearful about what will happen if they are removed. They have genuine fears that should not be underestimated and must not be discounted. We may not be able to make progress at the rate that we would like, but we must ensure that we do not lose sight of our destination. We are totally committed to building a genuinely shared future, but, for now, we need to persuade some people that we need to share the present.

4.00 pm

Mr D McIlveen: I will keep my comments as brief as I can. This is a useful debate. The tone has been set by one or two Members who have decided, unfortunately, to go down the road of finger-pointing, and that is regrettable. It completely misreads the spirit of the motion, and I think

that it is fair to say that none of the main political parties in the House can say that their hands are completely clean in relation to how division has, at times, been handled in this society. I could give examples; however, that would be to fall into the very trap that I am trying to speak against. Those who have, at times, encouraged division know who they are, and they will have to deal with that.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair)

When it comes specifically to the cost, a point has to be made about where the cost actually emanates from. In my capacity as a member of the Policing Board, I have regularly questioned the Chief Constable and his assistant chief constables on parading and the cost of parading. Every assistant chief constable whom I have asked about the issue always gives me the same answer: the cost of policing a parade, in a general sense, is virtually nothing. A small amount of traffic policing is required, which is a relatively small cost to bear for a parade. However, when you come to a parade that is being molested, inhibited or protested against in a way that creates tension, as we have seen in Drumcree and at Twaddell, the costs of policing mushroom.

In a roundabout way, I agree with Mr Eastwood. He said that the issue of parading was a balance of rights and responsibilities. In my view, the right of somebody to walk on the Queen's highway has long been set in our constitution and should always be guarded. However, with those rights come responsibilities, and I am the first person to acknowledge that. As a former member of the Orange Order and a loyalist band, I always sought to walk with responsibility when I was parading, no matter what part of Northern Ireland I was parading in. That is something that all lodges and bands should adhere to. When they go to an area where perhaps there are those who may not exactly be bought into the cultural identity that they represent, they should present themselves with dignity and respect. Certainly, they should not walk in a way that is provocative to any section of our society.

I find myself really agreeing with Mr Eastwood here. Like Mr Moutray, he touched on the myth of "both sides of the community" that we still cling to in Northern Ireland. When will we learn that, after 20 years of relative peace, we no longer have "both sides of the community"? We have a thriving migrant community from eastern Europe, South America, China, Russia and many countries. We can learn so much from that. Those communities welcome the fact that they reside in this part of the United Kingdom, but they also celebrate the fact that they have their unique identity. Why can we, in Northern Ireland, not learn from that? Why can we not get to grips with the fact that the constitutional position of this country is set in the St Andrews Agreement. It is not up for debate. However, anybody within that boundary who wants to celebrate their identity, whatever it may be, has every right to do so.

Very briefly, I will conclude on the issue of education. I went to a grammar school that was not a Protestant school. We do not have Protestant schools in Northern Ireland. I welcome and applaud the Roman Catholic families who stepped outside the mould and sent their children to my school —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr D McIlveen: — even though they were in the minority. Once that community gets its head around that issue and starts using the system that we already have, the cost of division will plummet.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá áthas orm tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo. I am pleased to support the motion. As we have heard, no party in the House denies the cost of division in our society. We must remember that the cost is not only in economic terms but, tragically, in the thousands of lives that have been lost here over the years and the attitudes that continue generation after generation and turn the problem into a vicious circle.

Unfortunately, the traditional lines of division have not been healed, and, as we have heard some Members say today, they have extended to racist attacks in our now multicultural society. One would hope that a shared future would enrich the life of everyone here and that it should be prioritised by each Department and collectively by the Executive and, perhaps more importantly, by every political party here not only in their policy documents but in what they say and do in public. Unfortunately, as we have seen in the past, that has not always been the case. A shared future should benefit our society individually, socially and economically, but we must not look on a shared future as something that is easy or simple. It is a difficult problem, and it will be difficult to resolve.

A cohesive and integrated society cannot be achieved simply by pretending that reducing the number of buildings that we have will solve the problem. A truly shared future cannot be achieved without coming to terms with our past. The barriers to a shared society are not insurmountable, although the scars of division run deep. They must be addressed in any strategy for a shared future, and it will fail if it restricts itself to a question of bricks and mortar. Divisions cannot be resolved simply by carving up funding for projects. A shared future must be supported and sustained by the necessary funding, which has to be underpinned by an understanding of the complex cultural and social landscape in which we live in this part of the world.

The lines of division must not ignore the invisible cultural and social underlying causes. As part of the current talks, we have the issues of the past, flags and identity. Those are all issues that we have to deal with, and it would be a welcome advance if the current talks were to progress those issues. It would send out a very positive sign to our society at the present time, a time when the currency of politics is not at its highest and, in fact, the reverse is probably true.

Social housing was referred to. The segregated nature of housing here is regrettable. Unfortunately, it can ease the way for Ministers who would like to allocate housing on the basis of creed rather than need. We all know that people want to live in their own area, where they grew up alongside friends and family, where they were educated, and so on. We must —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member must draw his remarks to a close.

Mr D Bradley: We must, to the greatest extent possible, help to ensure that there are shared housing projects and that people have the opportunity, if they so desire, to live in such settings. The clock has beaten me on this occasion. Gabhaim buíochas leat. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Kinahan: I am very glad to speak to the motion. It has been particularly good to hear indications from all parties that there are ways forward, although, equally, we have heard indications of the opposite. We all need to find a way forward to stop the waste of money. Today, I will concentrate on education.

The shared education Bill that we have been promised could be the acid test of whether the Assembly and its Executive are serious about desegregation and promoting cohesion, sharing and integration. In recent debates, some Members, particularly the signatories to the motion, have argued that shared education is a ploy or a ruse to avoid what they would see as truly integrated education. One is part of the other. As far as I am concerned, however, the jury is still out. The Ulster Unionist Party will wait to see the contents of the shared education Bill with an open mind. What is clear is that shared education must be a process, not an end in itself. We want a single education system in the medium to long term.

I will share some statistics that will counter comments about schools being just Protestant or just Catholic. Nearly half of Northern Ireland's schoolchildren are being taught in schools in which 95% or more of the pupils are of the same religion. In the 2011-12 academic year, 180 schools had no Protestant pupils on their roll. Another 111 schools taught no Catholic children. In the 2011-12 year, 493 schools educated almost exclusively — 95% or more — pupils of just one religion compared with 827 schools in 1997-98. Therefore, things are getting better.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No, I will carry on, thank you.

In 2011-12, 20 controlled schools, the vast majority of them in the primary sector, had a Catholic pupil enrolment of more than 30%. Ninety-one per cent of Protestant primary-school children attended controlled — mainly Protestant — schools, and 88% of Catholic primary-school pupils were enrolled in Catholic maintained primary schools in the last academic year. At the same time, 88% of Catholic post-primary pupils attended Catholic maintained or managed voluntary schools. Eighty-nine per cent of Protestant post-primary children attended controlled schools. Total pupil numbers have dropped from 340,940 in 1997-98 to 311,559. In that time, integrated school pupil numbers have increased from 8,154 to 21,170. We do see that things are getting better, but we have a long way to go before we share properly.

If we look at area planning, we see that, so far, it has been an opportunity missed. There is no evidence that anyone has been looking at the bigger picture. In fact, a cynic would conclude that the various sectors have been allowed to rationalise their own estate, completely oblivious to the other schools in the area. Area planning has failed to follow its two guiding principles; namely, to identify realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross-sectoral basis, and to maximise the use and sharing of the existing schools estate.

How can the process even be described as area-based planning when the maintained sector has already planned its own future with little regard for shared education? There is continuing uncertainty in many parts of our divided education system, and very little leadership has been shown by the Department or its Minister. The current

area-planning process has been fatally undermined since the day that it was announced. Not only has the process caused significant levels of anxiety and suspicion in schools across Northern Ireland, it has proved to be counter-productive, as some of our biggest education sectors have started looking inwards to solidify their positions rather than outwards to work proactively and strategically with all local schools.

4.15 pm

Shared education is undoubtedly the right way forward. My party's long-term policy for Northern Ireland to have a single shared education system, where all faiths are educated together, has to be the right way forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Kinahan: The motion refers to the financial and economic costs of division. Let us all try to work together to find a way forward. I would welcome an audit and review. We support the motion.

Mr Agnew: Sixteen years on from the Good Friday Agreement and seven years on from the Deloitte report, we can legitimately ask: "What progress has been made, and what assessment are we making of that progress?". I suspect that the answer would be, "Not very much", but we do not have the evidence either way, and that is of concern.

This should be a priority. It was seen to be a priority when we agreed the Good Friday Agreement and the majority of our people voted for it; but it is something that, to a large extent, has fallen off the radar.

If we need an example of the problem, the last time I discussed the Good Friday Agreement in the Chamber and said that the majority of people in Northern Ireland supported it, Mr Campbell, who is not here — and it can be checked in Hansard that he said this — asked whether I accepted that the majority of his community had not supported it. If ever anyone misunderstood the principles that people voted for in the Good Friday Agreement, it was that we did not have politicians who referred to their community as if that was what mattered and that any other community was separate. Mr McIlveen mentioned the fact that we have many communities in Northern Ireland. The language of the "two traditional communities" is as outdated as the division in our society. We need to move on from that language and, more importantly, from the way of thinking that it represents.

The cost of division, as was pointed out, is not just financial. Mr Eastwood hit the nail on the head when he talked about constant conversation. After the Good Friday Agreement, we stopped talking — not politically; we still have our debates in the Assembly: we stopped talking to our citizens. It became a purely political process. We have to remember that St Andrews, unlike the Good Friday Agreement that was endorsed by the people, was agreed three weeks after an election, so it never had public endorsement. Parties were going in with one wing saying, "We'll never go into government" and with the other wing alluding to the fact that they would. It was designed so that the electorate did not know what it was voting for. The St Andrews Agreement has no democratic legitimacy, unlike the Good Friday Agreement, which was endorsed.

That just shows the lack of will to tackle division in our society. Look at the shambles that was the shared future strategy. We were not going to take a document that was handed-down from the British Government that came in under direct rule; we would create our own. Many years later, it was only when the British Government came with the bribe of a financial package and told us to agree our shared future document, which was CSI at the time and is now T:BUC, that we got a strategy. It was a piece of PR. T:BUC talks about shared apprenticeships and that type of thing. That was clearly a planned economic measure rebranded as something to tackle division in our society. It was nothing of the sort.

We get the same again with corporation tax; Government say, "If you don't start coming to agreements, you won't get what you've asked for." That seems to be the only condition under which we come to agreement.

Finally, if ever there was an example of our failure, it is the Education Bill. The peace walls were mentioned. We politicians cannot take down the peace walls, and nor should we. Communities have to lead that process, facilitated instead of hindered by politicians, as is often the case. However, we as politicians absolutely can, should and must tackle the structural segregation in our society. The Education Bill and the area planning process were the opportunities to do that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Agnew: Instead, through the vision of so-called shared education and the Education Bill that we recently passed, all that we have done is sought to underpin segregation in our society. We have done little to move it on.

Mr McCallister: The motion is like motherhood and apple pie: how could you disagree with any of it? Quite frankly, none of us has disagreed. Everybody has set about trying either to say nice things or to blame someone else.

At the risk of completely wrecking Mr Eastwood's career, I agree with a sizeable chunk of what he said. He talked about rights and responsibilities and how those applied. He went on to talk about how we have missed the promise of 1998. I was reminded of that today, as I had a work experience student with me who was born just a few days before the Good Friday Agreement. As an Assembly and an Executive, we have completely missed that promise. We have not delivered anywhere near its shared future or shared space agenda. What have we been doing on that? We have actually entrenched more division.

I have to say, even to colleagues in the Alliance Party who tabled the motion, for which I am grateful: look at what you are doing from inside the Executive, having to increase the number of peace walls and build a fence through a church car park in east Belfast. In 1998, is that where we imagined we would be? Is that where you guys in the Alliance Party imagined you would be, even when you entered the Executive in April 2010? I suspect not, because it is effectively going backwards.

I listened to Ms McGahan from Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin's main focus is to blame the Brits for everything and blame the Tory Government for the cuts. May I remind Sinn Féin Members that the United Kingdom Government are still going to borrow in the region of £98 billion in this Budget year? The UK national debt is at £1.5 trillion, and we have

not even seen the scale of cuts that the Republic of Ireland had to endure. Yet somehow, doing away with partition would magically fix the economic and Budget crisis. That is the politics and economics of la-la land. It will not work.

Mr Kinahan: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Certainly.

Mr Kinahan: I wonder whether the Member knows the amount of money that was given to Ireland to help it through its financial crisis.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCallister: I am aware of the bailout and the money that the British Government made available there. That was done to help, because these two islands and all the constituent parts either sink or swim economically together. Rather than blaming each other, let us take our responsibilities in the Assembly and get on with what the Assembly and the Executive were elected to do. We either reform this place, or it is going to fail. I agree with the First Minister that it is not fit for purpose. It either has to be reformed, or it will fail and collapse because of its own incompetence and because we cannot be trusted to deal with anything. We cannot deal with a shared future. We cannot deal with corporation tax or other tax-varying powers because we do not have a mandated Government that agrees on a common Programme for Government to move its ideas forward.

That is why we are failing on shared housing and shared space on every measure. That is why the Alliance Party had to walk out of the original cohesion, sharing and integration talks. That is why we have never moved this agenda forward. That is why, nearly five years since the Alliance Party became part of the Executive, there is no progress on a shared future, despite much talk about it at that time.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: If I have time at the end, I will take an intervention.

Look at the language that many people around the Chamber use. We talk about a unionist forum, and I have warned about unionist unity being a dangerous concept in that it forces us into tribal division. Talk of a graduated response and a culture war and offensive and unnecessary attacks like "curry my yoghurt" damage the drive to end us-and-them politics, which is what the First Minister talked about. Such talk drives us into blaming the other side. When we talk about the naming of play parks in Newry, that is why we fail to deliver on shared space. These are difficult issues that cause offence, and we have not cracked the nut when it comes to how we deal with them.

When bad things happen, we have to, as Mr Agnew pointed out, get it into our head that they are happening to all of us instead of saying, "That doesn't apply to me, because it happened to the other side."

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McCallister: We have to remember that bad things are happening to all of our community. While I support the

motion, the Assembly is in need of fundamental reform. Otherwise, it will fail.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the cost of division and the work that we are doing to address the many legacies of the past and to build a united, shared and reconciled community and a better future for all our people.

The cost of division research was commissioned on 29 March 2006 and, as such, was conducted and finalised during direct rule. It is independent research, and the interpretation of and commentary on the data sets contained in the report represent the views of Deloitte and not those of the First Minister, the deputy First Minister or the Executive. The report does not form an agreed basis for future policy development.

The report cites £1.5 billion as the estimated value of additional annual expenditure as a result of division in our society. The research provides an upper limit of the costs of the divide by comparing the North's public expenditure as a percentage of GDP with that of other comparable regions. That comparison indicates a maximum additional spend in the range of £1.5 billion, but a wide range of other factors influence that level of spend, such as deprivation and demographics, not just the impact of the divide or the Troubles. The £1.5 billion figure is not the total of the costs that could be identified but a comparator with other regions.

The research characterised areas of spend as follows: direct costs arising from civil unrest; less obvious, but no less real, costs arising from the need to provide services separately to meet the needs of the two communities; costs due to additional expenditure on a variety of activities, including community relations work and promoting the North as a tourist destination and an inward investment location; and the lost opportunity cost of underdeveloped economic sectors, such as tourism.

The key outcome of the research confirmed that there is a strong economic case for promoting sharing over separation. However, we in the Executive are convinced that building a united community should not be based only on economic imperatives. Addressing the challenges left by a legacy of division is a strategic priority for all of us and vital to building a stronger, more united and diverse community. We need to address the causes of division: the attitudes, the prejudices and the behaviours that manifest themselves as sectarianism and racism on our streets. Reducing costs will not be a sustainable exercise if we do so simply by closing a particular facility or service in a specific location without addressing the circumstances that created the duplication in the first place.

The Executive's commitment to tackling division and building a united community is clear. One of the key priorities in the draft Programme for Government is to build a strong and shared community. That can be achieved only when we work to reduce segregation and separation. That is why the First Minister and the deputy First Minister announced the publication of 'Together: Building a United Community' in May last year.

4.30 pm

This strategy reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and building a united and shared society. Tackling issues of segregation and identifying opportunities for the development of shared spaces and services across the region is a key objective of 'Together: Building a United Community'. The strategy outlines a vision based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation. It provides the framework for government action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance whilst seeking to address division, hate and separation.

Mr Dickson: Will the Minister give way?

Ms J McCann: Yes.

Mr Dickson: I listened to what the junior Minister is saying, and it all sounds wonderful, but when we cut to the chase and get down to reality, like recently when I questioned the Social Development Minister about Together: Building a United Community and the shared neighbourhoods that were announced under that scheme. I was told that there was no chance of actual sharing, because the allocation of the housing would be done on the same basis on which the Housing Executive currently allocates property. Therefore, there was no genuine ability under Together: Building a United Community, in those new housing projects that have been identified, to build that very same united community. There is no mechanism in place to allocate housing on a shared basis rather than on the current Housing Executive's plans.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I remind Members that interventions should be brief.

Ms J McCann: Can I just finish off, and then I will take your point at the end? Is that OK?

This is an Executive strategy that places responsibilities on all Departments. The Executive are committed to meeting the aims and objectives that are outlined in the strategy. OFMDFM remains committed to continuing to provide leadership and drive forward this important agenda in order to achieve positive good-relations outcomes and build a united, shared and reconciled community. However, we recognise that OFMDFM cannot achieve that alone. The actions required to achieve real, meaningful and positive change across our society demand the commitment of all Departments, statutory agencies, district councils and the community as a whole.

The implementation of a strategy of this depth and scale cannot be undertaken by one Department or agency, and effective delivery against the targets and commitments will depend wholly on a collaborative approach across all sectors in our society. Therefore, the strategy provides for the establishment of a number of structures that, together, will make up the delivery and implementation architecture to oversee progress in achieving our vision of that united, shared and reconciled community.

As a means of harnessing that collective commitment across government, the ministerial panel, which comprises all Ministers of the Executive, sets the strategic direction for improving good relations across our society, oversees the delivery and implementation of the strategy, and monitors progress through a robust action planning and reporting process. Each Minister is required to report against the actions and targets attributed to his

or her Department and show how and to what extent departmental policies are achieving the objectives aligned to this strategy. To reflect our commitment to collaborative working, the membership of the ministerial panel will also include high-level representation from statutory agencies and the voluntary and community sector.

Thematic subgroups will also be established under the auspices of the ministerial panel to reflect the key priorities of the strategy. The membership of each of these subgroups will comprise representation from statutory organisations, alongside community representatives and key stakeholder groups. The chairs of these subgroups —

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for giving way. I thank her for the detailed update. How many times has the ministerial panel met in the last 18 months?

Ms J McCann: I am not aware of the individual panel — we have met, I think, about three times; that is when I have been at meetings. But there are also thematic subgroups.

Just to answer your colleague's query, I know about the shared neighbourhoods. We are of a firm belief that allocation of housing should be based on need. That is how all housing allocation should be delivered. I have worked with people who have moved into particular shared neighbourhoods, if you like, and the difficulty is, that when people move into neighbourhoods where one section of the community has been living rather than it being shared, sometimes they can be frightened by incidents.

For example, I know of one neighbourhood where flags went up when people from a certain religious background moved in. We have to break down those sorts of attitudes and prejudices. It is about looking at the causes and not just treating the symptoms. I do not know whether that answers your question, but I will come back —

Mr Dickson: Will the Minister give way?

Ms J McCann: Yes.

Mr Dickson: I understand what the Minister is saying, and I appreciate the constraints that she is operating under. However, remember, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister made a promise to the American president, and it was on the back of that that things were allowed to be moved forward. She has not come forward with any creative ways of dealing with this. In order to allow families and communities to share, you have to prepare for it. What programmes are in place to prepare for people who want to live in shared housing?

Ms J McCann: I take your point. I will not stand here and say that those programmes are there. We need to look at that and at building towards doing that. As I said, I know people who had to move out of a shared neighbourhood, having moved into one, because of the conflicts that were there. I take your point, and I think that a lot more work needs to be done. That is all that I can say. As I said, I am just working within the constraints of what I am saying today, but I know that a lot more work needs to be done in that area.

The good relations programme board comprises senior officials from all Departments, who will act as senior responsible officers for the various aspects of the strategy's delivery. The programme board will operate under the strategic direction of the ministerial panel and will report to it on delivery and performance.

At the outset, there was a total of 59 interface barriers, 22 of which were owned by the Housing Executive. The joint agency approach to the removal of interfaces, led by the Department of Justice, has resulted in a reduction in the number of interface barriers from 59 to 53, and engagement is ongoing with 40 of the 53 remaining areas.

I know that it has been said in the debate, but it cannot be the case that people just go in and remove the barriers. A lot of work has to be done in the lead-up to that. We also have to try to build a more reconciled community that is tolerant and that has respect. It is about changing attitudes. That is one of the key areas that we have to change first before we try to make any practical changes. Sometimes, it is people's mindsets that prevent more shared spaces and people coming together in shared housing, shared education and all that. We need to change those attitudes and, in a sense, that is one of the biggest challenges for us when we are looking at tackling the problems and building a united community.

I want to touch on some of the issues of public expenditure. The challenging public expenditure environment does not preclude us from striving towards our vision. We continue to work proactively with Departments to identify opportunities to build on existing work through greater collaboration.

One of the things that could be done at an Executive level to develop it into something that we could use in the next Programme for Government is to use the framework for Delivering Social Change. Instead of individual Ministers from different political parties working in silos in their Departments and to their narrow political mindsets, we could work collaboratively between the Departments and deliver much better for all the people in our community.

People have quite rightly said that it is about the whole community. We are a more diverse community and are not just the two communities any more. We are more diverse and have more and more people coming here to live and work. If we base our policies and strategies on equality of opportunity, tolerance and respect, we will go a lot further when we take those forward. I am very conscious of the time.

We want the North to be seen as a place where people want to invest because we have a truly shared, inclusive and vibrant society, which, as I said, is based on equality. That society needs to be committed to providing a better future for all our people, and combating division is a vital first step to achieving that. Building a united community that is based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and the promotion of reconciliation is important for us not only as we move from conflict and division, but in shaping a modern, diverse and sustainable community that is better equipped for the future.

I want to make one concluding remark. Politicians cannot do it on their own. We need to work more collaboratively with people in local communities. A lot of good work is going on at the grassroots. Someone said earlier that there was always a lot of good work being done in peace building and reconciliation at a grassroots level in local communities. That happened years before we entered into a peace process. I think that we need to develop that more, and we need to make sure that the programmes and projects on the ground that work are resourced and funded in the way that they need to be. I also think that we need

to look at civil society. We need to look at the voluntary sector and the community sector, and we all need to work together with the statutory sector in local government and central government, because the only way in which we are going to make those changes is by ensuring that everyone comes together and decides that that is the future that they want for their children and grandchildren. I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this discussion.

Mr Dickson: I would genuinely like to thank my colleague Chris Lyttle for introducing the debate and, indeed, all those who have contributed to it. For many decades, the Alliance Party has been highlighting the cost and the damage of division in society. It is not a financial legacy of just the Troubles and beyond. It has had a deep and lasting impact on the way society is structured and the way in which we deliver our public services. That is particularly pertinent, as a number of Members have made reference to, in light of the current Budget pressures.

Members across the House have highlighted examples of the cost of division. Stephen Moutray talked about the work that is needed to bring down barriers. Bronwyn McGahan talked about the cost of division in dealing with the past. Colum Eastwood told us that this was a sensible motion and that the Budget was an element in that. Leslie Cree told us that his party was fully supportive of a prosperous society. David McIlveen highlighted the cost of parades and the rights and responsibilities in respect of that and made particular reference to the role of new and emerging migrant communities in Northern Ireland. Dominic Bradley told us that no party denies the cost of division. Danny Kinahan told us that we need to find ways to forward shared education. Steven Agnew commented on something that I intend to move on to. He questioned what progress had been made in respect of the matter and spoke of the urgent need to move on. He also made reference to the Good Friday Agreement and made the very pertinent point that perhaps it was at that point that we stopped talking. John McCallister challenged those of us who are in the Executive on what we were doing. Reference has been made to the number of peace barriers and walls; they may have increased, but only one Minister has actually taken any down, and that is David Ford, the Justice Minister.

It was particularly interesting to hear the junior Minister. I thank her for her contribution this afternoon. She told us that OFMDFM did not accept a report that was written in 2007 by one of the world's leading economic houses. If you did not accept it in 2007, what have you been doing between then and 2014 to correct the report? What have you been doing to write your own report? It is a damning and scandalous indictment of OFMDFM that you took this report and ignored it. You have failed to challenge it, except in a soft debate here this afternoon. That is simply unacceptable.

4.45 pm

An example from that report that particularly strikes us concerns health, where it is stated that the erstwhile North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust commissioned research on the physical location of service delivery. It accepted recommendations to locate new health centres in locations that would be acceptable and accessible by separate communities. That was written in 2007. I do not hear anybody coming back challenging that, yet the report was rejected. That rejection resulted in the development of four health and well-being centres instead

of the two or, at the very most, three that would have been required if the decision had been taken purely on the basis of population, deprivation patterns and the services to be provided. In short, additional health facilities have been built to accommodate division. The practical outworking is there on the ground for us all to see. It is a disgrace to think of the millions that have been, and continue to be, spent propping up a dysfunctional system in the context of the current closures of minor injuries units and the threat to, for example, the unit at Dalriada and the widespread pressures on our health budget. I accept that there are no instant fixes for those matters, but you have had the report since 2007.

The most obvious costs are the direct costs to our policing service in dealing with security situations, but it is also clear that there are costs to services such as our schools, health centres, leisure centres, local government and housing. There is duplication all around us. It is scandalous that we have in excess of 60,000 empty school desks across Northern Ireland. It is scandalous that we have segregated, not integrated, education. Mr Kinahan made the comment that the jury is out on shared education. He must have missed the fact that the jury came back in with academic research last week to tell us that we need integrated, not shared, education.

The report, despite being rejected, is an invaluable resource. It estimated the cost of division at £1.5 billion then. We do not know how that figure has changed since. However, given the role of inflation and increased tensions, it is very likely to have increased. The current Budget black hole that we are dealing with should put into perspective the scale of the challenge. I understand that not all the savings can be realised immediately, but it is clear that the Executive must have had some plan to make a start. That is why the departmental assessment is so important and why we need to have accurate information. It is only then that we can develop departmental plans to desegregate our society and begin to see the financial benefits of that. A robust, cross-cutting Executive could play a significant role in making our budgeting and financial processes sustainable. We often think of the consequences of the legacy of the past in terms of the human and social cost, and we should never underestimate that, but the financial costs are quite often forgotten. In tackling them, we can divert funding towards public services and economic development and to trying to have a genuinely normal and shared society in Northern Ireland. Tackling the cost of division is an important part of that, and I urge Members to support the motion. Finally — this applies to me and all Members in the House, as well as to all those who have spoken — it is time to stop talking about what divides us and to take some action to stop that dividing continuing.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the financial and economic impact of continued division in Northern Ireland; calls on the Executive to conduct formal audits of their budgets and publish their assessment of the impact of societal division; and further calls on all Departments to actively encourage desegregation and promote cohesion, sharing and integration within their policies and spending plans.

Adjourned at 4.49 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 9 December 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Plenary Meeting

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): In compliance with section 52C(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we wish to make the following statement on the nineteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in plenary format, which was held in Armagh on Friday 5 December 2014. The Executive Ministers who attended the meeting have agreed that we can make this report on their behalf.

Our delegation was led by the First Minister, Peter Robinson MLA, and me. In addition, the following Executive Ministers were in attendance: Minister Durkan; Minister Farry; Minister Ford; Minister Hamilton; Minister Kennedy; Minister Ní Chuilín; Minister O'Dowd; Minister O'Neill; Minister Storey; Minister Wells; junior Minister Bell; and junior Minister McCann

The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD. The following Irish Government Ministers were also in attendance: Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton; Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Charles Flanagan; Minister Howlin; Minister Bruton; Minister Fitzgerald; Minister Reilly; Minister Varadkar; Minister O'Sullivan; Minister White; Minister Donohoe; Minister Humphreys; Minister of State Nash; Minister of State Sherlock; and Minister of State Harris.

At the start of the meeting, we had a good discussion on a very important event that had taken place earlier that morning at the Royal School Armagh — the announcement that the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) had decided to proceed with a bid to host the 2023 Rugby World Cup. The Council noted that, following ministerial consideration of a report on the feasibility of submitting a joint bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023, it had been agreed to support the IRFU's bid. We discussed the potential benefits that hosting such an event would bring to both jurisdictions and agreed that the relevant Ministers should work closely together to ensure that the strongest possible bid is submitted. I can safely say that all Ministers at the meeting were delighted at the prospect of such a prestigious event being hosted here.

Following on from the discussion on the Rugby World Cup, the Council noted the position on sectoral priorities and the north-west gateway initiative and agreed to keep those matters on its agenda.

As is normal at these meetings, we had an in-depth discussion on economic and budgetary issues in both jurisdictions. The Council welcomed the fact that, in general, signs are positive, while recognising that challenges remain. The recent announcement by the British Chancellor of the Exchequer on corporation tax was also discussed. Both Governments reflected on their respective successes in attracting external investment, while recognising that there is a key role to be played by indigenous companies in economic development. The opportunities to work together on joint trade missions and on developing new markets were recognised.

Ministers had a useful discussion on EU funding opportunities. The new draft Peace and INTERREG programmes are with the European Commission for consideration, and it is hoped that the final programmes will be launched in spring 2015. Following our consideration of EU funding at our last meeting, the Council welcomed the ongoing discussions between Ministers at NSMC meetings on the potential for collaboration to draw down EU funds. There is engagement between the jurisdictions on the opportunities available, and the Council looked forward to a further progress report at its next meeting.

The next item on the agenda was child protection and e-safety. The Council had an in-depth discussion on child protection issues, with a particular focus on e-safety, and noted that good collaborative work is already taking place on child protection within the NSMC structures and elsewhere. There was very good discussion on this item, with several Ministers from each jurisdiction contributing. Ministers recognised that such issues are cross-cutting and cross-jurisdictional and will require collaborative working to address. We agreed that Ministers who have a remit in child protection and e-safety-related activities should engage with their counterparts in the opposite jurisdiction to explore whether there is potential for further collaboration. It was also agreed that the topic should be revisited at a future meeting.

The Council then noted the progress report prepared by the NSMC joint secretaries on the work of the North/South bodies and other NSMC areas of cooperation since our last meeting in October. They welcomed the following key developments: in the area of transport, cooperation is continuing on identifying strategic transport priorities, including developing the strategic road and sustainable transport networks, and opportunities are being explored to pursue EU funding in a mutually beneficial manner to include support for the development of cross-border greenways.

Health is also an important area for cooperation, and progress continues on developing the two new suicide prevention strategies to follow on from the Reach Out and Protect Life strategies. Both jurisdictions have committed to share knowledge arising from media and public information campaigns on mental health. The All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care launched its children and young people website. The first ever all-island Palliative Care Week took place from 6 to 11 October and was aimed at encouraging a deeper public understanding of palliative care.

Funding for rural communities is important, and both Administrations are in the process of seeking approval from the European Commission for their respective rural development programmes for 2014-2020.

Education also remains an important priority for both jurisdictions. Education Ministers, at their meeting on 22 October 2014, received a joint presentation on cross-border cooperation between the Departments on educational underachievement. The focus of the presentation was the joint workshop in Dublin on 8 October 2014. Work will now be taken forward to establish a means of sharing the experience of schools to address educational disadvantage.

In the environment sector, Ministers, at their meeting in November, noted that the contract for the all-island air quality research study of airborne pollution from the combustion of residential solid fuels — in particular, smoky coal — was awarded in February 2014. They noted that an interim report is being considered by officials and will be presented to Ministers in the near future. The second and final phase of the study is due to commence before the end of the year.

I turn now to the work of the North/South bodies. Research and development is important for both jurisdictions. Both Enterprise Departments and InterTradeIreland continue to encourage North/South collaboration in research and innovation to increase the drawdown of funding. Significant actions have included the publication of InterTradeIreland's Horizon 2020 guide, the recently held Collaborate to Innovate conference in Dublin Castle, and the launch of the jointly agreed strategic action plan prepared by the Horizon 2020 all-island steering group.

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) has an important role in the development of the draft Peace IV and INTERREG Va programmes 2014-2020, which were submitted to the European Commission on 22 September 2014 in line with the regulatory deadline. The programmes are now in the negotiation phase with the Commission, and it is hoped that the final programmes will be launched in spring 2015.

Safefood continues to develop community food initiatives, and the evaluation of the first year of the current 10 projects has concluded that all are progressing very well. A range of research reports and surveys have also been completed by Safefood in recent months.

The Loughs Agency continues to work on the marketing and promotion of the Foyle and Carlingford areas through the development of marine tourism, angling and education and outreach programmes.

Foras na Gaeilge continues to assist with the implementation of the new funding arrangements,

including the agreement of an overall high-level strategic plan in addition to three-year plans for each of the six strategic areas.

A new Discover Ulster Scots Centre was opened on 27 November at the Corn Exchange Ulster-Scots hub in Belfast. The centre works with a number of partners to maximise the opportunity for collaboration in the Ulster-Scots sector to provide a modern showcase of Ulster-Scots culture for the general public.

Waterways Ireland has developed the Shannon blueway, Ireland's first blueway. This is a multi-activity trail running alongside water between Drumshanbo and Carrick-on-Shannon in County Leitrim, which it has developed in conjunction with the National Trails Office, Canoeing Ireland, Leitrim County Council and Leitrim Tourism. The body continues to engage with relevant organisations interested in the further development of blueways or greenways in both jurisdictions, including by exploring opportunities for EU funding.

Finally, the Council noted that the British-Irish visa scheme was officially announced by the British and Irish Governments on 6 October 2014. Under the first phase of the scheme, Indian and Chinese nationals will be able to visit Britain and Ireland using just one visa, removing the need for those visiting here to apply for a separate visa to travel across the border and vice versa. It is anticipated that the scheme will significantly boost business and holidaymaker visitors.

Ministers noted the current position on a North/South consultative forum.

At the end of the meeting, the Council approved a schedule of NSMC meetings proposed by the joint secretariat, including an NSMC institutional meeting in early 2015 and the next NSMC plenary meeting in early summer 2015.

Mr Spratt: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Child protection and e-safety are serious issues for all of us. Will the deputy First Minister elaborate on what the Executive are doing in the area of child protection and e-safety?

Mr M McGuinness: Safeguarding and protecting children from abuse of any kind is the responsibility of all of us. It is important to ensure that there is continued cooperation across Departments, agencies and organisations. I am pleased to advise that the work programme agreed at the NSMC health and food safety meeting on 18 July 2012 is continuing to improve safeguarding and child protection practice across both jurisdictions. A North/South childcare in practice conference was held in October 2014 in Dundalk, and it explored the background to early intervention approaches to child and family problems and the similarities and differences in solutions in both jurisdictions. The conference was attended by over 200 people and brought together prominent academics, policymakers and managers of statutory and not-for-profit organisations as well as practitioners from all over Ireland to showcase examples of good practice and making positive changes for children and families. The Department of Justice continues to work to ensure that, when sexual-exploitation-related crimes occur, we work together to protect and support victims and bring perpetrators to justice.

10.45 am

Child internet safety continues to be a concern, especially in relation to the online dangers that children and young people face, such as pornography, online grooming and bullying. While we recognise that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has the lead role in child protection, we have taken advantage of OFMDFM's central role in the Executive to help inform how we can best protect children from abuse through the Internet, and there are quite a number of actions, including commissioning research, the UK Safer Internet Centre and an ongoing review of activity.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an LeasChéad-Aire as an ráiteas. Will the deputy First Minister give an update on the current position of the EU funding programmes?

Mr M McGuinness: The 2007-2013 Peace III programme has a total budget of €333 million. The programme is fully committed and has achieved all its spending targets to date. The 2014 target was met during September 2014, with a cumulative expenditure of almost £257 million recorded by the end of October, against an EU target of £250 million. The 2015 target will represent the full programme budget. It is vital that the EU income is maximised, and SEUPB must now manage the portfolio of projects to successful conclusion within the eligible programme time frame.

INTERREG IVa has a budget of €256 million, 88 projects have been issued with a letter of offer and the programme is now fully committed. INTERREG IVa has exceeded all its annual expenditure targets to date, and SEUPB advise that it will meet the spending target for 2014. The target for 2015 will, of course, be challenging. DFP is monitoring the situation closely and is working with the SEUPB to manage the risk and ensure that no EU income is lost.

We noted that the draft Peace IV and INTERREG Va programmes were submitted to the European Commission on 22 September in line with the regulatory deadline, and that will be followed by further negotiations between DFP and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Commission to agree a final programme.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the deputy First Minister for his very detailed report to the Assembly. He referred to indigenous companies and economic development. Will the deputy First Minister expand on the opportunities to work together on joint trade missions and on developing new markets? I think that it is crucial that that cooperation continues.

Mr M McGuinness: I totally agree with the Member. It is vital that, where we can gain benefit for both Administrations North and South, we work together. During the NSMC meeting that was held in Armagh, I made the point — given that we are opening a new office in China — that we very much appreciated the support of the Irish Government's diplomatic services, particularly the ambassador, in opening that office and paving the way for our representative to get to know people in the Chinese Administration and, just as importantly, in the business community.

There have been a number of joint missions. Our Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister has been involved in joint missions with representatives of the Irish

Government. In the context of going out from this island, we all accept that places like India, China and many other places do not differentiate between North and South; they look for a business proposition. In circumstances where it makes sense for us to work together, it improves our ability to gain more exports for our businesses, including our indigenous businesses.

It also makes it clear to the Administrations that we are open for business on the island. Many of those people will also be looking at the opportunities that the prospect of our having the ability to set our own rate of corporation tax could have in terms of impact on foreign direct investment, which, as we all know, mainly comes from North America at this time.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. I welcome the work of the Northern Ireland Executive to support the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023. I add the Alliance Party's full support to that work. Does the deputy First Minister agree that the unique partnership approach to this bid North/South and between the IRFU and the GAA, and indeed Ireland's rich rugby heritage, makes for a very persuasive bid? In what practical way will the Executive be able to support that bid?

Mr M McGuinness: I think that all of us in the House know that this is a fantastic opportunity for all of us on the island to host one of the largest sporting events in the world. Of course, we have a tremendous rugby tradition. This also puts us in the international spotlight with a great opportunity to raise our profile. There is our historic role in developing the world game and, in recent times, driving the growth of the European cup; rugby's role in bringing people together; and of course our popularity as a destination due to the beauty of our landscape, rich heritage, diverse culture and warmth of welcome. I have no doubt that everybody will get behind this bid. I think that we do so with a considerable degree of confidence that it can be a winnable bid. All that has happened on this island over the last 20 years will not be lost on those who will make a final decision.

Ireland is one of the great rugby nations of the world. If you want a very clear indicator of our prominence, you just have to look at the two victories over South Africa and Australia; the first time there were two in a row over southern hemisphere teams. We have a very proud rugby tradition. We have also been blessed by the fact that the powers that be in soccer, the GAA and rugby have all come together very powerfully over recent years to exploit the real opportunity that sport has to bring people together right across the country. People like me have no problem standing up for the Ulstermen when they are playing. I presume that people on all Benches here have no problem standing up for Ireland when they are playing. It is great to see that quite a number of the Ulstermen feature on that team. I was very pleased to have Andrew Trimble with us in Armagh on Friday. He was recently voted Irish rugby player of the year. That is a fantastic accolade for all of us.

This is a fantastic opportunity with hundreds of thousands of people coming to our shores and a worldwide television audience in the region of 4.2 billion people.

Mr Campbell: The deputy First Minister mentioned that child protection was discussed in Armagh. Can he indicate whether there was any discussion regarding sexual abuse

of children in the past and the relocation of those who were responsible for that abuse from Northern Ireland to the Republic courtesy of the paramilitary organisation that he used to belong to?

Mr M McGuinness: In the course of the public promulgation of all of this, I have made it clear that I have written to both the Taoiseach and the First Minister on my proposal that we need to be very proactive in this regard. I know that there are ongoing discussions between Minister Fitzgerald, Minister for Justice and Equality, and Minister Ford, from our perspective, on the matter. We await the outcome of those deliberations. If those deliberations take some time, as they may well do, there is a huge responsibility on all of us to consider how, in the interim, we can continue to support those who have been victims of sexual abuse.

From my perspective, I want to see as much support as we can possibly give, North and South, through our working together to support people with counselling, helplines and, very importantly, how they can access justice. There should be no hiding place on this island anywhere for anybody guilty of the sexual abuse of anyone. I think that there is a total commitment on the part of everybody at the North/South Ministerial Council that we all have to do whatever we can to ensure that we support victims.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I seek assurance from the deputy First Minister that the Executive are exerting maximum pressure at this time on the Irish Government to play their full part in meeting their financial obligations in respect of the crucial A5 road project.

Mr M McGuinness: I think that all Members will be aware that, as a result of a legal challenge on behalf of the Alternative A5 Alliance, the orders relating to the A5 scheme were quashed in April 2013. The judge dismissed 11 of the 12 grounds of challenge but held that there was a need to carry out an appropriate assessment under the habitats directive in relation to special areas of conservation.

Public consultation on three reports informing the appropriate assessment process concluded in June 2014. Consultation on the fourth and final report concluded in late November 2014. Work is well advanced on the new draft statutory orders and a new environmental statement. When the new environmental statement is published, it will be subject to public consultation, which may lead to a further public inquiry in 2015.

Subject to the successful conclusion of statutory procedures, the Executive, taking account of their other priorities and the funding commitments of the Irish Government, which the Member referred to, will decide when funding can be made available to build the scheme. We had a very useful discussion with the Taoiseach about the A5 funding. It was a very positive development that he specifically mentioned the A5 at the press conference following the meeting; he again reaffirmed his Government's commitment to the scheme.

All in all, this is obviously a huge priority for not just the North/South Ministerial Council but our Executive. In terms of the construction industry, the sooner we can get diggers back on the road again to build that important road to not just Belfast but Dublin, the better. The conversation with the Taoiseach in relation to the prospect of the Irish

Government restoring the full funding that they committed themselves to was very encouraging indeed.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Before calling the next Member, I ask Members to check or recheck their mobile phones. A very active one is creating problems for Hansard.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas seo ar maidin. I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement this morning. Will he confirm whether we are on target to make the tourism industry here a £1 billion market by 2020?

Mr M McGuinness: Our visitor numbers continue to rise year on year. More importantly, revenue from tourism has shown healthy increases in the last few years; in 2013, tourism spend was worth some £723 million to the local economy. Of that, £531 million came into the economy from out-of-state tourism spend. The total visitor numbers for 2013 were 4.1 million. Figures for the first six months of 2014 show a 5% and 10% increase in visitor numbers and visitor spend respectively compared with January to June 2013.

Progress is on track to achieve the long-term goal to make tourism here a £1 billion industry by 2020. Our significant investment in developing a world-class tourism product is bearing fruit. For example, Titanic Belfast has seen over 1.84 million visitors since opening, which well exceeds the target for the first two years. The Giant's Causeway has seen over 1.96 million visitors, and over 1.37 million people from 178 countries have visited the visitor centre since it opened. We are making exceptional progress in tourism. Tourism figures are up. We are very confident that we will reach the £1 billion mark by 2020. It is very encouraging.

11.00 am

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. An dtig liom fiafraí den LeasChéad-Aire an raibh aon phlé ag an chruinniú faoi na heagraíochta Gaeilge anseo i mBéal Feirste a mbeidh deireadh leo de bharr na samhla nua maoinithe, mar shampla an tIontaobhas Ultach, atá imithe cheana féin, agus Pobal, atá i mbaol a bháis? Caidé an tionchar a bhéas aige sin? Could I ask the deputy First Minister whether there was any discussion at the meeting about those Irish language organisations here in Belfast that will disappear as a result of the new funding model being operated by Foras na Gaeilge and if the influence of the disappearance of those organisations was also discussed?

Mr M McGuinness: There was no specific discussion, but the NSMC approved the implementation of the new funding model in July 2013. That represented a significant shift in the strategic coordination and delivery of services to language communities. The new model seeks to ensure improved collaboration and a more flexible and adaptable approach that can respond quickly to the current and future needs of the language. The six lead organisations are in place and have met in the partnership forum with Foras na Gaeilge to develop its plans for delivering its allocated strategic priorities in relation to its specific theme in both jurisdictions. Work to finalise the arrangements is ongoing.

A language development forum was established at the end of June to provide feedback and advice about the delivery of service by the lead organisations and to give voice to the Irish language community in the development

of future plans and the emerging needs of the language. Foras na Gaeilge has appointed a chair to lead the forum. I know that the Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister, Minister Ní Chuilín, has been involved with the Irish language organisations in Belfast and meets them regularly. In fact, she attended a meeting that I was involved in last week, when Pobal came to Parliament Buildings and we had a bilateral meeting. It was great to see that Pobal was accompanied on that visit by Linda Ervine from east Belfast, who, herself and through her organisation, has been very much involved in the teaching of the Irish language in east Belfast to what appears to be a very receptive audience.

Mr Allister: Can we expect any reduction in the number of wasteful North/South bodies and the extravagance of the cross-border machinery as a result of the upcoming talks, or are they to continue as profligate sacred cows in the political arrangements?

Mr M McGuinness: The North/South bodies make a very significant contribution to both jurisdictions and carry out a range of valuable functions.

For example, InterTradelreland does excellent work on promoting cross-border trade and helps SMEs and others to grow their capability in exporting. It plays a key role in helping companies to access research and development funding through EU programmes such as FP7 and Horizon 2020. It has carried out good work to help the companies gain greater access to the public procurement market. Of course, the SEUPB also plays a key role in the management of EU funds such as Peace and INTERREG. I am sure that all Members will be aware of the important role that those funds have played across all constituencies.

Waterways Ireland plays an important role in the management of inland waterways, which is a resource that is very important for our tourist industry. The Loughs Agency plays an important role in the management of Foyle and Carlingford loughs and is also heavily involved in promoting the loughs as destinations for marine tourism. There are many other examples of good work taken forward by the bodies. It is clear to see that the work of the bodies is important and it will continue.

Mr Cree: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. It was interesting to read that Waterways Ireland has developed this first blueway in the Carrick-on-Shannon area. Can he share with us if, in fact, Waterways Ireland has developed any projects for the Erne waterway itself?

Mr M McGuinness: These projects are under ongoing consideration by Waterways Ireland, as the development of blueways and greenways could add to our tourist potential. It is clear from how greenways have been used, particularly in the west of Ireland, that they have huge health benefits for those now walking and cycling and involved in physical activity.

There is a proposal for another greenway from Derry city to County Donegal. Blueways and greenways offer important tourist potential, and it is exciting to see that Waterways Ireland is considering the linkage in the Leitrim area and how it can be extended to Lough Erne.

Mrs Overend: It was interesting to see that e-safety was raised at North/South level, especially since there does not yet seem to be any agreement here as to who will take responsibility for a cross-departmental Internet strategy

in Northern Ireland. What did they learn about forming an Internet safety strategy from the Republic of Ireland Government? It is important to see action on this issue as soon as possible.

Mr M McGuinness: The Member raises a serious issue. It is serious not just because of the need for us to continue to explore with the Irish Government how, on this island, we can protect our children but also since, with advances in technology and the extensive use of the Internet, this is now a global problem.

It is not a problem affecting just us here on the island of Ireland; it affects every nation in terms of the protection of children, so there needs to be a global response. In considering what we can do on the island of Ireland to continually improve our ability to protect children, we also have to look at what is happening in the big world out there.

I am sure that many nations have similar concerns to ours about the safety of their children. This requires global cooperation. In the context of what we are doing on this island, there is a duty and responsibility, particularly on the Justice Departments, to continually review, and I know that those reviews are ongoing.

Of course, the health service is involved. Also, given the contribution that education can make, it is definitely a cross-cutting issue that needs to be accelerated as we continually see, hear and read horror stories in newspapers and on the news. There is also a big problem with bullying on the Internet; that has had its own impact, as young people have taken their lives as a result of being bullied. The Internet has been a tremendous advance and resource for educationalists and for ending the isolation of older people in their homes. However, there are dangers, and they will have to be met by a global response.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. That concludes questions on the statement.

Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): With permission, I wish to make a statement regarding a meeting under the auspices of the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) on cooperation on criminal justice matters, held in Dublin on Friday 21 November. I represented the Executive at the meeting, which was hosted by Frances Fitzgerald TD, Minister for Justice and Equality.

This was the ninth formal ministerial meeting under the IGA since the devolution of justice in April 2010. As I have said in statements to the House, I am committed to keeping the Assembly informed of meetings held under the auspices of the agreement on the same basis as North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meetings. The meeting on 21 November provided us both with an opportunity to review early progress against the joint work programme for 2014-15, which will run through to the summer of 2015. Members will recall that I shared a copy of the joint work programme on 16 September following my meeting with Frances Fitzgerald on 27 June, at which the programme was agreed.

It was pleasing to note the progress that has been made: for example, a draft strategy and action plan has been developed to enhance and optimise forensic science partnership between the respective services in Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland.

The sharing of information between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána progressed in the form of a best practices document in July, covering policing in partnership with diverse communities.

Meanwhile, through the work of the support for victims project advisory group, valuable discussions have been ongoing between officials in my Department and officials in the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE) as preparations continue in both jurisdictions towards implementation of the European victims directive in November 2015.

Under the guidance of the youth justice project advisory group, the PSNI and An Garda Síochána have begun to examine the potential for cooperation on juvenile offenders who are on diversion programmes.

Those are just some of the examples that demonstrate the embedded cooperation ongoing between the criminal justice agencies, North and South. It is my intention to report more fully on progress against the current work programme following the next IGA meeting with the Irish Justice Minister, which is scheduled to take place in Northern Ireland before next summer. In the meantime, progress against the work programme actions will be monitored by the working group of officials.

One action that arose from the 2014-15 work programme was the organisation of the fifth annual joint public protection seminar, which was held in Dublin on the same day as our meeting. The theme of the seminar was working with and in communities. It provided the opportunity for professionals from various justice agencies to discuss a number of key topics, and volume 11 of the 'Irish Probation Journal' was launched. Having addressed the previous four annual seminars, I was very pleased to join Frances Fitzgerald in opening the fifth.

Six project advisory groups provide the mechanism by which the work of the IGA is taken forward. They focus on the areas of public protection, registered offenders, youth justice, forensic science, support for victims of crime and social diversity. Each of the project advisory groups has continued to promote and support cooperation across the broad spectrum of criminal justice agencies on both sides of the border. On the management of sex offenders, for example, there continues to be excellent cooperation between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána at an operational level.

I used the opportunity on 21 November to advise Frances Fitzgerald of the recent publication by the Home Office of the expert panel's report on new psychoactive substances, more commonly known as legal highs. Whilst noting that the Home Office leads in the area, I nevertheless stated that my officials and I would be keen to learn from the approach and legislative response taken in Ireland to that complex issue.

I also advised the Irish Justice Minister about the recent publication of the inquiry report into child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland. Welcoming the inquiry report, which was produced by Professor Kathleen Marshall, I informed Frances Fitzgerald and her officials that I, along with colleagues in the justice system, will consider carefully the report and its recommendations. Given recent allegations about the sexual abuse of children, Frances Fitzgerald and I underscored at our meeting the importance of victims, or those with any information, coming forward to report such crimes to the relevant authorities, particularly if they have concerns about children who may be at risk.

Following on from our earlier contacts, we discussed the very disturbing allegations about the cover-up of sexual abuse by paramilitary organisations. A key concern is that abusers were seemingly allowed to remain in communities or were moved to communities where their activities were unknown to the authorities, and the normal measures could not be taken to protect children. We welcomed the fact that people are making information available. The information is being investigated, and, again, we emphasised the importance of anyone who has relevant information making it known to the authorities in our respective jurisdictions.

Whilst, in the first instance, we were anxious not to take any action that would interfere in any way with ongoing investigations, we agreed to continue to consider what further measures might be taken jointly to address the issue. We did that again last Friday when we met before the NSMC meeting in Armagh. Government officials in DOJ and DJE have begun to assess issues that might arise relevant to the establishment of an inquiry.

Frances Fitzgerald and I have indicated that a scoping exercise will examine the legal, procedural and constitutional complexities to be considered. To reiterate what I said on Friday:

"We have tasked officials to look at what further opportunities lie beyond the current issues of criminal investigations and support for victims. The important issue is that we do not cut across the work currently being done by the different agencies, North and South."

Minister Fitzgerald and I plan to meet again in January to assess progress.

11.15 am

In conclusion, the intergovernmental agreement provides an extremely helpful framework for supporting North/South cooperation on criminal justice matters. I am pleased to report that there remains good progress in enhancing and promoting further the development of North/South cooperation to make the whole island of Ireland a safer and better place for all our people, particularly protecting our children and the most vulnerable in our society. It is this that the Irish Justice Minister, Frances Fitzgerald, and I are fully committed to securing.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I thank the Minister for bringing the statement to the House. I welcome the U-turn by the Minister of Justice to look into a North/South investigation on the serious allegations about child abuse in the republican movement. I am disappointed that it took the intervention of the Irish Taoiseach for the Northern Ireland Justice Minister to have this change of position, despite the appeals that were made by some of his own people in the Assembly. Nevertheless, I welcome that change.

In his statement, the Minister said:

“The important issue is that we do not cut across the work currently being done by the different agencies, North and South.”

Given the work that is now being undertaken, will he assure the House that there will not be any attempt to hide behind the work being considered by the PPS and others in Northern Ireland on these issues but that there will be a very serious investigation, linking with the authorities in the Republic of Ireland, so that we can get to the truth about those who have been involved in child abuse and in moving perpetrators across the border to protect them in the South?

Mr Ford: I do not think that the Committee Chairperson can welcome a U-turn, because there has been no U-turn.

Mr Givan: Yes there has.

Mr Ford: I have consistently said that the first and most important issue is to ensure that criminal investigations, North and South, are not hampered and that I was open to seeing what might follow after those investigations were completed. That is exactly what I have said from the very beginning, and that is what Frances Fitzgerald and I said at the IGA meeting. That is what I repeated in Armagh last Friday.

Mr Givan: U-turns.

Mr Ford: Mr Givan may talk about U-turns as much as he likes. If he actually listened to what was said, he would realise that there is no U-turn whatsoever. If he wants to be serious and talk about ensuring that the work being done is not cut across — I think that that was the precise phrase that he used — I am committed to ensuring that the work being done at the moment — the review by the Police Ombudsman, the review commissioned by the Director of Public Prosecutions and being carried out on his behalf by Keir Starmer QC and the ongoing work of investigating further complaints being made to the PSNI

and an Garda Síochána — will continue. We will then see what appropriate work may follow.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I encourage Members to take the Minister's advice and listen to what is being said. More importantly, I encourage Members not to shout from a sedentary position. If it happens again, I will take action.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. Does the Minister agree that any proposed all-Ireland inquiry into sexual abuse during the conflict must involve all sections of society to meet the needs of all victims?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Mr Lynch that any inquiry must cover whatever allegations may come forward. At the moment, it seems to me that only one set of allegations is being made. As I understand it, only one set of criminal investigations is being carried out to investigate allegations made against certain republican paramilitaries.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tcím ón ráiteas go raibh plé ag an Aire agus a leathbhreac faoi shubstaintí sícighníomhacha le linn an chruinnithe. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí de caidé atá ar intinn aige a dhéanamh leis an mhéid a d'fhoghlaim sé faoin dlí fé mar atá sé sa Deisceart. I see from the Minister's statement that he discussed legal highs. What does he intend to do with the information that he has gleaned about the law as it operates in the South?

Mr Ford: Mr Bradley raises an entirely reasonable question, although the answer to it is that, since the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is a reserved matter and not a devolved matter, there is little that we can do directly. However, it is important that we use our influence in the conversations that I and officials have been having with the Home Office to ensure that it learns the lessons of international best practice, including, in particular, the recommendations that were made to its own inquiry to look at the Irish example. It is clear that there have been significant successes in closing down head shops across the Republic, and we should certainly learn from that. At the same time, we should also recognise the good work that has been done by environmental health officers in this jurisdiction. The key thing will be for the Home Office to act, and we will certainly use our influence to get a joined-up system across these islands where possible.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas seo agus a chuid freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers to date. Following on from Dominic Bradley's question, there is no doubt that the legislation in the Twenty-six Counties has practically wiped out the sales of legal highs on the high street. How can the Department be innovative and proactive in its approach to the British Home Office so that we can speed up the introduction of similar legislation in the North?

Mr Ford: I appreciate Mr McCartney's point, but there is little that I can add. I have certainly been in correspondence with Norman Baker and Lynne Featherstone, the two responsible Home Office Ministers. I have been supplied with a copy of their report, and my officials have looked through it in detail and engaged with Home Office officials. It certainly seems that there are strong lessons to be learned from the Irish approach. It has had significant successes across the border, and I hope that it will be followed up on by the Home Office.

However, beyond using our influence, there is little that we can do on a matter that is still technically reserved.

Mr Frew: Given the fact that the Minister failed to act at a very early stage on the allegations made about republican terrorists and organisations and left it to the Justice Committee to act, will he now support that investigation and inquiry by the Committee? Can he assure the House that he will do everything in his power to ensure that republican terrorists who were involved in the most heinous crimes across the two jurisdictions will be brought to task and justice will be served?

Mr Ford: There seems to be a bit of a pattern coming up, Deputy Speaker: lines like “the Minister failed to act”, when the Minister has been supportive of the relevant agencies carrying out their duties; has indicated that he will see what follows from that and what might be suitable for a wider inquiry; and has, because it is a cross-border issue, discussed it in phone calls and in two specific face-to-face meetings with the Irish Minister. It may suit cheap lines from the DUP Benches, but it is simply not factual.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his detailed statement. I want to ask about the potential and very novel cross-border inquiry into sexual abuse and the transfer of abusers from one jurisdiction to another. At what stage are the investigations by the police into these matters? What level and what stage are they at? No inquiry can take place unless there is an evidential basis.

Mr Ford: I have to agree with Mr Maginness's point. As I understand it, investigations are at a relatively early stage on both sides of the border. For example, I know that Regina Doherty TD has presented a number of names to an Garda Síochána. Some allegations have been made that are being considered by the PSNI, and we are all well aware of the ombudsman's inquiry and the review that is being carried out on behalf of the DPP. Those issues have to be addressed before we can properly tease out the potential for cross-border inquiry. There is also the quite serious issue that it might well require primary legislation in the Oireachtas, here and, potentially, Westminster. So, this is not something that could be done easily. It needs to be done right, if it is to be done, and we need to ensure that the ongoing work of the justice agencies to catch perpetrators, to prosecute them and to protect victims is not impeded by any grandstanding in this place.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for bringing the statement to the House. Can the Minister assure the House that the important cross-border cooperation in combating the sexual exploitation of children will not be hampered by any departmental budget cuts?

Mr Ford: Sadly, Mr Deputy Speaker, I can give no guarantee whatsoever about the ongoing work of the justice system not being hampered by budget cuts. Members will be aware of recent announcements by various justice agencies, which are looking at what the effect of cuts being imposed on my Department amount to, and, in the context in which the police are having to cut back on historical work, where the ombudsman has a small reduction in budget, and where the Public Prosecution Service, though not directly funded through my Department, has cuts, it is not possible to say whether this work will or will not be done. Clearly, the justice agencies are prioritising, and they are seeking to ensure that resources are directed to the most important issues,

but there can be no guarantee that there will not be some potential effect from the cuts that are being imposed.

Mr Allister: First, it was the disappeared; now, it is the relocated. In regard to the scandal of the relocated sex fiends of the IRA, what discussions has the Minister had with his Sinn Féin partners, who are well placed to know, about where those sex criminals were relocated and the risk that they continue to afford to innocent people?

Mr Ford: Mr Deputy Speaker, Mr Allister makes a point about what may be known by some people, but the reality is that the Department of Justice does not conduct criminal investigations; the PSNI and an Garda Síochána do.

Mr Poots: I welcome the fact that the Minister seems to have been stirred up from his laissez-faire approach to the child sex abuse that has been perpetrated by paramilitary organisations. We know that the PPS has been sitting on a report, carried out by the Attorney General, for over a year. What steps does the Minister intend to take to move this forward, and to do so at a rapid pace, rather than have it as something that is put on the long finger?

Mr Ford: It looks like Mr Poots does not listen, but then again, he was not in at the start of the statement, Mr Deputy Speaker. There is no laissez-faire, never mind “lassey-faire” attitude in the Department of Justice. The Department of Justice is allowing the relevant justice agencies to carry out their duties, and it is examining the scope for further inquiries in conjunction with our colleagues in the Department of Justice and Equality, because that is the appropriate and responsible way for Ministers to behave. They should not interfere with the work that needs to be done to deal with criminal offences and allegations of criminal offences. I made it perfectly clear what the long-term options were, but if DUP Members wish to continue repeating slander and smears against me, I will continue to respond with the truth, which appears to upset them.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That concludes questions on the statement. I ask Members to take their ease for a moment, please.

11.30 am

Executive Committee Business

Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): I beg to move

That the draft Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

I seek the Assembly's approval for the draft regulations, which transpose paragraphs 5 to 9 of article 14 of the energy efficiency directive. The energy efficiency directive was adopted on 25 October 2012 and updates the EU's legal framework for energy efficiency, pursuing the target of saving 20% of the EU's primary energy consumption by 2020 and making further energy efficiency improvements after 2020. Although DETI is transposing most of the directive, I agreed that my Department would take forward the transposition of article 14 paragraphs 5 to 9, as my Department already regulates most of the affected installations.

The directive requirements are as follows: new or substantially refurbished thermal electricity generation installations with a total thermal input exceeding 20 megawatts will be required to undertake a cost-benefit analysis in order to assess the feasibility of operating a high-efficiency cogeneration installation; new or refurbished industrial installations with a total thermal input exceeding 20 megawatts generating waste heat at a useful temperature level must undertake a cost-benefit analysis in order to assess the feasibility of utilising the waste heat to satisfy economically justified demand, including through cogeneration, and of the connection of that installation to a district heating and cooling network; and new or substantially refurbished energy production installations with a total thermal input exceeding 20 megawatts in district heating and cooling networks must also carry out a cost-benefit analysis in order to assess the cost and benefits of utilising the waste heat from nearby industrial installations.

Regulators are required to put conditions in permits ensuring that, in cases where the cost benefit is positive, the installations are operated in the manner shown to be cost beneficial. My Department has worked closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the other devolved Administrations to ensure that the requirements are implemented in a consistent manner across the UK. It is estimated that it will affect only 22 installations over the next 10 years in Northern Ireland. Installations that have only small amounts of waste heat or where the heat links are not economical because of the distances involved are exempted from having to undertake a cost-benefit analysis. I ask the Assembly to approve the draft regulations.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): Excuse me for being a bit breathless from rushing down here. Things are moving fast this morning.

I thank the Minister for his explanation of the background and purpose of the draft affirmative statutory rule. The Committee was briefed by departmental officials on

the content of the rule on Thursday 20 November 2014. Officials explained that the regulations would impact only on large heat users, such as dairies, power stations, hospitals and universities. As the Minister said, only around 22 installations are likely to be affected over the 10-year period from 2014 to 2024.

Members were made aware that the rule stems from a European Commission directive and that the Department is obliged to transpose the requirements into this subordinate legislation, but some members of the Committee queried whether there should be an EU subsidy to assist with the costs of conducting the analysis, given that it is a directive driven by the EU. It is an issue that the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment may wish to consider.

Concerns were also raised by some members about the initial costs to businesses associated with the introduction of the rule, which can range from £10,000 to £40,000 to carry out a cost-benefit analysis. Many businesses and public-sector organisations are already under severe financial pressure. However, officials indicated that this represented a tiny percentage of the gross operating surplus. The Committee was content that long-term savings could arise from the legislation. The Committee agreed to recommend that the motion be affirmed by the Assembly as drafted.

Mrs Cameron: I, too, thank the Minister for his explanation of the background and purpose of the draft affirmative statutory rule. I thank the officials who briefed the Committee back in November.

There is little to add to what has already been said, given the relative lack of clarity around the exact costs and savings to businesses. On rereading the Hansard report of the officials' evidence, it struck me that the reported costs to businesses of between £10,000 and £40,000 simply to carry out a cost-benefit analysis was apparently the best guess of consultants. Given the existing financial pressure that all the affected businesses are likely to be under at present, I ask that the Minister keep a close eye on the costings provided and seek to agree the most cost-efficient way to carry out this mandatory exercise.

I close by saying that it is perhaps telling that the European Parliament, which cannot balance its own books and continually fails to meet its own targets, seeks to bail itself out by passing the cost of its failed targets on to businesses, backed up by threats of fines to the Executive if they are not delivered. If only the European Parliament was subjected to similar accountability, I might be more enthusiastic in examining the directives it issues. However, I support the motion this morning.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Chair and vice-chair of the Environment Committee for their contributions and their support and the fact that neither of them asked me any questions about the regulations. The regulations will allow my Department to transpose the relevant parts of article 14 of the energy efficiency directive. I thank Members and the Committee for their support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Pension Schemes Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

I beg to move

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of clause 45 of and schedule 5 to the Pension Schemes Bill, as amended in Committee in the House of Commons dealing with a pension scheme for fee-paid judges.

Today, I seek the Assembly's agreement to extend to Northern Ireland the provisions of the Westminster Pension Schemes Bill, dealing with the pension arrangements for fee-paid judicial office holders. The requirement to do so has arisen because of a Supreme Court decision in the case of *O'Brien v Ministry of Justice*. In that case, which dealt with the interpretation and application of the part-time workers directive, the UK Supreme Court held that Mr O'Brien, a fee-paid recorder, was entitled to a pension on terms equivalent to those enjoyed by his salaried counterparts.

The effect of the judgement is that all qualifying fee-paid judicial office holders who have a salaried comparator are now entitled to a pension. Following its decision, the Supreme Court referred the matter to an employment tribunal to determine the details of the pension entitlement. Corresponding litigation is ongoing in Northern Ireland. While some matters remain the subject of litigation, the Ministry of Justice, on 17 June 2014, published a statement indicating that in 2015-16 it will put in place a pension scheme for eligible fee-paid judicial office holders for whom it is responsible.

Following careful consideration, my Department has accepted that the fee-paid judicial office holders for whom it has responsibility — chairmen of our industrial tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal — have salaried comparators. It is therefore necessary to establish pension arrangements for those individuals.

It may be helpful to provide some context for Members. Current UK-wide pension provisions for salaried judges were established by the Judicial Pensions and Retirement Act 1993. When that legislation was enacted, it was not envisaged that fee-paid judicial office holders would have access to pension provisions. As a consequence, nothing in current statute permits fee-paid judicial office-holders to access those arrangements. Given the decision in the *O'Brien* case, there is now a need to address that situation.

As part of the programme of wider public-sector pension reform, from 2015 onwards a new judicial pension scheme is being established that will align with the overall framework of the public-sector reforms, including, for example, career-average pension benefits, with normal scheme pension age being linked to state pension age. However, action also needs to be taken to provide a retrospective remedy for eligible fee-paid judicial office holders who have already missed out on pension entitlements since 2000, when the part-time workers directive came into effect. With that in mind, the Ministry of Justice indicated in August 2014 its intention to amend the Judicial Pensions and Retirement Act 1993 to provide the required remedy scheme for its eligible fee-paid judicial office holders. That is being achieved through the

introduction of government amendments to the Pension Schemes Bill currently before Parliament.

The reason for presenting the legislative consent motion is to obtain Assembly approval to apply Ministry of Justice amendments to the relatively small number of fee-paid devolved judiciary who fall within the responsibility of a number of Northern Ireland Departments. Although separate primary legislation could indeed be introduced, given the small numbers of devolved office holders, it would, in my judgment, be disproportionate to pursue stand-alone, highly technical legislation for this purpose.

Having explained the reasons for bringing the motion to the House, I commend the Employment and Learning Committee for the timely manner in which it addressed the matter and for its report, which outlined that the Committee would support the motion. I thank the Committee for its support.

My Department has accepted that its fee-paid judicial office holders have comparable salaried counterparts and are therefore entitled to access an equivalent pension scheme. Agreement to the motion will enable the Lord Chancellor to extend coverage of a pension scheme for fee-paid judiciary to all eligible devolved office holders in Northern Ireland. It is a time-bound scheme that will apply to fee-paid office holders in respect of service from 7 April 2000 to 31 March 2015, in compliance with the Supreme Court judgement. I hope that Members will agree with me and support the motion that I have laid before the Assembly.

Mr Buchanan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I have only a few short remarks to make. The overall purpose of the Bill, as the Minister said, is to establish a new legislative framework for private pensions, defining them on the basis of the promise that they offer for members about their retirement benefits during the accumulation phase.

The Minister for Employment and Learning wrote to the Committee on 25 September 2014, notifying it of the outcome of the UK Supreme Court case of *O'Brien v Ministry of Justice*, which held that fee-paid judicial office holders were entitled to a pension on terms equivalent to those enjoyed by their salaried counterparts. The Minister also advised that the impact of the judgement is that the Ministry of Justice tabled an amendment on 11 September to the Pension Schemes Bill currently before Parliament to establish pension arrangements for fee-paid judicial office holders.

The Committee has been assured that the Departments responsible for the Northern Ireland judiciary have agreed that it is appropriate to seek to extend the amendments now being proposed in Parliament to the Pension Schemes Bill so that they may be applied in Northern Ireland. The Committee is also assured that implementing this by way of a legislative consent motion has the Executive's approval.

The Committee received the legislative consent motion on 12 November 2014 and considered it at a meeting on 19 November 2014.

Officials from the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Justice briefed the Committee on the legislative consent motion. In response to questions from the Committee, they outlined the

reasons for choosing a legislative consent motion to amend the current legislation.

11.45 am

To ensure that the scheme can be operational in 2015-16, appropriate primary legislative powers should be in place early enough to allow for the preparation of regulations and for setting in place the necessary supporting IT, administrative and governance arrangements.

The Committee was briefed on the three legislative options that are open to the Department. The first was to identify a suitable primary legislative vehicle to take forward the relevant amendments. However, such a vehicle is unlikely to become available in the immediate future, and if that option were pursued, the establishment of a pension for fee-paid devolved judicial office holders would be significantly delayed.

The second option was the development of a Bill specifically for providing entitlement. That would involve a lengthy process and would be a disproportionate use of resources and time, given that, currently, only a small number of individuals may be affected. Again, pursuing that option would significantly delay the establishment of the pension.

Finally, the third option, which the Committee chose, was to use a legislative consent motion, which is considered to be the most timely, reasonable and proportionate way forward in the circumstances.

It was with that in mind that the Committee concluded that it was prepared to support the Department in seeking the Assembly's endorsement of the legislative consent motion.

Dr Farry: I warmly welcome all Members' contributions, particularly that of the Deputy Chair of the Committee. Again, I will put on record our thanks to the Executive, particularly the First Minister and deputy First Minister, for the manner in which they addressed the issue, and to the Committee, for the timely manner in which it expedited the matter. It is largely technical, and I believe that it is something that we have to do to ensure that we live within the requirements that the UK Supreme Court set out. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of clause 45 of and schedule 5 to the Pension Schemes Bill, as amended in Committee in the House of Commons dealing with a pension scheme for fee-paid judges.

Committee Business

Topical Questions: Review Report

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour for the debate. The proposer will have 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Clarke (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee on Procedures on its Review of Topical Questions [NIA 209/11-16].

On behalf of the Committee on Procedures, I am pleased to bring to the House today the Committee's report on its review of topical questions. When the Assembly agreed to the introduction of topical questions, it was agreed that the Committee on Procedures should review the process after a six-month trial period.

Members will be aware that a single-issue review was carried out in November 2013 following concerns about the positioning of topical questions before listed oral questions. That review resulted in topical Question Time being moved to the 15-minute slot after Assembly questions to each Minister. That did not preclude the need for a full review of the process, and the report sets out the findings of that full review.

To inform the Committee's review, data was collected throughout the review period. You will see from the report that the statistical information covers the last session from September 2013 to July 2014. I will perhaps highlight some of the key findings in the report.

In the last session, 1,556 topical questions and supplementary questions were put to Ministers during topical Question Time. Initial fears that Ministers would be unable to respond effectively to that type of spontaneous questioning have not been realised.

Having considered the statistical information and evidence provided, the Committee concluded that topical Question Time has provided a valuable additional opportunity to hold Ministers and Departments to account and that it should be retained largely unchanged. The revised order of Question Time, with topical questions following the listed questions for oral answer, has been seen as an improvement, and the Committee recommends no change to the existing order.

There was general agreement in the stakeholder submissions that the 45 minutes allocated at Question Time to each Minister was appropriate, and the Committee recommends no change to that.

One issue that was raised in all stakeholder responses relates to the balance of time allocated to topical questions and listed questions for oral answer. A variety of views was expressed by stakeholders as to what the breakdown of time should be. Although some were in favour of increasing the length of time given to topical questions, others were not. Having taken into account the balance of opinion expressed, the Committee concluded that the current breakdown of time allocated at Question Time should be retained. The Committee believes that that area warrants further consideration and has therefore

recommended that the matter be subject to a further review after a six-month period.

Evidence provided by the junior Ministers indicated that there may be benefit in Ministers having advance notice of the topic to be raised, as that might prove helpful in enhancing answers. The matter was not raised as a concern in any other submissions, so the Committee was content to recommend no change to the current procedures for advance notice at topical Question Time.

The review also considered whether any further admissibility criteria should be introduced and whether there should be a definition of "topicality". Ministers were in favour of introducing a specific definition, but other stakeholders were not. That includes the former Speaker, who said that it would be difficult for him to be aware of every emerging departmental or constituency issue and that he would therefore be hard-pressed to rule on admissibility in the Chamber. Having taken into account the balance of opinion expressed, and bearing in mind that one of the aims of topical Question Time was to achieve spontaneity, the Committee concluded that no additional admissibility criteria or definition of "topicality" should be introduced.

The Committee also considered whether restrictions on who can ask topical questions should be introduced. Again, stakeholder opinion was mixed. The Executive did not offer an agreed opinion, with some Ministers strongly opposed to any restriction, suggesting that it would inhibit the rights of Members from certain parties to hold all Ministers to account. Some Ministers, however, supported the introduction of a partial restriction, similar to that in force for questions for oral answer under Standing Order 20(7), whereby the first question may not be asked by a Member from the same party as the Minister. The Committee concurs with that view and therefore recommends that Standing Orders be amended to include a similar restriction for topical questions that mirrors Standing Order 20(7).

The final issue considered by the Committee was the use of supplementary questions, and whether enhanced scrutiny could be achieved by allowing Members other than the Member who had posed the initial topical question to ask them. Although a number of stakeholders indicated that they would be content if such a change were introduced, they also said that such a step would likely reduce the number of topical questions covered in the time permitted. In forming a view on the matter, the Committee weighed the benefit afforded to other Members if extra supplementary questions were permitted against the detriment to Members drawn in the ballot should their question not be reached. After careful consideration, the Committee concluded that no changes should be made to the current procedures for supplementary questions permitted during topical Question Time.

The Committee conducted a thorough and comprehensive review of the topical questions process. The Committee asks that the Assembly agree the report and give its approval to proceed with drafting amendments to Standing Orders to implement the recommendations set out in it. I thank members of the Committee for their considered deliberations during the review and all who made a contribution. I look forward to today's debate and commend the report to the House.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Deputy Chair of the Committee for his contribution. There is very little else to add.

Members have a copy of the report, and, on behalf of the Alliance Party, I support the review of topical questions. I thank the Committee staff who worked with us to examine the issues fully and to come up with the report. I also thank those who came before the Committee to give evidence and, indeed, those who submitted written evidence. As in all cases, not everyone gets what they want, but I think that we have come to a fairly reasonable conclusion. Our Deputy Chair has covered all the important aspects of the review, and I am fully in agreement with him. I ask the Assembly to support the motion.

Mr Clarke: I thank the only Member who made a contribution. To be fair to the Member, in his remarks he described the conclusion as "reasonable". All the Members who represent each of the parties on the Committee had an opportunity to make their contribution. I commend the report as submitted to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee on Procedures on its Review of Topical Questions [NIA 209/11-16].

Private Members' Business

Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill: Final Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I inform the House that consent for the Bill as amended has been received from the Secretary of State.

Lord Morrow: I beg to move

That the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill [NIA 26/11-15] do now pass.

I am glad to rise today, although much earlier than I — or, I suspect, the rest of the House — anticipated. That is the way things go sometimes. I open the debate by noting that, as Members will appreciate, the passage of this Bill has been a long journey for me. It is nearly three years since I decided to take it forward. It will be no surprise to anyone when I say that I am glad that the process is reaching a successful conclusion today. In my opening remarks I want to explain what underpins my desire to bring this Bill forward, before outlining my heartfelt thanks to the many individuals who played a significant role in seeing the Bill come this far.

Members may be aware that I am a practising Christian, like many others around the House today, and I have always strongly believed that every person is made in the image of God and therefore has an intrinsic dignity that must be respected. Human trafficking is a horrific abuse of a person made in the image of God. The process of bringing this legislation to the Assembly has made it abundantly clear to me that every Member of this House, regardless of their faith or lack of it, agrees that human trafficking is a heinous crime which needs to be tackled in this Province, even if there is some disagreement on how best to achieve that goal.

For me, taking action was very much motivated by my Christian faith and principles. I am not ashamed to say so. Others seeking to tackle this crime derive their motivation from another source. When I heard that this crime was taking place in Northern Ireland, I wanted to see what I could do to bolster our response as a country. As a Member of the Assembly, I was in a position to make a difference, so I looked into the subject and sought to see whether we could improve our response.

I brought this Bill forward because I believed that we in Northern Ireland could have a better legislative framework to tackle human trafficking and exploitation. From the start of the process, I had three main aims for the Bill. First, I wanted to improve support services for victims of trafficking and exploitation to ensure that those who have suffered from these crimes are appropriately supported and cared for. Secondly, I wanted to reduce demand for human trafficking and exploitation in Northern Ireland through a variety of measures. Thirdly, I wanted to ensure that perpetrators of these heinous crimes are effectively punished.

12.00 noon

The Bill that we will vote on later today looks different in some respects from the Bill that I first introduced to the Assembly. The positive changes that have been made

throughout the legislative process in the Assembly ensure that the Bill meets the aims that I set for it from the outset. I am also pleased that the Assembly has been able to agree on legislation that goes much further than the Modern Slavery Bill at Westminster. It is rare for us in the Assembly to lead the way in the United Kingdom in policy, but we clearly are doing so through this Bill, and parliamentarians at Westminster recognise that.

At this juncture, I urge Westminster parliamentarians to consider introducing the changes that we are making through this Bill during the passage of the Modern Slavery Bill. That is especially the case with regard to the introduction of guardians for trafficked and separated children and the statutory guarantee of support for victims of human trafficking. If the Assembly passes this legislation today, as I very much hope it will, victims of human trafficking will be better provided for in Northern Ireland than they are in other parts of the United Kingdom. The British Government would do well to reflect on that as the Modern Slavery Bill continues its passage through Westminster.

I urge Westminster to follow us in criminalising the purchase of sexual services. We, of course, have followed others in doing so, including Sweden, Norway, Iceland and now Canada. I will not dwell much today on the debate on clause 15. A lot of time has been given to it throughout the process, and it clearly has been the most divisive aspect of my Bill. However, I made that proposal because I believe, on the basis of the evidence that we have seen in other jurisdictions, that it is the most effective way of tackling human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and the exploitation of individuals involved in prostitution. I do not believe that this approach will solve everything, nor have I ever suggested that it would. In reality, as with many complex social issues, there is no perfect way of tackling the issues involved, but the evidence clearly suggests that the approach modelled by Sweden is the best available. It recognises the abuses involved in the prostitution industry and seeks to reduce the core driver for prostitution — the demand for paid sex. I can understand why certain Members opposed that approach. Some of the arguments made had some merit, but, on balance, I and the vast majority of Members of the House felt that it was the right way for Northern Ireland. It is an irony that what is allegedly the most controversial part of my Bill received the largest majority in voting: of those who voted, nearly 90% voted for it. That speaks for itself.

Before I close today, I want to put on record my thanks to a number of individuals for the work that they put in on the Bill. First, I again convey my thanks to the Minister of Justice and his civil servants for how he has worked with me throughout the passage of the Bill. I think that it is safe to say that the Minister and his team were sceptical when I first announced that I wanted to introduce the legislation. I can, of course, understand why that might have been the case. After all, I was a member of another political party and was looking to introduce legislation that affected the Minister's Department. However, I am very grateful that the Minister, over time, came to the view that he could support many aspects of my Bill, and he and his civil servants have worked constructively with me on its contents even though he disagreed with aspects of what I was proposing. It is to his credit that he was willing to put aside party difference to work with me on something as important as this subject. I can sincerely say that the Bill before the House today has been significantly

improved as a consequence of the Department positively engaging with me on its contents. I also want to give special mention to one particular civil servant in the Department of Justice: Julie Wilson. She will no doubt be pleased to see the back of me after the Bill completes its passage through the Assembly. She had to deal with the complexities of working on the Bill when there was no real blueprint for how to go about it. She conducted herself with constant professionalism throughout and was always helpful to me as I sought to engage with the Department. It is very clear to me that she is a real credit to the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The Minister, as, I am sure, he will agree, is very fortunate to have her in his Department.

Secondly, I thank the current Health Minister and his predecessor for their positive engagement with me on aspects of my Bill. Both Minister Poots, as he then was, and Minister Wells were fully supportive of what I was trying to achieve through the Bill and did their utmost to help to ensure that the best provisions could be drawn up. I am grateful to them both for their support in this matter. I should further add that the civil servants in the Health Department did an excellent job in seeing good provisions come before the House.

Thirdly, I thank all the members of the Committee for Justice, who scrutinised the Bill while it was passing through the Assembly. I know that it was not easy for members to deal with some of what was discussed. The subjects of prostitution and human trafficking are not easy to handle. However, the Committee did a superb job in scrutinising the legislation and suggesting improvements that could be made to it. All members from across the parties gave the subject the attention it deserved. I believe that the Committee has shown itself to be one of the best, aside from the Committee for the Environment of course. It has proved itself on many occasions during the Bill.

I do not want to forget the work of the Committee staff. Having been Chair of the Committee for Justice, I know how exceptional they are. I am sure that the Committee would want to pay tribute to them for their work on the Bill. I also want to give a special mention to Paul Givan for his work as Chair of the Committee. I know that he will soon step down as Chair, but I want to thank him for his hard work on the Bill. He showed a sure hand in considering the legislation, and I have no doubt that he is destined for greater things in the months and years ahead. I wish him well. I hope that he enjoys his private Member's Bill process as much as I have, as he brings forward his Bill in the coming months. The one thing that I will say to him is that he has plenty of work ahead of him; I can tell him that from experience. I also want to mention the Clerk of the Justice Committee, Christine Darragh, who was totally professional in all her dealings with me during what seemed an eternity. It is almost three years since I started on this journey. I suspect that many got weary of me. At times, I felt weary; not of them, but in another way.

Fourthly, I thank the Attorney General and his staff for their assistance in bringing the Bill forward. The Attorney General was consistently available to me throughout the passage of the Bill and ever willing to consider the legal issues that arose with regard to it, and I hasten to add that there were many. I greatly appreciated his wisdom and insight with regard to the provisions of my Bill, alongside those of his staff. We in the Assembly are fortunate to have

someone as bright, intelligent and gifted as the current Attorney General.

Fifthly, I pay tribute to the Bill Office, particularly Éilis Haughey and Damien Martin. The process of bringing a Bill before the Northern Ireland Assembly is a complicated one. Éilis and Damien did a fantastic job guiding my team and me through the process here at the Assembly. They were constantly helpful from start to finish and were always willing to help out in any way that they could. I am very grateful to them both for their work on this matter. Having such high-quality staff in the Bill Office really makes a difference in guiding legislation through this place. I must also name the person sitting to your left, Deputy Speaker: Patricia Casey. At the very early stages, her guidance, advice and support was invaluable as she sought to steer me and, at times, maybe settle me down when I thought that things were not going forward. I put on record my appreciation of Patricia also.

Sixthly and finally, I thank the many NGOs that helped to support me throughout the passage of the Bill. A considerable number of them contributed to the consultation on my Bill and gave evidence to the Justice Committee on its contents. I am thankful to every NGO that contributed to the process. Without a doubt, the Bill has been improved by their input. I single out a couple in particular. I am extremely grateful to Christian Action Research and Education (CARE) for its excellent briefings and advice throughout the many years of the Bill's development. Its expertise assisted me greatly as I sought to understand the issue of human trafficking here in Northern Ireland. Dr Dan Boucher, Mark Baillie, Louise Gleich and Claire Wilson-Thomas were superb. They were very professional. They did a mountain of research. Whatever words I might say about them here today will fall far short of what should be said.

To Members who are contemplating taking through a private Member's Bill I say this: make sure that you have the right team around you. I was, to some degree, envious of Departments because they seem to have unlimited resources. A private Member does not have that; they must gather their own team around them. Fortunately, I was able to do that. I gathered some of the best expertise available in relation to this matter.

I also thank Women's Aid, Ruhama and Survivors of Prostitution-Abuse Calling for Enlightenment (SPACE) International for their support with regard to clause 15. Those organisations do invaluable work supporting women in prostitution not only here in Northern Ireland but in southern Ireland. They are engaged in work that seeks to see society change for the better. I found the support of Sarah Benson, Geraldine Rowley, Rachel Moran, Louise Kennedy and Noelle Collins to be of great value throughout the process. I am so thankful to them that they were willing to so positively engage with me to see clause 15 become a reality. Their expertise and commitment were total. It was apparent when we spoke to them that nothing was too much trouble for them. They applied themselves to producing and providing a lot of assistance to get the Bill to the stage it is at today.

I record my gratitude to the Law Centre and the office of the Children's Commissioner. I am aware that the Children's Commissioner is not an NGO but a quango of a sort, but it seems fitting to consider it here too. The Law Centre and the office of the Children's Commissioner

provided valuable expertise with regard to the introduction of a guardian for separated children. I hope that they take pride in knowing that they played a critical role in seeing that provision become law.

Furthermore, I mention Gunilla Ekberg, who is a world authority on the issue. She was an adviser to the Swedish Government when they were taking similar legislation through, and I was able to bring Gunilla on board with me. I knew that I was in the company of someone who had a deep knowledge and understanding of the issue. I am eternally grateful to her for all the expertise she brought so willingly. She gave of her time unstintingly.

12.15 pm

To conclude my remarks today, I make one thing clear: legislation, in and of itself, will not make a difference if it is not effectively supported and enforced. Today may mark the end of the passage of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill, but the most important part will begin once it comes into force. It is my hope that its provisions will make a real difference to some of the most vulnerable people in Northern Ireland, whether they are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation or forced labour or other forms of trafficking. I will watch closely as the PSNI seeks to enforce the new offences and the Departments of Health and Justice seek to roll out the provisions in the Bill, assuming, of course, that the House votes for the Bill at this stage. I know that the Department of Justice and the PSNI will continue in their work to tackle these crimes. I hope that my Bill will assist their efforts in this area.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I want to begin at Final Stage by commending the proposer of the Bill for his work. He talked about it being a three-year journey: with half remission, that would be a six-year sentence. In that respect, I think that he knows that it has been a long journey. From a party point of view, on behalf of the Sinn Féin members of the Committee, I commend him for the work that he carried out and all the briefings that he provided as he took the Bill through the process, particularly on what was formerly clause 6 and became clause 15. He has rightly mentioned the many people who supported him in what he called his team. Some of those people met us as a party, and they gave evidence to the Committee. We, too, appreciate that work. Lord Morrow has already said this, but we have to put on record the professionalism that the Committee staff and the Department brought to this at all times.

It was obviously a longer and more intense journey for the proposer of the Bill, Lord Morrow, but for us, as a Committee, it was also very detailed work. Many of the briefings were very informative. Lord Morrow said that, if you compared an initial copy of the Bill with what will be voted on this afternoon, you would see the differences that have been made. That, in itself, is a positive. One person had an intention, and then, when they engaged with other people, including the Department, that helped to shape the Bill and to make it better as it went through.

From our point of view, there was a number of very important aspects. Our visit to the Oireachtas Committee and its detailed report also informed us. Lord Morrow mentioned Jim Wells. Jim Wells's favourite person in life at that time was Pádraig Mac Lochlainn, so I think that Pádraig Mac Lochlainn goes away from this very heartened. One degree of disappointment in all this is that,

at Further Consideration Stage, I said that I hoped that he would be invited to the DUP conference. That has come and gone, and he did not get an invite. However, I am sure that he lives in hope that he will be invited next year.

Lord Morrow talked about this when he was concluding. At the core of the Bill is an attempt to deal with exploitation; that is what we were all focused on. He said that there were issues on which people needed to be convinced and brought along on a journey. The way that it was carried out certainly helped people to do that. It was not seen as people being opposed to something for the sake of it; there were genuinely held concerns. The sponsor of the Bill did well in acknowledging, accepting and realising that and then working very hard to change people's minds.

Lord Morrow said that — we sort of know that the Bill will be voted through later this afternoon — it is now about testing its effect. If we set out to tackle exploitation in whatever form, we have to ensure that the Bill has an effect. We were guided by the answers to many of the questions that we asked about the Bill's intention, outcome and effect. We now wait for that effect as we go forward.

Lord Morrow mentioned the Committee's work. I pay tribute to the staff and the Committee Chair, who he said was now leaving. From a Sinn Féin point of view, throughout the Committee Stage, opinion was divided on many issues and aspects of the Bill but no barriers were ever put in front of members who wanted to tease out questions.

As a result, there were some long sessions. The Chair is to be commended for that approach. There is sometimes a tendency for people to want meetings to be over quickly, but we can say that that did not happen in the Justice Committee. That approach allows people to exhaust whatever avenue they want in interrogating or testing any piece of evidence. That was similar for this Bill.

We will certainly be supporting the Bill. In conclusion, I commend the proposer of the Bill for his work and, indeed, his courtesy throughout in all his engagements with the Committee and the party on separate matters. Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. On behalf of the Committee for Justice, I very much welcome the Final Stage of the human trafficking and exploitation Bill. I again place on record my congratulations to Lord Morrow and his team as we enter the final straight for the Bill. No one should underestimate the perseverance, hard work and commitment that it has taken to get the Bill to this stage.

Lord Morrow thanked at length a broad range of people for their support, as well as those who carried out the scrutiny of the Bill. However, it was Lord Morrow who had the vision and identified the need to try to do something. It was Lord Morrow who set himself the task of bringing forward a private Member's Bill, which are very rare and difficult to navigate through the Assembly.

People will often ask themselves this question: what did you ever achieve in politics? What was your legacy? There is no doubt that Lord Morrow will be able to look back on this Bill as one of the most significant achievements of his political career and as a legacy that will stand the test of time. It is a legacy that is about helping the most vulnerable and giving a voice to the voiceless.

I think that that is a commendation that Lord Morrow is worthy of in the way that he addressed this issue and the tenacity that he showed, at times in the face of obstacles that were put in his way. The Department gave resources to try to undermine the work that was being done.

On the one hand, I accept that there was an engagement with the Minister on these issues, but there was also an attempt, particularly on clause 6, which is now clause 15, to undermine that aspect of it. Despite all that, Lord Morrow was able to navigate the Bill through the Assembly because the strength of the argument was overwhelming and convincing for Members.

As I said on numerous occasions, human trafficking is a heinous crime that devastates people's lives, which the Justice Committee heard at first hand. It needs to be tackled robustly and from every possible angle, which the Bill does.

While the Bill underwent extensive scrutiny and consideration during Committee Stage and the lengthy debates, particularly at Consideration Stage, and while a large range of amendments were made to it, the principles that Lord Morrow brought to the Assembly and the core of the Bill have not changed. In bringing this Bill forward, Lord Morrow wanted not only to provide a more effective legal framework to tackle and provide a deterrent to human trafficking and slavery offences but to provide the necessary support and assistance to victims of human trafficking. The Bill is very much an overall package rather than just the one clause — clause 6, which is now clause 15 — that attracted so much publicity.

When Lord Morrow first briefed the Justice Committee, he outlined that he wanted Northern Ireland to lead the way in protecting some of the most vulnerable men, women and children. He wanted other countries to look at us as a model for tackling the scourge of human trafficking. He also wanted us to adopt a maximalist approach that was in line with the spirit of the EU directive, not just the letter of it. I have no doubt that the Bill achieves both objectives admirably.

The Assembly should be proud of the Bill. Indeed, during the recent Second Reading debate in the House of Lords on the Modern Slavery Bill, a number of contributors praised the Human Trafficking Bill. Lord McColl of Dulwich paid tribute to Lord Morrow and described the legislation as “excellent” and “ground-breaking”. Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws stated:

“I, too, would like to see a greater synergy with Northern Ireland and what is being drafted in Scotland. I think it right that we have been ousted by Northern Ireland's progressiveness on this.”

Given the importance of the Bill and the interest expressed in it, the Committee spent a considerable amount of time undertaking detailed and careful scrutiny of all the clauses, with the aim of ensuring that Northern Ireland has the strongest possible legislation to tackle human trafficking. That was not an easy task, and some of the oral evidence relating to personal experiences was very difficult to listen to. Those personal testimonies were very powerful, and they will stay in the memory of the Committee members who heard them.

The Bill will consolidate and simplify the legislative framework on human trafficking and slavery offences, and

it will introduce new offences and penalties to strengthen the ability of the police and the courts to deal with the perpetrators. The Committee welcomes that approach, as it does the fact that the new offences will be triable on indictment only and the fact that a prosecution is not dependent on reporting or accusation by a victim and can take place even if the victim has withdrawn his or her statement.

The Committee also welcomes the fact that the Assembly supported the inclusion in the Bill of clause 7, which provides for a minimum sentence for human trafficking and slavery offences. The Committee is clear in its support for a robust sentencing framework that reflects the gravity of human trafficking and slavery offences and that indicates the seriousness with which such offences are viewed in Northern Ireland. The provision will send a strong message to the perpetrators of human trafficking.

The Bill also recognises the importance of providing appropriate training and resources for investigations into, and the prosecution of, human trafficking and slavery offences and places a requirement for the strategy provided for in clause 12 to cover those issues, which allows for a comprehensive multi-agency approach. That is a necessary element of the overall package of measures to tackle human trafficking and slavery.

Issues relating to whether a Northern Ireland rapporteur or the UK-wide Anti-slavery Commissioner was more appropriate to provide effective monitoring and accountability arrangements were raised and discussed during Committee Stage. The debates at Consideration Stage and Further Consideration Stage, as well as the debate on the legislative consent motion in the Assembly yesterday, also provided further opportunities to discuss the key issues, which I will not rehearse again.

Suffice it to say, the Committee supported the principle of having an independent body to monitor and report on the response to human trafficking in Northern Ireland. However, it is satisfied that the role and remit of the UK-wide Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner will provide for that and is therefore content for remit of the commissioner to extend to Northern Ireland. There is no longer any need for the Bill to provide for a separate rapporteur in Northern Ireland.

As I indicated, what is now clause 15 of the Bill attracted the most attention, the most comment and the most controversy, and much of the written evidence received by the Committee focused on it. We listened to oral evidence from a wide range of organisations and individuals, including some who are, or were, involved in prostitution, and held informal meetings with a victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation and a sex purchaser. We visited Sweden and met with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality to discuss the findings of its report on a review of legislation on prostitution, which recommended the adoption of the Swedish approach of criminalising the purchase of sexual services.

The Committee agreed to support the inclusion of the clause, believing that criminalising the purchase of sexual services will curtail demand and lessen the incentive for human trafficking for sexual exploitation, thus reducing it and making Northern Ireland a hostile place for such activity. That stance was subsequently supported by the

Assembly with an overwhelming majority. The Bill is much stronger as a result of the inclusion of the clause.

The Committee also accepted the importance of ensuring that support services be put in place for those who are in, have exited or wish to exit prostitution, and it is therefore pleased that the Bill includes such a requirement. One of the key strengths of the Bill is the assistance, support and protection that it will provide to victims and possible victims of human trafficking and slavery. This includes a statutory defence for victims of slavery and human trafficking who have been compelled to commit offences; support and assistance whether criminal proceedings are taken or not; the establishment of an independent guardian to assist, represent and support children; and the extension of the provision of special measures to victims of trafficking during the investigation and court processes. All these measures improve how victims are supported and treated and are very welcome.

12.30 pm

Finally, I will move on to the commencement provision in the Bill. The Committee was the catalyst for the changes made at Further Consideration Stage. I am very pleased that, as a result, the vast majority of the provisions in the Bill will come into effect either on Royal Assent or within six months of it, and the requirement for the Minister of Justice to commence provisions with which he is not in policy agreement has been removed.

I would like to finish speaking as Chairman by thanking the members of the Committee for their commitment and diligence in carrying out the scrutiny of this Bill. I have been privileged to be the Chair of the Justice Committee and to oversee the scrutiny work for the Bill. The inquiry report that the Committee published into the experiences of victims and witnesses of crime was very important and will subsequently be legislated for in a forthcoming Bill, but this Bill is up there as one of the highlights of what the Justice Committee has had to deal with.

Some Committee members came to it, maybe, with different views and some, maybe, with hostile views, but as we listened to evidence, and as we sought to do our scrutiny work and get into the detail of it, I believe that people opened their minds and were prepared to listen to that evidence. As a result of that work — I believe that the Committee played a critical role in facilitating that — we were able to get to the point where there was overwhelming support for this.

The Justice Committee is very blessed in its membership. Undoubtedly, most of its members are some of the brightest in this Assembly, and they bring a particular skill set to the Committee. *[Interruption.]* I note that Edwin Poots has only just joined the Committee. *[Laughter.]* It would be unfair to apply that to him.

There are times when Committee members will raise issues that I do not necessarily agree with. Indeed, I may not always agree with the manner in which an issue is raised, but it is important that Committee members have the right to do that. At times, I have found that, even though I may not have always appreciated some of the tactics deployed, it unearthed issues that some of us had not thought about and revealed elements of the Bill that, maybe, we needed to consider and tighten up. Beforehand, I might have taken a very supportive role, but,

as a result of some of the questioning, we were able to tease those issues out.

The Committee is one of the best in the Assembly because it nails down what the real issues are and puts its mind to focusing on those specific issues and tries to find a way to effectively deal with them. Other Committees can learn from how the Justice Committee carries out its work. Some may say I am biased on this issue, but the Committee is a model of good practice. It is a good Committee, because we get support from the Department of Justice officials. They supported the Committee as we scrutinised the Bill, and, as Chairman, I want to place on record my thanks for the work of the Minister and his officials in dealing with this.

I want to pay particular tribute to the work of the Committee staff and to Christine Darrah, the Committee Clerk. We, unquestionably, have been given the most professional support that was necessary, above and beyond what people may well expect in terms of the capacity that exists in this place to provide that advice to Committee members. There was not an issue that Committee members raised, from any perspective, on which Christine and her team in the Committee office were not able to provide information to allow us to deliberate on these issues. They did so, at all times, entirely impartially. I could not tell you what any view is of the Committee staff in respect of this Bill. I do not know; I have never sought to find out, and none of the staff have ever sought to tell me whether they supported the Bill or were against it. That is the entirely right way for officials to conduct themselves and provide that information so that Committee members can deliberate and come to the right position once they have sought that information. So, I want to thank especially the Committee staff for all their work on the Bill.

Finally, let me put on record my appreciation to all those organisations that came to the Committee and engaged with it. We produced a report of some 1,300 pages. We engaged extensively with individuals and organisations, and there is a broad body of work by the Justice Committee that I have no doubt many other jurisdictions will use as a reference point as they consider these issues.

At the very end of my contribution, let me reiterate my thanks and appreciation as an individual MLA on behalf of the Democratic Unionist Party to Lord Morrow. We are immensely proud of him for the way in which he has conducted himself over the past two and half or three years on an issue that I know has consumed every fibre of his being and every aspect of his day in dealing with this. As a party, we are immensely proud of the way in which he has conducted himself and has brought this legislation forward for approval. I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Even though the Business Committee is not meeting today, it has agreed that there should be a lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2:00 pm, when the first item of business will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.36 pm.

On resuming (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 4, 5 and 7 and questions 6 and 9 are grouped, and questions 10 and 11 have been withdrawn. There are issues with topical questions, but we will deal with those at the time.

Abortion Consultation

1. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of Justice how he intends to integrate proceedings in the Supreme Court (Greater Glasgow Health Board v Doogan and Anor (Scotland)) in the criminal law on abortion consultation. (AQO 7245/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The judgment of the Scottish Appeal Court in the Doogan and Wood case is referred to in chapters 8 and 9 of the consultation paper, and readers are particularly requested to address in their response a provision for conscientious objection and how it should be formulated.

Although the case is now in the Supreme Court and a ruling is not expected until next year, the consultation paper makes clear my intention that draft legislation should take full cognisance of the need for clarity and certainty in any provision for a right to refuse to participate in the termination of pregnancies on the grounds of conscience.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat. Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. In light of the fact that the judgement will, obviously, set legal precedent, will the Minister commit to extending the consultation period, if necessary, to take account of any judgement? As you know, the consultation period ends on 17 January.

Mr Ford: I am not sure that it is necessary or appropriate to extend the period. Specifically, the Supreme Court has been asked to judge on the basis of the current legislation as it applies in Great Britain, which is not directly relevant to any proposal for legislation that we might introduce in this jurisdiction. We are at a relatively early stage of any legislative process, and we are not in anything like the same position of the concerns that are being raised about the operation of the current GB legislation.

Mr Givan: The Minister should be aware of a case, last November, in which the Court of Appeal overturned a decision by Justice Treacy in respect of a request for an inquest that the Attorney General instructed the senior coroner to carry out but which was rejected. Given that, in the first instance, Justice Treacy said that allowing the Attorney General's case to be won would have implications for abortion and seeing that the Court of Appeal overturned that decision, the Attorney General won the case and a landmark precedent was set conferring the rights of personhood on the unborn child in those circumstances, what cognisance is being taken of that by the Minister in his consultation document so that that landmark decision is properly upheld?

Mr Ford: The consultation document contains information on the proposals for change or potential change in the law. It is for those who wish to comment on it to raise their concerns, and the Department will fully consider any responses. Clearly, issues are arising from a number of legal cases, but, if we held up all consultations as part of a legislative process until all matters were settled in the Supreme Court, we would never consult on anything.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will the Minister reassure the House and, indeed, those involved in nursing, particularly midwives, that whatever legislation is finally produced, the right to conscientious objection in the performance of an abortion will be safeguarded?

Mr Ford: Mr Maginness raises a serious point. The reality is that, at present, in Northern Ireland, in the small number of abortions that are lawful to protect the life of the woman, there are no grounds of conscience to withdraw because it is that kind of procedure. I see no prospect of there being legislation in this jurisdiction that would have grounds of conscience any less than the grounds of conscience that exist under the 1967 Act for England, Wales and Scotland.

Mr McCarthy: Can the Minister clarify beyond any doubt that he is strictly limited and is not advocating, as has been suggested in some quarters, that the Abortion Act 1967 be brought to Northern Ireland?

Mr Ford: I am happy to give that confirmation. I know that there are those who have suggested that I am in favour of abortion on demand to the point of birth: that is a complete fabrication. The consultation is on an extremely narrow area, looking at fatal fetal abnormality where doctors certify that there is no prospect of life and no life-saving treatment could be given after delivery. It also raises the question around rape and incest. It is far away from the way that the law operates across the water, and there is no intention on the part of the Department of Justice to go anywhere near the 1967 Act.

Criminal Assets

2. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on funding awarded from seized criminal assets. (AQO 7246/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since it was first launched in 2011, the assets recovery community scheme has awarded over £2.1 million to nearly 200 projects that meet the statutory criteria of fighting crime or the fear of crime. The schemes supported include diversionary activities for young people; making older people more secure in their own home; and projects aimed at reducing drug and alcohol abuse. The projects are based throughout Northern Ireland and are benefiting urban and rural areas. The emphasis is on encouraging new, innovative projects. It is of great satisfaction that not only are the projects benefiting the community but they are being funded through assets recovered from criminals.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his response. I welcome the fact that over £2 million of criminal assets have been redirected to community projects under this Minister of Justice. Does the Minister agree that that is an encouraging example of devolved policing and justice powers working to tackle organised crime for the benefit of community development in Northern Ireland?

Mr Ford: Yes, I agree. The reality is that it is only since devolution on 1 April 2011 that we have persuaded the Treasury to enable Northern Ireland to access 100% of Northern Ireland criminal confiscation receipts. Previously, it was only 50%. Whilst the agreement is capped at £10 million per year and is potentially time-limited to the current CSR period, I believe that we have shown very positive results from it. It is unfortunate that it is perhaps not slightly more flexible, but, nonetheless, £2.1 million — not just £2 million — is an extremely positive statement of good work being done in every part of the community, principally through PCSPs and agencies of the justice system. That is all very much to the good of communities right across Northern Ireland.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Can the Minister provide some information about the process by which the money is allocated from the fund? Is there anything that he can do to ensure that more money from the fund goes to projects outside Belfast?

Mr Ford: I do not have figures suggesting how much money has been spent in different districts. That information is certainly freely available; I just do not happen to have it in front of me. There is no suggestion that money is disproportionately going to Belfast. In past years, it has certainly gone to each of the 26 districts, and, to ensure that there is best value for money, it has been allocated on the basis of projects that have passed a scoring matrix. The reality is that even in the tight circumstances of this year, when we had slightly less money to spend than we might have hoped, we were able to ensure that each of the projects that passed an appropriate mark was able to be funded. There is no question of money not going to areas outside Belfast if the projects are good enough.

Mr Beggs: Fuel laundering has been a highly lucrative operation for criminal gangs, involving hundreds of millions of pounds, yet few, if any, have gone to prison, never mind having substantial assets seized. Does the Minister accept that the proportion of assets seized is very small compared with the profits that have been made in this area? What more does he intend to do to address illegal fuel laundering?

Mr Ford: I must congratulate the Member on the way in which he managed to extend that question. The reality is that we use the assets that are seized in the best possible way. It is up to the justice agencies, which are responsible for seizing those assets, to carry those out. Specifically, on the topic of fuel laundering, I take it that Mr Beggs is not suggesting that we should sell illegally laundered fuel to people to make a profit from it. That would be the only way in which we would recover those specific assets. It is unfortunately the case that, since so many of the fuel laundering plants are automated without people present, it is difficult to prosecute individuals even where it is possible to seize the plants. However, allowing for the difficulties that the agencies have should not detract from the good work being done by the assets recovery community scheme.

Railway Street Drug Arrest Referral and Harm Reduction Service

3. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the discussions he had with stakeholder organisations such as the PSNI, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, GPs

and local pharmacists when making his decision to cut the funding for the Railway Street Drug Arrest Referral and Harm Reduction Service. (AQO 7247/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department has contributed approximately £330,000 per annum — 66% of the total cost — over each of the last three years to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to run the Railway Street service in Ballymena. Given the changing financial environment, my Department first notified trust officials in October 2013 that funding was at risk. Given the increasing pressures on my budget, notice was given to the trust in October this year that funding would cease at the end of January. We have since secured funding to provide an additional month's cover. No discussions were held with stakeholders prior to the trust being notified of the decision. The Probation Board, which provides one dedicated member of staff to the project, was advised at the same time as the Northern Trust. Since the trust was advised of my decision, I have met Daithí McKay MLA and a delegation that included representation from local GPs, pharmacists, service users and their families and a union representative. I am due to meet trust officials later this week to consider whether anything further can be done. The decision was not an easy one and was not taken lightly. However, following the significant cuts in funding to the DOJ in-year, it has not been possible to continue to protect front-line services.

Mr Frew: Does the Minister agree that this is the sort of project and model that shows best practice and would save his Department money with regard to prison numbers, crime rates and social issues in our towns and cities? Does he agree that it should be rolled out across the country, not stifled at inception?

Mr Ford: The fact that the Department funded the project for the last three years is clearly an indication that it was seen as a positive project. However, I repeat my point: in the light of the cuts being made to my Department's budget, it is not possible to continue to protect front-line services. Mr Frew specifically referred to the number of prisoners and crime rates. The reality is that, although a lot of positive work was done by the Railway Street project, crime rates in Ballymena have decreased at a broadly similar rate to crime rates across Northern Ireland. The number of prisoners that might have resulted had there been a slightly higher rate is not, as has been suggested to some people, at a cost of £60,000 per additional person admitted to prison. The marginal cost of that is significantly less. Of course I regret cutbacks to front-line projects like this, but, given the budget cut that the Department of Justice is faced with, there is no choice but to make cuts that will be difficult, will damage community safety and will reverse many of the advances over the last four and a half years.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Like the previous Member who spoke, I am deeply concerned about the effects that the cut will have on our constituents, particularly those who are at risk from drug abuse. I am grateful for the meeting that the Minister had with us. In his forthcoming engagement with the Northern Trust, will he go into that meeting with compromise in mind? Will he be minded to meet health officials halfway to ensure that we do not have a 100% cut from the Department of Justice and a meaningful compromise is put in place?

Mr Ford: I appreciate Mr McKay's reference to his constituents and Mr Frew's. I remind him that, at the

meeting he was at, one of those present was a constituent of mine. I am entirely aware of the local value of the project. The meeting with trust officials is to explore what possibilities exist to see whether it is possible to continue the project in a meaningful way. If the Member is asking me to say that I will meet officials halfway, I am not sure whether that means keeping half of the grant aid. I can make no specific promises, but I will go in there to see whether it is possible to make any kind of arrangement with the trust.

Mr Swann: Like other North Antrim reps, I am extremely concerned about the removal of the service, which serves a wide section of our community. Has the Minister approached the Minister of Health or the Minister for Social Development to see whether there is any other match funding, rather than just the Justice Department and the trust looking to fund the project? If the 260 users of the service re-enter the community without the support that has been provided by Railway Street, that will have a knock-on effect on both those Departments.

2.15 pm

Mr Ford: As this project is actually run by the Northern Trust, though two thirds funded by the Department of Justice, it is an issue for the trust to follow up with its parent Department, DHSSPS, and not for me as Minister of Justice to follow up. That is one of the issues that I may be able to explore later this week. There are real challenges, across a range of budget cuts affecting every Department, to see whether it is possible always to prioritise the front-line services that we would wish to.

Mr Allister: Minister, is this not a classic invest-to-save scenario? By investing this relatively modest sum, you save: the lives of a number of the drug-dependent people; the state from the ravages that come from drug-fuelled crime; and the health service from the repeat costs of looking after such people. So, is it not time to recognise that it is an invest-to-save project and to make the investment?

Mr Ford: Sadly, a lot of preventive work done by my Department is invest to save, and it is going to have to go in the face of the budget cuts imposed on my Department. Specifically, Mr Allister may make reasonable points about saving the health service or saving lives. However, the role of the Department of Justice is not to take over the role of the health service. We work in partnership at the moment in a number of different areas, of which the Railway Street project is but one. However, the prioritisation has to ensure that, if there are issues of concern to one Department, they cannot always be bailed out by another. I am looking to see what is possible. As I have said to a number of Members — we still have two Members from North Antrim who have not asked yet questions — we can but say difficult times cause difficult decisions to be taken.

Mr McKinney: I add my voice to the calls for this decision to be reversed. In this context, and it is reflective of comments made earlier, this is marginally small money — potted together with other moneys — producing good outcomes. Is not the decision around this, like many of the other decisions, consistent merely with the bottom line and not with strategic objectives? In that sense, it is completely counter-strategic, not only to justice outcomes but to health outcomes.

Mr Ford: I mean no insult to Mr McKinney when I point out that neither he, nor anybody else who has spoken on this question, has suggested anywhere else where money can be saved. That is the blunt reality of the life that we have to live with. It is fine to talk about benefits in the future by maintaining services today. However, if we cannot fund them, we cannot fund them. It is as simple as that. Whether it is realistic, sensible, strategic or long-term, the budget of the Department of Justice, despite being supposedly ring-fenced for this year, as the end of the four-year CSR period, was cut unilaterally in year, and the Department of Justice is living with the consequences. That is the reality of where we are currently placed.

If Members wish to go back to the Minister of Finance and Personnel and suggest that the Department of Justice should have its budget restored to the ring-fenced position — where we were managing the strongest cuts that were happening to any Department anyway — and not impose further cuts, I will happily lead them in a deputation to DFP.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr David Hilditch is not in his place.

National Crime Agency

5. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has to ensure that the National Crime Agency can operate in Northern Ireland to the same extent as it does in the rest of the United Kingdom. (AQO 7249/11-15)

7. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the impact on the delivery of justice services of the restriction of National Crime Agency operations in Northern Ireland. (AQO 7251/11-15)

Mr Ford: With permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 5 and 7 together.

The National Crime Agency (NCA) is still prohibited from operating in the devolved arena in Northern Ireland, and, as I have stated many times, there is clearly a major gap in our ability to tackle serious and organised crime groups as a result. That is why, along with the PSNI, the NCA, the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and the Home Office, I am making every attempt to resolve the situation.

On 8 September, I circulated an updated proposal paper to, among others, the main political parties, the Justice Committee and the Policing Board setting out proposals on the accountability of the National Crime Agency, which should, in my view, enable us to achieve the full operation of the agency here. It is a comprehensive proposal that would create clear, transparent and significant local accountability. It is the result of extensive work between my Department, the NCA, the PSNI and the Home Office and it has the full commitment of all those bodies.

Since then, I have met all the main parties, and I will continue to engage. However, as I said previously, we cannot operate in limbo indefinitely. If there is no resolution soon, we may have to find a way to work within the present limitations.

Currently, there is a complete absence of civil recovery here in the devolved arena, making Northern Ireland a potentially attractive place for criminals to operate or keep their assets. There is also an inability to source financial investigation expertise from the NCA where the offences being investigated are devolved, which in turn has hindered a number of investigations, for example,

on waste crime. The NCA cannot assist the PSNI with, amongst many other things, child exploitation and human trafficking operations, again leaving Northern Ireland at a disadvantage.

I will continue to urge all Members to work constructively to reach agreement on the current proposal so that our law enforcement agencies and our people can benefit from the skill, expertise and resources of the NCA.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for a comprehensive response. Minister, you came close to touching on a concern that I have, which is that the recent massive drugs find suggests to you that there are better opportunities now in Northern Ireland for criminals because the NCA does not operate fully in this jurisdiction.

Mr Ford: We cannot be sure whether the absence of the NCA was a factor in any specific instance, but there is no doubt that, cumulatively, especially at a time of budget restraint, we are losing out by not having the NCA, not least in the civil recovery of assets as well as the direct crime-fighting ability it would bring.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Sometimes people put up the thesis that, where the NCA operates, there is no crime, and that, if only it were here, there would be no crime. Is the Minister aware of the recent trial where the trial judge described the NCA as “incompetent”, involving itself in multiple failures, and “beyond negligence”, and said that it failed to adhere to the protocol and principles of disclosure? Does the Minister agree with our concern that, where people feel that it is not accountable, it acts beyond account?

Mr Ford: I am in no position to judge the operation of the NCA across the water. What I am absolutely clear about is that the concerns that Mr McCartney has raised about accountability are exactly the reason why, from the very beginning, I have sought to ensure that there is proper accountability, primacy of the PSNI, a role for the Chief Constable in the approval of operations, a role for the Policing Board, and a role for the Police Ombudsman in any operation of the NCA here. That would address the kind of concerns raised by Mr McCartney.

Mrs D Kelly: The Minister will be aware that there are extensive discussions ongoing in relation to the NCA, particularly around the accountability mechanisms. Will he join me in acknowledging the mechanisms that the PSNI would welcome and that it described in its 2013 human rights annual report as being the minimum standard of accountability necessary to move forward?

Mr Ford: I would certainly welcome the application of those standards that apply to the PSNI to the NCA, because, at the moment, the NCA is operating in Northern Ireland in the reserved sphere without any accountability mechanisms whatsoever. That is a further addition that would be given if we had the NCA operational in the devolved sphere. It would then also be accountable in the reserved sphere, and, indeed, for the seizure of assets. That is a further reason why we need it.

Roe House

6. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the recent independent assessment team report on Roe House, to outline how he plans to resolve the outstanding issues. (AQO 7250/11-15)

9. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how he plans to take forward the independent assessment team stocktake report into the separated regime in Roe House. (AQO 7253/11-15)

Mr Ford: With permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 6 and 9 together.

Members will be aware that I provided a comprehensive update to the Assembly in respect of the stocktake report by the independent assessment team in a debate on 25 November. The assessors made 10 recommendations. Of the nine that fall to the Northern Ireland Prison Service, eight have been fully accepted and one has been partially accepted. One recommendation, in respect of the criteria for entry into separation, is a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to consider.

I am grateful for the thoroughness and balance of the report, which has now been published, along with a detailed response from the Prison Service.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given that we have had some public representatives speaking very negatively about the team, will the Minister agree that the work it has done has been very valuable and that it is now up to the rest of us to get this stuff over the line and ensure that we can have no more difficulties in our prisons?

Mr Ford: I am grateful to Mr Eastwood for his endorsement of the team's work. I believe that it has carried out a very valuable function for a significant period, not least in the preparation of this report. That is why, after careful consideration, the Prison Service has accepted the report in all but one partial respect on visits. I hope that we will see positive responses on all sides to ensure that that work can be carried through in a way that reduces tension in the prison and which ensures that Roe House and other parts of Maghaberry are safe for prisoners, staff, visitors and, ultimately, the wider community.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that an opportunity now exists to treat everyone with dignity and respect? I know that he has said that the recommendations have been accepted, but will he give an assurance that it will go one stage further and that they will be implemented?

Mr Ford: The recommendations have been accepted and are being implemented by the Prison Service. Mr McCann rightly talks about the need for people to be treated with respect, and the most urgent part of that is to ensure that the threats against prison officers are lifted immediately.

Mr Poots: The Minister's last comment is very important, as the director general indicated that one threat is one too many. It is absolutely criminal that we continue to give concessions to prisoners while the threats continue. Will Minister Ford stand with the director general in saying that one threat is one too many, or is he so caught up in the spirit of Christmas that he will continue to be the

Minister who just keeps giving to prisoners and republican prisoners?

Mr Ford: I seriously wonder, for the second time today, whether Mr Poots actually listened to what I just said. I made it absolutely clear what was required to show respect and I made it absolutely clear that I stand with the director general and the Prison Service in implementing the recommendations to ensure that prisons are safe places. That requires action by those who are making threats to stop making threats, just as it requires management change in some of the administrative and managerial issues in Roe House.

Prisons: Harassment and Bullying

8. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the steps he has taken to establish the level of harassment and bullying perpetrated by prison staff towards other prison employees. (AQO 7252/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service is committed to creating and sustaining an environment where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, free from any form of inappropriate behaviour. Prison Service staff are supported in challenging any unwanted, unreasonable or offensive conduct, and procedures are in place to enable them to do so. All incidents of bullying and harassment by prison staff towards other prison employees reported under these procedures are captured and recorded. Such incidents are treated seriously and dealt with in accordance with the Civil Service dignity at work policy.

Between April 2012 and November 2014, there were 20 reported incidents of bullying and harassment: 15 were resolved informally; one was withdrawn; and four resulted in formal investigation. That is a low level of complaints when set in the context of a workforce of just over 1,800 staff, although all such complaints must be treated seriously.

Mr Dallat: Is the Minister seriously dismissing my question by claiming that bullying in the Prison Service is at such a low level? Can he explain why several hundred prison officers are off, suffering from anxiety? Many of them claim that it is not the prisoners who caused it.

Mr Ford: If individuals have concerns, they need to be formally reported in a way that means that they can be investigated and not merely raised in an anonymous way, for example, on the Floor of this Chamber. There are proper procedures that should be put in place, and I urge anyone with concerns to use them.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions; we now move to topical questions. Before I call Mr Swann, I inform Members that topical questions 2, 6 and 7 have been withdrawn within the allotted time.

2.30 pm

Clay Pigeon Target Shooting: Legislation

T1. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on legislation relating to clay pigeon shooting, given that he will be aware that young people in Northern Ireland have been waiting for many years for the Department of Justice to give them equality of opportunity with their peers in the rest of the UK for clay pigeon target shooting. (AQT 1881/11-15)

Mr Ford: As part of general reforms on firearms, I have stated my intention to lower the age at which young people are permitted access to shotguns in certain circumstances. The proposals have been published, and there have been a number of discussions, some of which are ongoing, including quite recently. Ideally, we need to reach consensus about a number of issues relating to firearms before progress can be made. Certainly, I am fully aware of these issues and, indeed, have met some of the young people who have been able to represent Northern Ireland outside, but not within, Northern Ireland. I recognise the concerns expressed by the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association, amongst others.

Mr Swann: I know that the Minister has acknowledged the problem. There is concern about the lack of consensus on a number of issues, and the other issues are holding this one issue back. When will the Minister move forward and make a decision, even one that is subordinate to the other decisions coming to fruition?

Mr Ford: Would that it were that simple. The reality is that anything we would look at would require primary legislation, and before we could engage with primary legislation we would need to ensure that we had considered all the relevant issues on firearms together. It would be impossible to produce legislation on this one specific issue. As yet, unfortunately, there is no consensus amongst the shooting organisations, never mind the PSNI and DOJ, on the appropriate way to move forward.

“Hooded Men” Case: DOJ Disclosure

T3. **Ms Maeve McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Justice, although it is appreciated that the relevant events occurred some time ago, before the Minister's watch, given the significance of the revelation that former Secretary of State Merlyn Rees informed the British Prime Minister in 1977 that Tory Ministers had authorised methods of torture here in the North, to assure the House that he will guarantee full disclosure of any information held by his Department and full cooperation with the “hooded men” case that was recently taken back to the European Court. (AQT 1883/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am not sure that I have a role in the current dispute at the European Court of Human Rights between Ireland and the United Kingdom. I am happy to guarantee that any information that my Department holds that may be relevant to historical matters will be made available in accordance with court requirements. I am fairly sure that that does not apply in this case.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his answer and, indeed, for his guarantee of cooperation. In the light of the revelations, does the Minister now agree that the British Government have a responsibility to ensure that comprehensive resources are available to the Executive to deal with legacy issues?

Mr Ford: I suspect that if we were going to take that question much further, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, Ms McLaughlin and I should go down to Stormont House rather than stand in the Chamber. I believe that there are significant legacy issues, which were not dealt with fully in the talks that Richard Haass convened a year ago, and which, it now appears, are being dealt with in a more comprehensive and joined-up way in the talks that we expect to see the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach

lead later this week. I do not answer here as leader of my party, but I will certainly do my best, including as Minister of Justice, to make sure that we reach a comprehensive agreement that ensures adequate funding for the justice system to deal appropriately with the matters that have arisen in the past and that are creating difficulties for the justice system today.

Legal Aid: Cost

T4. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Justice what measures are in place to reduce the legal aid bill. (AQT 1884/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am sure that Members will be aware of the fair bit of work that has been done on the cost of legal aid over, frankly, almost the entire period since I became Minister. The first element was reducing Crown Court fees significantly and introducing standard fees, which resulted in savings in excess of £20 million. There have been further reforms of other minor criminal matters, and work is ongoing to examine the scope for legal aid and alternative methods for providing legal assistance, where required, in a number of types of civil cases. It is clear that the budget for legal aid has been exceeded every year for many years, which it unfortunately continues to be, in a way that is damaging to the rest of the justice system's budget.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he give a commitment to the House today that he will see that the cost of legal aid is reduced before it impacts on services such as policing and the Prison Service?

Mr Ford: Unfortunately, although I suspect that most of the House probably agree with Mr Moutray, if there are legal obligations to pay legal aid to solicitors and barristers at the rates currently set by statute, it is not possible to say that, in the interests of defending other services, those will simply not be paid. I am sure that most Members of the House would wish to see services such as policing, community safety, youth justice and even the probation service funded ahead of legal aid, but the reality is that there are contractual obligations that have to be met as we seek to produce the reforms. I welcome the fact that, in October, I got agreement from the Justice Committee for a further £4 million reduction in the legal aid bill. Unfortunately, it took many months to get that agreement from the Committee, and we will need to see much quicker movement if we are to deal with the problem of excessive legal aid spending compared with other jurisdictions and to ensure that we can redirect funding to the services that we would all wish to see funded.

Talks Process: Importance for Victims

T5. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Justice for his view on the importance of the talks process producing a package of measures to deliver truth, justice and services for victims. (AQT 1885/11-15)

Mr Ford: As Minister of Justice, I see every day the impact that the legacy of the past has on the operation of the justice system. There is no doubt that the pressures on the Police Service are exacerbated by the large amount of historical work that is having to be done by the PSNI. That work was previously done within the Historical Enquiries Team (HET), but Members will be aware of restructuring reforms going ahead there. There is similarly a pressure of the past on the Police Ombudsman, and the fact that

we now have a very significant number of legacy inquests ordered is adding to that further. All of that is making difficulties for the justice system in dealing with the needs of the present. The work that the justice system is doing around the needs of victims is largely concentrated on that for the present. However, there are possibilities from the talks going on between the parties that would see work being done around truth recovery and work that would allow information retrieval in a way that would benefit victims. There are further issues around services for victims that need to be addressed that go a little bit beyond my direct responsibilities for the justice system.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his answer. What is his assessment of the consequences of failing to agree a new fully funded and article 2-compliant system for dealing with the past?

Mr Ford: I know that my colleague has a particular interest in and concern about one group of bereaved families — the Ballymurphy massacre group. There is no doubt that, although they are close to seeing inquests happening into the death of their loved ones, there are many others further back in the queue who are unlikely to see inquests on the current basis being called for many years, with all the dangers that that has of causing further distress and upset to victims. That is why it is urgent that we use the proposals for what Richard Haass called the “historical investigations unit” — I do not particularly mind what it is called — to ensure that it not only does investigations into the past but that those investigations lead to seeing the truth recovered and publicly tested for the benefit of bereaved families so that they can get past the current blockage of not seeing inquests happening.

PCSPs: Delivery

T8. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Justice whether, in the light of his stark warning about the detrimental impact that the cuts to his budget will have on policing, he agrees that the policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs) have delivered very little and that that is where the cuts should be directed. (AQT 1888/11-15)

Mr Ford: I think that it is fair to say that, in the work that they have done, some PCSPs have been better than others. From what I have seen during a number of visits to the four PCSPs in the future Causeway area, where Limavady, Coleraine, Ballymoney and Moyle have been cooperating, some very good work has been done, particularly on addressing issues of concern for young people, such as a car-crash simulation and a play that I recently saw performed in Bushmills on the problems of underage drinking.

Therefore, it is clear that, in many cases, PCSPs are doing good work. It is also clear that, in some areas, there have been greater difficulties in getting the arrangements joined up, and we have not yet seen the full benefits of bringing district policing partnerships and community safety partnerships together, which is what was envisaged when we passed the Justice Bill in 2011. I think that it is a challenge. I certainly hope that the work that is being done by my officials with PCSP managers will ensure that we see an improvement so that all of them live up to the current standards of the best.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he, at least, ensure that administration costs of 43% can be brought into line with those of the public sector, which are 20%?

Mr Ford: That is clearly an issue for PCSPs themselves to address. Clearly, there will be a role for new councils in addressing that. I have no doubt that, given that we are talking about a smaller number of larger councils, there ought to be economies of scale that reduce those administration costs. I suspect that, to some extent, there may be slight difficulties in some cases. Issues may be presented as administrative costs, which are actually funding council staff or PCSP staff engaging in full-time front-line work with communities, particularly around safety and addressing the fear of crime. It all tends to get wrapped up as administration nonetheless. There may be work that is being done, which is funded by salaries as opposed to project money, and is not administration but is being counted as such. The important thing is that people cut down on administration costs and ensure that as much as possible of the funding for PCSPs goes into providing direct services, whether by staff or others.

Court Service: Budget Cuts

T9. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Justice what impact the budget cuts will have on the Court Service, particularly the potential closure of courthouses. (AQT 1889/11-15)

Mr Ford: At the moment, the specific issue of courthouses is under consideration. Proposals have been developed. Members will be aware that there are already proposals to close hearing centres in Magherafelt and Limavady on the basis of boundary revisions being put through. The reality is that there are major issues around the current running of the court system. In some cases, it is costing money to provide relatively elderly facilities, which, in some cases, are not disability-friendly. Concern is being caused about their overall running costs. There may well be a case for rationalisation of the court estate to ensure that better services are provided in a smaller number of modern courthouses rather than the large number of older buildings which do not meet the needs of the 21st century.

Mr Eastwood: Is the Minister confident, though, that this rationalisation can be carried out without creating long delays in the system and without impacting on people's access to justice?

Mr Ford: It is a perfectly reasonable question from Mr Eastwood. I do believe that there are issues that say that if we concentrate on a smaller number of courthouses, it may well be possible to ensure that we cut out some of the delays if, for example, we have a greater number of staff working in a group. Even, at times, the ability to provide a deputy judge if a judge is sick may be enhanced by having a smaller number of venues that provide greater economies of scale. That is the amount of detail that is being worked through by my staff. Proposals will be put forward on that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As Mr Dominic Bradley is not in his place, I congratulate the Minister on working his way through his list of topical questions. I thank him very much.

Even though the Minister for Regional Development is early, very commendably, I suggest that we wait until 2.45

pm to begin the next session, which is the time that is allotted by the Business Committee. The House will take its ease until then.

2.45 pm

Regional Development

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I inform Members that questions 4, 5, 12 and 15 have been withdrawn.

A1: Junctions

1. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed grade separation of junctions on the A1 from Hillsborough to Newry. (AQO 7260/11-15)

Mr Lunn: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Ceist uimhir a haon to the Minister. Question number 1.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I am grateful to the Member. The proposed grade-separated junctions on the A1 between Hillsborough roundabout and Loughbrickland form part of the A1 junctions phase 2 proposal. That proposal includes additional junction improvements, including four flyover-type junctions, closing up all openings in the central median, installing a continuous central safety barrier, and closing some minor road junctions along that stretch of the route. Following extensive feedback received at the public information event held in November 2013 and over the following months, the proposals have been reviewed. As a result, significantly fewer closures of minor road junctions with the A1 are being proposed than previously. They will now remain open for left-in and left-out access. A northbound on-slip at Castlewellan Road, Banbridge will also improve access at the junction. I have not yet made a decision on the preferred option for the scheme.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his answer. I may have missed the first part of it, where he mentioned the Hillsborough roundabout. Is that to be included in the proposed amendments? Does he have any idea at the moment of the priority that will be given to the particular junctions, such as those closest to Belfast, which carry the most traffic?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. The project in mind is to deal with junctions along the entire route of the A1. Separate work is being carried out to look at the Hillsborough junction. A number of Members have asked questions about this over a period of time. That work is ongoing. I have outlined the situation when it comes to our proposals for the junctions along the A1 stretching almost along its entirety.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister aware of development proposals for car parking at Hillsborough Castle entering and exiting the A1 and what impact those might have?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I am aware of those proposals. I am due to meet representatives from Hillsborough Castle and Historic Royal Palaces early in the new year.

Obviously, the A1 is a protected route, so we would have to look very carefully at any proposals that others might suggest. We will certainly engage in that meeting and hear the view of Historic Royal Palaces. I accept the huge potential that Hillsborough Castle, as a royal residence, will have as a tourist facility. I am sure that the Member will want to acknowledge that; no doubt, if he has not been there, an early invitation can be arranged. I see the huge potential in tourism, but there are practical difficulties, not least the status of a protected route on the A1.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his very interesting response. Minister, you have given us a broad outline; perhaps you could outline the next stages of the scheme as they occur.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He will know that a significant amount of development work has already been progressed. However, much remains to be done.

The next stage includes completing the detailed design and taking the proposal through the environmental statement, direction order and vesting order statutory procedures. That process is likely to include public inquiries. The proposal is estimated to cost in the range of £35 million to £45 million. However, there is an opportunity to deliver the proposal in phases by constructing one junction at a time, with the associated closing of gaps in the central median and the erection of a central safety barrier. Delivery of this scheme remains subject to it clearing statutory procedures and having a satisfactory economic appraisal, and it is dependent on future funding levels.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for his replies. He and I are both very familiar with this section of road. I am encouraged that he will at least consider moving in different stages, possibly with the closure of central reservations quickly. Bearing in mind that this road is part of our main economic corridor, if all this work were to be completed, would he consider removing the speed restrictions at Banbridge and Dromore — the only two permanent reduced speed limits between Belfast and Dublin?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, he and I travel that road very often, mostly separately. *[Laughter.]* We parted our ways a while ago, but who knows?

The prime reason for the reduction in speed limits in certain key areas, Banbridge and Dromore included, was safety. Of course, the Member will also know that a number of safety measures have been carried out over the years. We continue to review that situation in consultation with the PSNI, but we currently judge that it is in the best interests of road safety that the 60 mph speed limit should remain in place.

Winter Service Programme

2. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for Regional Development how his departmental budgetary pressures will impact on the winter service programme. (AQO 7261/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has delivered £15 million of resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) to meet the 4.4% budget reduction agreed by the Executive in 2014-15. These cuts were addressed through a number of savings measures including a series of measures to reduce my Department's administration spend; reductions in funding

to Translink; stopping external contractors' work on routine road maintenance, including patching, grass cutting and gully emptying; and suspending the use of external contractors for the repair of street lights that fail, unless they pose an electrical hazard to the public.

However, a number of pressures remain within my Department, the largest being the £20 million pressure in respect of the release of value from Belfast Harbour Commissioners. My Department's budget was set, as part of Budget 2011-15, by the then Executive on the basis that £20 million of income would be secured from Belfast Harbour Commissioners in both 2013-14 and 2014-15. The Budget review group subsequently agreed that the Department should work collaboratively with Belfast Harbour Commissioners on release-of-value projects. While the Harbour has agreed to undertake £41.5 million of release-of-value projects and is progressing these, there is no means of crediting this investment to my Department's budget. The Executive agreed that the shortfall should be addressed through in-year monitoring, and this was the case in 2013-14 when the Executive allocated £20 million to my Department during the year.

In September 2014, the Budget review group recommended that the Executive take the same steps. They have not yet done so, with my bids for the £20 million in June and October monitoring being unsuccessful. I am conscious of time, but this is important, so I claim your indulgence, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. The next stage of resource measures available to me would involve cutting core front-line services, including some £3 million of funding for winter service activities. These measures directly affect public safety, including no gritting or snow clearing. I am simply not prepared to put the public at risk by stopping such services.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his answer. I am sure that many, including my constituents, know that the Minister is committed to provision of those winter services. Does he agree with me that Simon Hamilton should know better than to seek to apply pressure to the budget over the port's reserves for what appear to many to be party political reasons?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question. I hope and trust that politics is not being played with anybody's budget. Quite frankly, these matters are too important, and winter services are an essential part of the services that DRD provides.

We are engaging with the Department of Finance and Personnel. I made my concern clear to Mr Hamilton and the entire Executive. Nobody should underestimate this. There are clear implications not only for the DRD budget but potentially for an Executive overspend. Surely no one will want to be in that situation, because it will reflect badly on all of us, I suspect. I very much hope that people will not play politics and that we can restore this budget and ensure that the level of service that we would seek — that I would want to provide — can, indeed, be provided.

Mr G Robinson: We have had a very mild winter so far and hopefully savings can be made. Will salt boxes still be provided to rural communities — to farmers, schools etc — along with other road services?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I can confirm that in spite of the pressures on me, and given what I said, we will continue to provide winter

services. Whilst the early part of winter has perhaps been a little bit milder, I am aware, and the Member will be aware, of weather warnings about wind speeds this evening.

We are now approaching the hard section of winter. Nevertheless, we continue to put out the grit boxes and grit piles — some 50,000 grit piles and approximately 4,800 salt bins — and we will continue to salt the main network. But I respectfully say to the Member that if he wants to assist me properly, he does need to speak to his party colleague, the Finance Minister, and Executive colleagues to encourage them to plug the gap that is currently in my budget.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Is it still possible for farmers and other interested parties in rural areas to apply to DRD for contracts to clear rural roads affected during harsh weather?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. There is ongoing provision for farmers and other such contractors to register to give assistance. We have to use in the best possible way the limited resources available to us. We will deal as sympathetically as possible with emergency cases that require attention, such as funerals etc.

Arrangements are in place to bring farmers and contractors in to assist with the clearance of snow from local roads. Of course, we have salt bins and 50,000 grit piles. The Member will know, living in a rural community, how important self-help is to assist particularly the elderly and those not able to carry out such functions. I encourage people to continue to do that and work together at community level.

Mr McNarry: The Minister says he will not put the public at risk, and we are greatly relieved to hear that. How much money has he set aside for compensation liability claims due to failing maintenance and public roads not being properly fit for the road user?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question.

There is, as yet, no evidence of increased claims against the Department as a result of the savings and the cutbacks that we have been forced to make.

3.00 pm

The Member, through his membership of the Committee for Regional Development, has been critical of some of the actions that I have been forced to take. I repeat: I have been forced to take them. He also offered a solution by saying that we would somehow find moneys by using the resources of Translink. We have attempted to use every resource available to us; we have forensically looked at our budget, and we continue to do so. However, you cannot make savings on the scale of those imposed without their having an impact.

I am glad to say that that has not led to an increase in public claims of liability, and we will continue to challenge and contest such claims, case by case. I do not want to hear Members coming to the House with crocodile tears, airing concerns that they are not prepared to support in other places.

EU Funds: DRD Draw Down

3. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the success of his Department's EU unit in increasing the draw down of EU funds. (AQO 7262/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am very pleased that the Member has, through his question, been prepared to acknowledge that my Department has been successful in drawing down European funding. The reasons behind my decision to establish a dedicated EU Unit were twofold. First, there was a need to build and retain specialist expertise of the complexities of a range of EU funding programmes. Secondly, I appreciated that the benefits of applying that expertise effectively, particularly in the preparation of bids and applications, had the potential to significantly increase the flow of EU moneys into Northern Ireland.

The evidence to date justifies my decision. Since 2013, the EU unit has successfully secured some £33 million of European funding, and it continues to explore further opportunities as I speak. Across the board, wide disparities exist in departmental performance. One of the key reasons for that is that the incentive for putting what we all know are tightly constrained resources into a competitive bidding process is marginal at best. There is, therefore, a great deal of scope for a reconsideration of how competitive EU funds are collected and distributed at the centre.

If every Department was assured of retaining all the funding that it won, rather than suffering the vagaries of the existing budgetary process, the probability of more Departments replicating the success of the Department for Regional Development would be significantly higher.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for his answer. European moneys provide much needed assistance across the board. He said that DRD is on course to reach its target to increase draw down by 20%? When will that be achieved?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his encouraging remarks. DRD is top of the league of Executive performance. Having created the special EU unit, it is clear that my intention is that we stay top of the league but that we also encourage other Departments to benefit from EU moneys. The point that I made in the latter part of my answer to his substantive question is an important one: there should be more incentive for Departments and Ministers to ensure that Europe is being properly and forensically drained of funding opportunities. If Departments were allowed to keep the money or to spend it on their departmental responsibilities, that would add further incentive.

Mr Clarke: I listened to what the Minister said about keeping the money. I hope that the Minister is not using that as an excuse not to apply for the money. There was a debate in the House last week about the A6. Have there been any applications to draw down any EU funding for that project?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. We continue to look at all aspects of our projects to see what benefits there are. There are several possible projects relating to the current Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) call; indeed, the final decision to apply for funding will depend on the outcome of a fit-for-purpose test of the call criteria. That includes assessing the

maturity, quality, relevance and impact of each project. Projects that are being considered include the A26 Glarryford to Drones Road junction dualling and the Newry southern relief road, as well as a couple of options from Translink, including the Coleraine to Londonderry track upgrade phase 2 and the Knockmore to Lurgan track rehabilitation.

NI Water: Price Control

6. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the price control process in relation to NI Water. (AQO 7265/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The regulator published the PC15 draft determination on 10 July, and consultation closed on 15 October. The final determination is expected tomorrow. That will provide an assessment of the Northern Ireland Water business plan and will set out the required operating costs, capital and income requirement for the years 2015-2021.

The consultation document on the 2015-16 Budget that I published last week makes it clear that I will be unable to meet the funding requirements resulting from the draft determination and that that is likely to have significant negative repercussions for the quality of services that NI Water provides. Should such a shortfall remain after the final determination emerges and the 2015-16 Budget is finalised, those repercussions will become reality in the coming years.

At least £15 million additional funding is necessary to maintain delivery of water and wastewater services at current levels. The increase is largely as a result of a £13 million increase in rates stemming from the non-domestic revaluation exercise. Failure to provide sufficient funding would reduce Northern Ireland Water's ability to maintain a 24/7 service for call handling and out-of-hours customer and network responses to service interruptions, flooding and pollution incidents.

NI Water has demonstrated that it has improved efficiency since 2007, and the regulator has independently verified that. With a reduction in funding, this situation is likely to be reversed, and it could give rise to environmental failures, potentially leading to EU infringement and/or legal action as a result of failure to meet environmental standards.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for his answer. In that answer he indicated that there would be some £15 million of a shortfall. That is quite a significant amount of money. What practical options will be there for Northern Ireland Water to operate in such circumstances? How will water quality and supply be maintained, given that that level of funding is significantly below that set as part of the price determination?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Indeed, that is a very serious concern that is at the very front of my mind when considering next year's budget and future financial settlements. Of course, we have yet to see the final determination, but I have indicated that we are potentially down some £15 million next year. I think that that will certainly have an impact on aspects of service. Staffing levels, in turn, cannot be reduced without a detrimental impact on front-line services. It might also be necessary to reduce the use of external contractors to live within budget.

That, again, would reduce NI Water's ability to maintain a 24/7 service and could perhaps give rise to environmental failures. As I said, that could lead to EU infringement and legal action as a result of the failure to meet environmental standards. Therefore, it is not a pretty picture. Indeed, I have had the opportunity to meet the board of Northern Ireland Water and its senior executives, and, like me, they are very concerned at the current financial situation.

York Street Interchange

7. **Mr Ó Muilleoir** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed York Street interchange. (AQO 7266/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The existing York Street junction is a key junction on the strategic road network that links three of the busiest roads in Northern Ireland — the Westlink, the M2 and the M3. The M1/Westlink improvements were completed in 2010. However, the existing York Street junction remains a bottleneck on the eastern seaboard corridor. The existing at-grade traffic signal-controlled junction causes considerable congestion and delays for the 100,000 vehicles that pass through it daily.

The Member will know that the development of a road scheme follows a well-rehearsed path. The preliminary assessment works have been completed on the York Street interchange, and I announced the preferred route on 6 December 2012. Since then, work has continued on the detailed development of the scheme. The proposed solution will provide direct links between the Westlink and the M2 and M3. That will provide for the strategic traffic movements between those three main routes and also cater for local access from the Port of Belfast and the city.

The next step will be the publication of the draft statutory orders. Those are the direction order, the vesting order and an environmental statement. The orders will be published during the current financial year, and I will announce the date of publication, along with the associated consultation process, in due course. Depending on the response to the consultation, I may also hold a public inquiry into the scheme. Given the rate of progress, and subject to finance, statutory approval and successful procurement, the scheme could commence in 2018, with a construction period of around three years.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra chuimsitheach sin a thug sé. Thank you, Minister, for a comprehensive answer. I want to probe a related area, which, of course, you are concerned about, and that is the air quality and pollution levels at the interchange. It has been known as a hot spot for nitrogen dioxide for some time. Is it your assessment that we will eliminate the pollution problem at the interchange through the work at York Street?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member and welcome him to the House. I think that this is the first opportunity that he has had to question me. He will realise that I am not given to rash answers, so I will not confirm or deny his assertion. I am happy to consider it further and provide a written response.

Mr Lyttle: I imagine that the Minister will agree that free-flowing bus lanes will be vital to the success of transport in Belfast city centre. He will also be aware that a potential

consequence of the Taxis Act would be that all taxis will be permitted to drive in bus lanes as of June 2015. What regulation of bus lane use by taxis will he introduce?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for ingeniously inserting a question on bus lanes into the issue of the York Street interchange. His ability in that respect knows little bounds.

I am aware of the change that is being proposed by the Minister of the Environment, Mr Durkan. That will obviously have to go through processes in the House and the Assembly. I am still considering the position, pending the successful outcome of that legislation, should it be put in place.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. That ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to topical questions. I inform Members that questions 1, 4 and 5 have been withdrawn within the allotted time frame.

Cycling: Omagh Area

T2. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his Department's commitment to continuing to work with local stakeholders to develop the cycling network in the Omagh area, especially given that the head of his cycling unit, Andrew Grieve, paid a visit to Omagh last Thursday to meet local stakeholders, including the Omagh cycling initiative and the district council, to discuss local cycling provision. (AQT 1892/11-15)

3.15 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I welcome the Member's keen interest in cycling and his championing of cycling in Omagh and west Tyrone, and I thank him for his response to the recent public consultation. The main messages coming from the consultation are about significant support for the strategy and the three-pronged approach of building for the bicycle, supporting and promoting the use of the bicycle and a greater emphasis on safety. That will help us to reach our target audience: citizens who are interested in cycling but concerned about getting on a bicycle. The need to develop a better cycling culture, where all road users treat other road users with respect, has also come up.

I hope that the consultation report will be available in the new year and that the strategy will be finalised after Easter. This is a 25-year Northern Ireland strategy, so I hope that it can be rolled out to all areas of Northern Ireland, not least to Omagh, of course, where, I am aware, there is already some excellent infrastructure and many active cyclists, including the Omagh Cycling Initiative.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his answer. I appreciate that the consultation closed only a number of weeks ago. I note that the draft strategy was not rural-proofed. Can you give us an assurance that, when the delivery plan comes out, it will be rural-proofed, and that rural areas will benefit in the same way as their urban counterparts in the overall plan?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. Of course, I am happy to say that I want the cycling revolution to extend to all parts of Northern Ireland, not least Omagh, as I have said, and to all of the towns, cities and villages. Of course, this will take time, but I think that there are opportunities available to us. Certainly, I know that there is potential for

the development of greenways in Northern Ireland. I know that the Member is interested in that and, perhaps, in the extension of the old Great Northern Railway (GNR) line as a greenway from Omagh to Londonderry. So, I think that there are opportunities there and I hope very much that we will have the opportunity to work together positively to successfully carry through this cycling revolution.

Comber Greenway: Embankment Disposal

T3. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any plans to sell off parts of the embankment along the Comber greenway and, if so, what would be the timescale for the disposal. (AQT 1893/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I do not know what rumour mill he has been listening to or where that is coming from, but I am very happy to confirm that I have no plans to do as he suggests. Presumably, he is alarmed that that might happen. I think the Comber greenway has huge potential. Work has been done. The number of people using it continues to increase and I think we want to use it to its maximum advantage as we press home our ideals for the cycling revolution.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his response. He will know as well as I do that there is never smoke without fire. There are always rumours around. Indeed, I understand that it has come from officials of the Department for Regional Development. As the Minister knows, the Comber greenway is a fantastic asset for the Strangford and East Belfast constituencies, promoting health and leisure activities. Will the Minister guarantee, as he has done for me in relation to the senior citizens' SmartPass, that, under his watch, this little bit of heaven on earth will remain a cherished open space for everyone and that the pathway will not be encroached upon in any shape or form?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. Of course, his contributions are always heavenly when made in the Chamber. I know of no plans. I have not even heard the rumours that he apparently has heard, even at close source. Frankly, it would make no sense for my Department to start selling off parts of the Comber greenway, given the exciting plans that we have, in conjunction with others, to develop it.

Magherafelt Bypass: Update

T6. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Magherafelt bypass. (AQT 1896/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his question. Tenders for the construction of the Magherafelt bypass were received on 24 November. Tender assessment is under way, with a view to awarding the contract. Subject to no commercial challenge, construction work should start next February. Temporary fencing to secure the six-kilometre-long site is complete, and NI service diversions are under way. The archaeological investigation and vegetation clearance will begin shortly, and, hopefully, the new carriageway will be open to traffic in October 2016.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answer. That is good news. I was afraid that there was a bit of slippage from an

earlier date that had been given. So, well done. Will the Minister provide an assurance that his Department will do everything possible to make sure that the project remains on course and that deadlines are met, etc?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his constructive comments. Obviously, there is the potential for good news. The Department and my officials will continue to manage this, and we hope that we can meet the timetable that I have outlined. I know that the people of Magherafelt and the surrounding district will benefit hugely from the bypass. My party colleague Sandra Overend has been a huge supporter and influence in encouraging me to bring the scheme forward and I am very grateful that, at long last, after a 40-year wait, it will be delivered by an Ulster Unionist Minister.

A32: Enniskillen to Omagh

T7. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any imminent progress on the A32, albeit that, if he is not sure where that is, he should be aware that it is the Enniskillen to Omagh road, also known as the Omagh to Enniskillen road, which has received some upgrades in recent years, with some works removed in the previous mandate and some sitting in abeyance. (AQT 1897/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: How could I forget the A32 when the Member consistently raises it in the Chamber and mentions it to me privately? There is seldom an opportunity, even over a cup of coffee, that he does not talk about the A32.

Two significant A32 road improvement schemes to a value of over £10 million have been delivered in accordance with the A32 improvement strategy. Those were the Drumskinny widening and realignment and the Shannaragh realignment works. Development work is ongoing on two further schemes. It is hoped to publish draft orders for an offline realignment at Cornamuck in March 2015. The approximate construction cost is £5 million. That would bring the project closer to a state of readiness for delivery should funding become available.

Preliminary development work is also being taken forward by consultants to identify a preferred corridor for an offline realignment at Kilgortnaleague, — I hear laughter from the Member — with an approximate construction cost of £6 million. It is hoped to announce the preferred route corridor in 2015.

Mr Elliott: I just want to confirm that those townlands do not have Irish pronunciations at the moment. It is helpful to know the situation at the moment, but he will know that the A32 connects with the proposed southern bypass of Enniskillen. Does the Minister have any update on that? I know that significant progress has been made, but it seems to have slowed up. Can we expect the diggers to move on site in the near future?

Mr Kennedy: I do hope that other Members realise the political pressure that is applied to me by colleagues on delivering. However, I am pleased to say that design development work to confirm the preferred route of the A4 Enniskillen southern bypass alignment is nearing completion. The preferred route will be available for announcement early in the new year, when a public display or information day will be held to inform the public and

invite comment. Further progression of the project will be dependent on the availability of finance.

NI Water: Shareholder Dividend

T8. **Ms Maeve McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Regional Development to clarify whether the dividend paid to NI Water shareholders is included in the draft Budget. (AQT 1898/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her question. All aspects of the Budget are given consideration, including that relating to NI Water. Of course, as the Member will know, NI Water principally receives its funding from the Department and therefore from the taxpayer. All that is then reinvested in NI Water as a going concern.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for that clarification. Will he detail how much has been paid to NI Water stakeholders in the course of the mandate?

Mr Kennedy: I do not have the available figures, but, if the Member wishes to write to me on the issue, I will provide a full answer.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Peter Weir is not in his place, so I call Mr Mickey Brady.

Road Maintenance: Rural Roads

T10. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister for Regional Development why only rural roads would be affected by the proposed cuts in the draft Budget for road maintenance. (AQT 1900/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am somewhat concerned that the Member would find it OK that any road would suffer from a lack of maintenance. We are trying to manage a very difficult situation. We want to try to minimise any reduction in front-line services, but it is simply not possible. I repeat that: when we are talking about a projected cutback of £65 million for next year in the draft Budget, it is simply not possible to protect all front-line services. There will be challenges, and difficult choices have to be made. I say respectfully to the Member that he should use his influence in a positive way by consulting his Executive colleagues to support the reduction of impact on my budget, given that he is so evidently concerned about the necessary cutbacks and savings that are being forced upon me.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. Whatever influence I have, I always try to use it in a positive way. I wonder how those proposals fit in with the Programme for Government commitment to target rural poverty and social inclusion.

Mr Kennedy: I share the Member's concern, but I bring him back to my central point that he can do more about it than simply complain to me on the Floor of the Assembly. He can air his concerns with his senior political colleagues around the Executive table and, together, perhaps we can have a more progressive attitude than some of the politics that is being played out at the minute.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That brings us to the end of Question Time. Thank you very much, Minister.

Mrs Dobson: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Chair of the Regional Development Committee to heckle me and make

derogatory personal comments when I am asking my question to the Minister? I know that that is the cut and thrust and tumble of the Chamber, but I feel that personal comments are a step too far. I ask that the Hansard report be reviewed.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I point out that it is up to the Speaker to adjudicate whether there is any inappropriate behaviour. I did not record any such behaviour, although I do know on a personal level that, when you are attempting to make a point, it can be a bit frustrating. However, I cannot accept that anything came to my attention that would justify a point of order on the issue.

3.30 pm

Mr Hilditch: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I offer my sincere apologies for having been absent during Question Time. I was not in my place due to an oversight on my part.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I appreciate you coming personally to give that explanation. Thank you very much.

Private Members' Business

Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill: Final Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

That the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill [NIA 26/11-15] do now pass. — [Lord Morrow.]

Mr Elliott: Let me place on record my apologies to Lord Morrow and the earlier contributors to the Final Stage of the private Member's Bill that I was not in the Chamber for the debate earlier. Obviously, business had moved on and I was caught unawares in that respect. I also add my apologies that I will have to leave the debate after the next couple of contributions for another meeting.

In regard to the Bill itself, I congratulate Lord Morrow for bringing the private Member's Bill to its Final Stage. Obviously, it was not without controversy or difficulties, and indeed, at some stages, there were quite heated exchanges, not only here in the Chamber but in the Justice Committee. However, we have got to this stage.

What we want, and I am sure that this is what Lord Morrow is hoping for, is that the Bill makes it much more difficult to operate human trafficking throughout Northern Ireland. Hopefully, that will be reflected in other jurisdictions as well, whether in the rest of the UK, in the Republic of Ireland or, indeed, in wider Europe. I think that that is one of the main benefits that will be seen from this private Member's Bill.

There was one clause, which was in the legislation at an early stage, that I had particular issues with as it gave a reflection that people who may have committed human trafficking crimes in the past may have been given leniency when it came to sentencing or convictions, whereby they were effectively immune from conviction. However, I am pleased that Lord Morrow, in conjunction with the Department, removed that clause, and I think that the Bill will be much better for it.

The clause that was clause 6 and now, I think, is clause 15 — I cannot remember exactly — caused a lot of controversy around the purchase of sexual services. I am right that it is clause 15; the Minister agrees with me on that. It was difficult at some stages to establish how many of the parties or Members were going to support it, but, in the end, it got pretty widespread support. I think that the jury will be out on that for some time in establishing whether it is indeed a successful part of the Bill. It will be interesting, when the report comes back in three years' time, to find out what success that particular clause and other aspects have had. I look forward to that report coming forward. By and large, that clause created huge difficulties. It caused huge division, if I dare say it, because there was no halfway house with it. Organisations and individuals were either for it or opposed to it, and that meant that there was no in-between mechanism for it. So I think that, in the end, the decision on that was right. Again, I look forward to hearing what comes back through the report about it.

That is all I want to say on the Final Stage of the Bill. I thank Lord Morrow, and I hope that the Bill is successful.

Obviously, the outworkings will tell the tale on that, and we will be in a better position to make a judgement on how successful it will be in three years' time.

Mr Dickson: I rise to support the Bill at its Final Stage. We have had a robust and detailed debate on it in the Committee and elsewhere. I hope that Lord Morrow agrees with me that I have given the Bill honest and fair scrutiny through that long process; a process that he, the Chair of the Committee and others have referred to.

Throughout the legislative process, each party has clearly expressed its abhorrence at the subject of human trafficking and modern-day slavery. In a previous debate, I said that it is an evil and heinous crime. I believe that every person has an inherent dignity, value and worth, and I therefore regard human trafficking and slavery as a grotesque violation of human rights.

Lord Morrow shares that view, and he brought forward the Bill to provide Northern Ireland with a robust legal framework for those matters, particularly the prosecution of traffickers and those subjecting people to conditions of slavery, the provision of improved support services for victims and the tackling of the demand for the services of trafficked victims. His Bill also seeks to achieve improved compliance with our international obligations from European conventions and directions. The legislation has evolved — dare I use that term — considerably since its introduction. For the most part, that has brought significant improvement, as Lord Morrow has worked closely with the Minister of Justice and the Assembly, as he readily acknowledges.

It is a source of deep regret, however, for my party and me that the Assembly has proceeded with the inclusion of clause 15 on the criminalisation of payment for sexual services. That is not because our objectives are immoral, as some would try to portray, but because we have concerns about the possible dangers arising from the clause for those who have been trafficked and for those who work in the sex industry and have not been trafficked.

We have strong justification for our apprehension. There is no evidence to suggest that the criminalisation of the payment for sexual services in other jurisdictions has resulted in a demonstrable reduction in human trafficking, but there is evidence that it has put women in greater danger, with the purchasers more reluctant to report incidents of suspected trafficking or to give sex workers information that can be assessed and vetted for risk. I consider the real possibility that we are putting trafficked victims and sex workers in greater danger as a deeply moral issue.

The issue is certainly not as black and white as some would have us believe, but it is clearly the will of the majority in the Assembly to proceed with the measure at this time. We must commit to revisiting it — that has been done — and amending the law in the future if that is necessary and if the clause leads to negative outcomes.

I am also concerned about the use of the tenuous and untested term “sexual services” as part of clause 15. As I outlined in previous debates, I believe that that could lead us into uncertain legal territory with other activities with a sexual component. I fear that that will also need to be revisited. We believe that clause 15 does not reach the standard for which the Assembly should strive in the quality of legislation that we implement. However, as I said,

it is clearly the will of the majority of the House that it is included in the Bill.

Notwithstanding our considerable apprehension about clause 15, we recognise the significant benefits provided by the majority of the Bill. It simplifies the legislative framework, enhances provision to facilitate the confiscation of criminal assets, enables the payment of reparations and enhances services for victims. For all those, Lord Morrow is to be commended. Those measures represent a step forward in our fight against traffickers and those who would hold others in slavery and servitude.

We also recognise that the Bill alone is not a panacea. Its passage must be accompanied by renewed support for our police, anti-trafficking organisations and others who provide essential services to those affected. Today is certainly not the end of the road. With the passage of the Bill, we will move to a new stage. It is important that we recommit to tackling those heinous crimes and keeping them on the agenda in the public sphere.

Mr Wells: In 100 years' time, very few people will recall who Minister Kennedy or Minister Wells was, or even, dare I say it, Minister Durkan. They will scratch their head and wonder who these individuals were and whether they made any contribution to Northern Ireland society; whether they were any good at what they did; and whether they were worth putting into those positions of influence. However, in 100 years' time, everyone will still know the name of Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley because of the decision today to back this absolutely crucial legislation — one of the most important pieces of law that the Assembly will pass in this mandate.

Lord Morrow started out on this pilgrimage, or very long journey, three years ago. I am sure that he could not have envisaged then just how complex, difficult, fraught and time-consuming his private Member's Bill would be. However, he has “stickability”, and he kept at it. Many hurdles were put in his way. The one thing that I must say about our party chairman and Member of the House of Lords is that he has tenacity and keeps at things. He really needed to show those talents because there were times when many thought that the Bill would never get any further than First Stage. There were times in the Committee when many hurdles were put before it, and still he persisted.

There was a vociferous campaign against his Bill, led by those who have a direct pecuniary interest in the pursuit of prostitution. I sat on the Committee almost throughout the entire passage of the Bill. Many people came before the Committee, pretending that they were in favour of rights for sex workers or in favour of civil liberties, but, when one dug a bit deeper, inevitably, one discovered that all had a very substantial pecuniary interest in this trade of trafficking women throughout the world for purposes of prostitution: a wicked trade and a fundamental breach of human rights, mostly those of women.

During that long process, many of us were exposed to tales of the horrific treatment of women who had been trafficked to Ireland, North and South, from all parts of the world. These women were promised that they were coming here to take jobs in shops, as household staff, in the tourist trade or whatever. They had their passports removed, were kept as slaves in various houses and flats throughout

Northern Ireland and the Republic and were expected to entertain or service large numbers of men.

We all remember the story of the Romanian nurse who very bravely gave evidence to the Committee. She was walking down the street when she was kidnapped and flown to Galway. She was locked in a room and expected to see between 20 and 22 clients a day. She escaped 11 months later, her life completely destroyed by this evil practice, but still she had the courage to come forward to the Committee to tell us how evil this process is.

We also saw what was going on in the prostitution industry in Ireland. One large concern seems to have cornered the market and advertises, on any given night, 300 women available for sexual services. We had this dreadful situation in which the punters, as they are called, used or abused these women — there are no other words for it — and then rated them according to the sexual services that they performed, giving them a score out of ten. Each woman carried with her a score as to her suitability for various acts. That is no way to treat the women of Ireland, North or South. We then heard that those women were trafficked weekly from one venue to the next because the men who used them demanded fresh entertainment. It is another flagrant abuse of the rights of half of our population that that should be even considered.

Uniquely, Lord Morrow gathered together, in unison, a wide range of bodies in favour of his Bill. Who else could bring together the Human Rights Commission, the Church of Ireland, Women's Aid and the Evangelical Alliance? They all, in unison, said that the Bill simply had to be pursued and had to be a success. We then had the PSNI, which, initially, I have to say, had a relatively hostile approach to the Bill, particularly to clause 6, as it was then, which is now clause 15. When the PSNI listened to the rational argument of those who had been trafficked, those who had experience of rescuing trafficked victims and those who had been directly involved in the prostitution industry but got out, it changed its stance on the Bill and will now enforce it.

3.45 pm

The ultimate deterrent in the Bill is that any man abusing a woman through prostitution in Northern Ireland can, if caught, be named in court. In a little society such as Northern Ireland, with 1.8 million people, that is an extremely powerful deterrent.

I went to Sweden with the Justice Committee delegation. The Swedish have the Nordic model, which is the genus from which this is largely derived. That legislation has been operating in Sweden for several years, and, if you are caught abusing a woman through prostitution, you are taken home by the police and introduced to your wife or girlfriend. The police explain where the husband or boyfriend was caught. You are then left with your wife or girlfriend for what is known as a very full and frank discussion. The repeat rate in Sweden is a mere 6%, and that is in a large, cosmopolitan society of 12 million people. I suspect that in Northern Ireland when that full and frank discussion has occurred between husband and wife the repeat rates will be a lot lower indeed.

The Bill has had many detractors in the Alliance Party, who pretend to be concerned with various aspects of clause 15. Without clause 15 the Bill is meaningless. Lord Morrow

was absolutely right to stick to his guns and make it clear that he was determined to see this through. No doubt they have their concerns. However, I will just say this: if the Bill saves one woman from being trafficked and abused in a cellar or flat in Northern Ireland, it will have been worthwhile. If one person can be spared the degradation, the humiliation, the loss of personality and the incredible emotional distress of being trafficked and used for prostitution, it will have been worthwhile.

I stand here pleased that my Department has been able to do much to encourage the Bill in various respects. Some of those who criticised the Bill initially were absolutely right. If the Bill is to be a success, it is essential that when women leave the prostitution industry we as a society have the health provision, accommodation, retraining and emotional counselling in place. We must give those women — it is mostly women — the full support that they will need when they come out of this dreadful industry. I am glad, therefore, that we have reached agreement that my Department, in conjunction with the Department of Justice, will provide the high level of care that is necessary. It stands to sense, as some even in the Alliance Party spotted, that if we do not give these women an alternative, they will inevitably be drawn into drug trafficking or petty theft to sustain a drug addiction or to support their family. What we now have in place is something that we can stand over and say, "That will give an alternative to those women, who are at their very lowest".

The Bill was amended to provide for a review after three years. I agree with that; it was right to consider that. I believe that Lord Morrow's Bill will stand the test of time and that, when we look at the provisions in three years' time, we will ask ourselves why we did not do this earlier and allowed this situation to continue. As we speak, in Northern Ireland there are women locked in rooms being terribly abused. As Lord Morrow says, we no longer have deniability; we know that this goes on. We cannot turn the other way. We have a responsibility to do what we can for these people. My message today is this: well done, Lord Morrow; you are to be congratulated for your tenacity and perseverance and for having the vision to identify this problem and devise legislation to tackle it.

This is the Assembly at its very best. We had long discussions, both in Committee and on the Floor of the House. There were considered views on the Bill, and I will even say, though it hurts me to say it, that some of the Alliance Party's contributions were well considered. They were well considered and totally wrong, but at least they were well argued. I am very glad to say that, despite their protestations and the ambivalence of the Minister, when it came to the crucial vote at Further Consideration Stage the Bill had overwhelming support right across the Chamber. Through private Members' Bills, whether it is John McCallister's Bill on caravans — it grieves me to say it, but it was very good legislation — Mr Allister's Bill on advisers and now this Bill on trafficking and human slavery, we have a strong message to tell the community: when the Assembly is left to have a free, educated and intelligent debate, it can make good legislation. All that I can say to Lord Morrow is "Well done and remember that, in 100 years' time, you will be remembered when all the rest of us are forgotten".

Mr Allister: I certainly commend Lord Morrow for bringing forward the legislation. It is a difficult area of law, but it is

necessary legislation. One looks forward to it rolling out and to its implications. I commend Lord Morrow for his tenacity and for refusing to be daunted by the torturous route that one has to travel to get to the point that he has got to. Certainly, for me, the Bill that I sponsored was an eye opener in that regard, and there are many more clauses and issues in this Bill. Therefore, I am sure that it was even more daunting. It takes tenacity and determination to see matters through, and I commend him very much for that.

I should welcome Lord Morrow to the select band of MLAs who have managed to navigate legislation through the House. There was Mr McCallister, although I think that, in this mandate, Lord Morrow and I are the only two so far. In welcoming him to that very select band of MLAs and thinking about his Bill and mine, three points of similarity occur to me, three parallels. Ann's law was very much designed to chip away at terrorism and terrorists, and Lord Morrow's Bill is very much designed to chip away at the terror of human trafficking. That is very important. Secondly, both Bills were very victim-centred. In both Bills, protecting the victim lay at the heart of the legislative purpose. Thirdly, both Bills had the remarkable assistance of some courageous women. In the case of Ann's law, it was Ann Travers, of course, and Lord Morrow's Bill had the support of a number of courageous women who came forward to tell difficult but vital stories that were of immense influence and impact.

I place on the record my acknowledgement of Lord Morrow's work in piloting the Bill through, and I congratulate him on a job well done.

Mr Agnew: I hope to join the select band of MLAs who have got private Member's Bills through the House, having moved the First Stage of the Children's Services Co-operation Bill yesterday. That will, of course, be up to the House, and I look forward to the Second Stage, when I will hear what people really think of it.

There is no doubt that the human trafficking and slavery Bill speaks to an issue that is severe and grave. I have said consistently throughout the stages of the Bill that we should not try to outdo each other in our abhorrence. We started from the basis that we had an Assembly that opposed human trafficking, saw its evils and sought to legislate against them. Was there anyone here with any doubt? Mr Wells illustrates better than I ever could why this is such a heinous crime. The question was always whether the Bill would assist us in tackling human trafficking. In that regard, there is much about it to be welcomed. It brings within the definition of victims not only those who are directly trafficked but those involved in forced labour, who may not otherwise have been captured by the law and given the protection that those who are trafficked will be given. The services and provisions for victims and suspected victims provided in the Bill should assist in supporting them through the difficult process of coming out of slavery, as the case may be, and indeed helping to prosecute their traffickers. There is compensation and protection from prosecution for victims, although I have been contacted by some who feel that victims are still at risk of prosecution. I suppose that, over time, with the outworkings of the Bill, whether it goes far enough with that protection is something that can be reviewed.

Of course, the clause of great controversy was the prostitution clause. I stand by my position that it could

be counterproductive to the stated aims of the Bill, which are to help in the fight against and the discouragement of human trafficking. It has been mentioned that a three-year review is included. That is to be welcomed, because we should have an evidence-based review. We, of course, have evidence from other jurisdictions, but the impact in every jurisdiction will be different. The Bill will be assessed on its own merits and on how it operates in Northern Ireland. The review must be robust. It must be based on evidence and on the Bill's stated aim of reducing, tackling and prosecuting human trafficking. The rights or wrongs of prostitution, to me, were secondary in the Bill; human trafficking is the issue that we had consensus on and wanted to tackle. As I say, whether the Bill is effective in doing that should be the focus of any review.

Mr Wells spoke passionately about the need to protect women who are trafficked. I have a concern — I am happy to give way if Mr Wells wishes me to — that we have come back to the idea of the deserving and the undeserving, because, when a sex worker appeared in front of the Justice Committee and was interrogated by Mr Wells and, indeed, Mr Givan, I did not see people who were fighting for the rights of women; rather, what I saw were people who were making a judgement about the lifestyle of the woman in front of them.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I certainly will give way.

Mr Wells: The reason that the questioning by Mr Givan and me was so strident was that we knew that what we were dealing with was not a genuine sex worker but a spokeswoman for the sex industry — someone who was inextricably linked to a ring using over 300 women in Ireland for prostitution. We never met someone who was a genuine sex worker as such; we were introduced only to frontwomen who were working for the big conglomerates in the sex industry, which are using both trafficked and non-trafficked prostitutes throughout Ireland. That is why we were so cynical.

4.00 pm

He said that he is still concerned about clause 15. Sweden, Iceland, Norway and, now, the Irish Republic have all looked at exactly the same situation as us. All are liberal democracies in which the Greens are an important political element, and they have all come to the same conclusion that the best way forward is to introduce the equivalent of clause 15. How does he know better than all those Western liberal democracies?

Mr Agnew: We could make the same point about a number of issues. I think of how we legislate for equality and how other countries legislate on equal marriage. The fact is that this is going to be the only region of these islands that does not legislate for equal marriage. I could make the same argument that the Members opposite would make to me in those circumstances: we have to legislate as we see fit in Northern Ireland. This is my best analysis of the subject. The evidence on this issue is mixed at best. I will not say that there is no evidence to support the criminalisation of the purchasing of sex; there is evidence, but there is also counter evidence. I was left unconvinced that the best way forward was the criminalisation of the purchasing of sex.

I take the Member very much at his word about that representative in front of the Committee. I do not have facts to counter what he said, so I do not seek to.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Yes.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Sorry, I did not have the benefit of attending the Committee, but I am getting a little nervous about the references to organised rings and people with pecuniary interests. I wonder whether, in posing the question and inviting a response, we are in danger of impugning the reputations of people associated with those witnesses. I am not speaking from any point of information in relation to the evidence offered, but, from listening to it, it seems that we must be straying perilously close to making inappropriate references to people with innocent associations with the witnesses who appeared. I ask Members to be extremely careful.

Mr Wells: Yes, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, but in intervention to Mr Agnew, at the Committee, I was very open and clear with the witnesses. I made those accusations straight to their face, and I named them. On this occasion, I am not, but, as the issue was raised by Mr Agnew, I will say this: one of the references I made in Committee directly to the person concerned was that her computer domain name for her so-called group supporting the needs of prostitutes was paid for by the wife of one of the largest pimps in the United Kingdom and that, therefore, it was quite clear that she was very much controlled by the industry. I made that point and named her in the Committee. How independent can someone be in representing the needs of sex workers when her office is maintained by one of the largest prostitution rings in the United Kingdom?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I appreciate that you finished your comments. We are dealing now with the Bill as it stands, not the process that brought it to this point. People should return to the purpose of today's debate.

Mr Agnew: Thank you for that guidance, Principal Deputy Speaker. The last thing I will say is a generalised comment: I certainly stand to protect the rights of women. It is not for me to make a judgement of how some women choose to live their lives in so far as it is compliant with the law. At the Committee, some of the questioning went beyond interrogating the Bill and into interrogating the lifestyles of people who were acting within the law.

The issue of pecuniary interests was raised. There is no doubt that, in any such issue, there will be vested interests, but the comment was made that it was those only with a pecuniary interest who championed the opposition to the prostitution clause. Amnesty International would take great exception to that. It is an organisation that fights for human rights across the world. It is a charity and had no pecuniary interest in the position it took. While Members may disagree with it, as they are entitled to do in a democratic society, it is worth putting on record that Amnesty had no pecuniary interest and that its position was based on its best analysis of the evidence on how best to protect the rights of women and tackle human trafficking.

Finally, it is clear that this Bill will be passed, and, as I say, there is much to be welcomed in it. It is now for us to ensure that any such review in the future is robust and takes an evidence-based approach to the Bill's operation,

effectiveness and stated aim of tackling human trafficking and slavery.

Mr McCallister: Others have been kind enough to reflect on those of us who have brought forward a private Member's Bill. I am hoping to rejoin that group at some point with my Assembly and Executive reform bill.

I give Mr Wells some credit. Not only is he the Minister of Health, but he has already made it into the history books by outing a police officer he caught smoking at a protest at Hillsborough Castle 30 years ago. It gives you a sense of how old Mr Wells must be when you can read about him in the history books. I can tell my children, "I knew Jim Wells." His place in history is secure, from all his activities and antics in the 1980s.

I want to say sincere and genuine congratulations to Lord Morrow. I know from my own experience, albeit in the last Assembly mandate, of the work that goes into getting a private Member's Bill to this stage. In dealing with it, you do not have a legislative team and a Department behind you. You generally have yourself, one assistant and other groups, and you are trying to bring people together. It is a mammoth task to bring forward a Bill of this size and significance. Congratulations to Lord Morrow on his tenacity, hard work and endurance in getting to this stage.

No doubt, he is aware that I did not agree with every element of the Bill. I had two main concerns. At the start, I had a concern that some of it was effectively repeating some of the laws that we already have. I also had concerns around clause 6, which is now clause 15. Nevertheless, I congratulate him on sticking with the Bill and getting it to this stage.

Yesterday, we had the legislative consent motion on the Modern Slavery Bill that is going through Parliament. The main things that I look for in these Bills — and they were also Lord Morrow's initial objectives in setting out with this Bill, and there is commonality and agreement on them throughout the Assembly — are the addressing of the scourge of modern slavery, sexual exploitation and human trafficking and the misery and ruined lives that those things bring. There is no debate over whether we, as a society and a nation, need to do all we can to play our role, regionally in Northern Ireland, nationally in a UK context and internationally, to limit this absolutely abhorrent behaviour and crime that happens to too many people. The fact that we have more people in slavery today than at any point in our history should shame our entire world.

I am fairly certain that the Minister was asked about the National Crime Agency during Question Time. Unfortunately, I did not hear the answer. I am sure that it was a particularly brilliant answer, Minister.

I remind colleagues, particularly to the right of me, although not always to the right of me on many issues but on this issue, of the work of Lord Morrow, which stands tall in the Assembly in scrutinising that legislation and trying to shape it through Committees and debates in here, and the work of the Minister in helping to make it workable for the Department of Justice and the Police Service, and, indeed, the work that the Minister was involved in with the Modern Slavery Bill. I remind colleagues in the SDLP that one of the MPs who has made the biggest contribution to the Modern Slavery Bill that is going through the House of Commons is Mark Durkan, Member of Parliament for Foyle.

It is vital that we have the National Crime Agency (NCA) to work on implementing Lord Morrow's Bill and the Modern Slavery Bill to try to fight to eliminate the absolute scourge of human trafficking and the misery that goes with that. We are going to be in a difficult time to implement and get the best use of this legislation at a time of diminishing budgets for our Police Service without tapping into the expertise and availability of the National Crime Agency. I appeal to colleagues to rethink our commitment to getting the NCA in and working in Northern Ireland to make the very best use of this legislation and the tools that we are giving to our Police Service.

I agree with Mr Agnew's point about the review. The mark of this legislation's being successful is that we end up with more prosecutions, more people before the courts and more deterrence. That is something that I want to see and I am sure Lord Morrow does as well.

Thanks and congratulations to Lord Morrow, the Minister and the Committee for persevering and getting this piece of legislation. There is a reasonable chance you are going to get it passed here today, Lord Morrow. A sincere "Well done."

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I feel that I should deal with the important business first of all: I actually had a private Member's Bill prepared in the first Assembly, but when the Assembly was suspended in 2002, it was lost.

Speaking on behalf of the Executive on the substance of this Bill, I welcome this final informed debate on what I believe is a groundbreaking Bill that puts Northern Ireland at the forefront of the fight against human trafficking and slavery. In reinforcing our stance against those crimes, it will act as a deterrent for would-be traffickers. Where people are exploited, it will help to ensure that the perpetrators are properly punished. Crucially, it will enhance the protection and support available for victims whose lives have been shattered by these abhorrent crimes.

Members will, I am sure, agree that the landscape has changed significantly in the three years since Lord Morrow stood here and announced his intention to introduce this Bill. The Bill that was subsequently introduced in June 2013 sought to make Northern Ireland a more difficult place for traffickers to operate in and to improve the provision of support for victims. It also sought to achieve improved compliance with international obligations. I have been clear from the beginning that those are worthy aims that I fully support. I am satisfied that they are being preserved intact and, indeed, strengthened in the final Bill before the Assembly today.

I pay tribute to Lord Morrow for bringing the Bill forward and for leading it through what I know has been a very challenging journey. He has demonstrated dedication and tenacity in driving the legislation forward to reach this significant milestone. In introducing the debate, Lord Morrow said that —

Mr I McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: I will give way.

Mr I McCrea: I had thought of putting my name down to speak in the debate, but the Minister got to the point of congratulating Lord Morrow. It is important that those of us who have followed this through the House do pay tribute to Lord Morrow for the time and effort that he has put into the Bill. I suppose we should give credit to the Minister for

the work he has put in alongside Lord Morrow. It would be wrong of me to not refer to my colleague to my left who led the Committee through the Committee Stage.

4.15 pm

The Minister was referring to the officials in the corner, but I wanted to join him, and it is fair to put on record the appreciation of Members on this side of the House to our colleague Lord Morrow and to the effort of the Department.

Mr Ford: I am grateful to the Member for that intervention; I should clearly allow DUP Members to intervene in my speeches more often.

When introducing the debate, Lord Morrow referred to me being "sceptical" in the early days. That is a correct assumption. The Department was looking at the potential for secondary legislation. While that would have covered the bulk of what is now in the Bill, it was clear that, as developments occurred, particularly in terms of linking up across the UK jurisdictions, there was a wider need to look to primary legislation. Indeed, when I was attacked by Mr McCallister's former colleague at the Second Reading for supporting the Bill when I had some reservations, I did a quick sum and said that, if you support a third of the clauses, believe a third need some amendment and are not too sure of another third, that is no reason to oppose a Bill at Second Stage.

The Bill is rather longer than it was when it appeared at Second Stage. It is rather more complex and bears the mark of a lot of work. It is much more agreed than it was at Second Stage. Whilst we have disagreed on some measures, Lord Morrow and I — and, I believe, the House as a whole — are united on the Bill's fundamental principles. I am pleased that we have been able to work so collaboratively, as so many Members, not just Mr McCrea, have highlighted, on the vast majority of the provisions in the Bill.

So, I again put on record my thanks to Lord Morrow for the openness, the flexibility and the willingness that he has shown throughout the process to ensure that we make the Bill the best that it can be for Northern Ireland. His desire to combat human trafficking and modern slavery is absolutely clear. He has firmly established himself as a key figure in highlighting these appalling crimes, and he has played a part in the Westminster legislation. I have no doubt that he will continue to engage with my Department as it works to implement the measures in the Bill. I say that on the presumption that we are about to pass the Bill.

When I praise Lord Morrow, I also praise those who worked with him, particularly Mark Baillie from CARE in NI, who has provided support to Lord Morrow throughout the Bill's passage and has worked very closely with my officials to resolve concerns and identify effective policy solutions to make the Bill so effective. Lord Morrow also referred in particular to one of my officials, Julie Wilson. Unfortunately, I do not think that she heard him directly; no doubt, he will repeat his praise in a few minutes' time. I add my thanks to Julie Wilson and her team, who have put an awful lot of effort into ensuring that the Bill is the best possible. Lord Morrow said that he expected Julie to be:

"pleased to see the back of me."

She probably has not seen the back of him, and I am not sure that she would be pleased to. However, I suspect that

we will all be pleased at the end of this laborious process to see the back of the Bill. The important issue is seeing that the work goes forward with the Department, the Department of Health on other aspects, a range of justice agencies and a range of our NGO partners, to ensure that the Bill's provisions are implemented. Certainly, the input from a number of those NGO partners, through our engagement group in the Department, as well as through those who have worked with Lord Morrow, has been key.

As others have said, I should also acknowledge the work of the Justice Committee, which has also played an integral role in shaping and informing the Bill, has done the detailed scrutiny and deserves our thanks for that. In particular, I thank Paul Givan and Raymond McCartney, the Chair and Deputy Chair, but I also thank all those members who played a part in helping to develop the legislation. I also thank Christine Darrah and her staff on the Committee.

There has been very valuable contribution from around the Assembly, and I am confident that we have robust, comprehensive and effective legislation, which, despite the changes due to the massive number of amendments we have passed, is still very much Lord Morrow's intent.

I also thank the Office of the Legislative Counsel (OLC), which has tirelessly provided the usual sage advice and guidance to ensure that the Bill is effective and appropriately written to match the sponsor's intent.

I have said before on many occasions that the nature of human trafficking is such that no one individual Department or agency, working alone, can tackle it. We need to build an effective partnership, and I believe that the Bill exemplifies the common goal and the partnership that we have done.

While Final Stage is not the place for a clause-by-clause analysis, I want to take a few minutes as Minister to remind the House of what we hope to achieve through the Bill. It consolidates and reinforces the legislative framework around human trafficking and slavery and brings together new offences for the first time in a single piece of legislation so that the law is streamlined and simplified to assist investigators, prosecutors and the courts. In doing so, it importantly gives equal weight to human trafficking and slavery-like offences. Both types of offence will be triable only on indictment, with each attracting a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The new sentencing framework provided by the Bill will enhance public protection and send out a powerful message to would-be traffickers and enslavers that Northern Ireland will simply not tolerate these evil practices.

We will see the introduction of new slavery and trafficking prevention orders (STPOs) to help to bolster public protection as well as adding a further layer of personal risk to those who are involved at whatever level in exploiting others and so act as a deterrent.

Law enforcement has described human trafficking and slavery as high profit and low risk. I believe that the new powers to confiscate criminal assets and to force perpetrators to pay reparations not only will help victims but will disrupt this profit/risk dynamic and so dilute the economic driver that fuels these crimes. In short, taken together, the package of provisions set out in the clauses of Part 1 will improve our understanding of these types of crime and help to protect the public as well as boosting

our capacity to respond effectively and robustly to perpetrators.

Of course, there is one small part of the Bill, originally clause 6 and latterly clause 15 in Part 2, on which Lord Morrow and I did not agree: the criminalisation of the purchase of sex. This one clause took up more than the lion's share of debating time and, I believe, diverted the focus away from some of the other important measures that I just outlined into the moral issues surrounding the purchase of sex. Lord Morrow has stated that the motivation for this new offence was to reduce the market for women trafficked into sexual exploitation but, invariably, other reasons were put forward.

My view has always been that policy cannot be developed properly, and the Assembly should not make law without a sound evidence base. I remain disappointed, therefore, that the research on prostitution that I commissioned from Queen's University, which was published before Consideration Stage, was ignored and, indeed, derided at times. In part, it was because it portrayed the views of sex workers who had until then not been heard and because it destroyed a lot of the stereotypical imagery of prostitution.

As we look at Part 2, I can do no better than briefly quote one of the sex workers who was interviewed as part of the research. She said:

"I used to respect government and I used to think they did things because they really put a lot of information into learning about things and making real decisions based on real facts. They are not making any decisions based on facts. They are making decisions for the rest of the country without really bearing in mind what the decisions are to be based on and I feel so disillusioned. Because they don't care about me, because they are not interested at what I have to say."

While we still have disagreements on Part 2, that should not detract from the areas on which we all agree about the positive aspects of the Bill. Lord Morrow has made it clear — I entirely agree with him — that victims are at the heart of the Bill and have to be at the heart of our work in future.

Mr Givan: I appreciate the Minister giving way. I asked for the intervention because he outlined where he believes Lord Morrow and others have ignored the facts, when all the evidence presented to the Committee demonstrated that there is a mountain of evidence that shows that criminalisation of the purchasing of sexual services is the right way to go. Others can produce other evidence, and we can get lost in a debate saying, "Here is evidence that says this" and "Here is evidence that says that". The bottom line is that MLAs had to make a decision, and the majority accepted doing that.

Does the Minister still not regret the fact that he decided, at the eleventh hour, to throw tens of thousands of pounds into an effort to undermine this clause when he should have known that the game was already up? Instead, Queen's University engaged in a piece of work that I hope it reflects on because of the shoddy quality that was produced by the prejudiced researchers who were involved.

Mr Ford: The DOJ is not in the business of commissioning shoddy, prejudiced work. Work was commissioned to assess the nature and extent of prostitution in Northern Ireland. Some Members may not like the result of that

research, but it was commissioned to be genuine, and it was on the basis of that evidence that the DOJ took its decisions.

Let us look at the remaining aspects of the Bill on which there is significant agreement. In particular, there is a focus in Part 3 on providing assistance and support that will help vulnerable individuals, victims and potential victims to take the necessary steps to rebuild their lives. It will also provide essential protections for children who have been trafficked or who are considered to be separated. On behalf of the Executive, I welcome the inclusion of these vital measures. They are, of course, the responsibility of DHSSPS, and I have no doubt that, had the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety taken part in the debate, he would have agreed with the points that I have just expressed on his behalf.

The provisions in Part 4 will also enhance the protections available for victims of these offences in criminal investigations. Those are important measures that I believe will help to give victims renewed confidence to take a stand against their exploiters without facing additional trauma and, in many cases, will protect them from prosecution for certain crimes that they might have been compelled to commit.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, if I could digress and ignore your earlier suggestion that we should stick to what is in the Bill, I would like to refer briefly to Part 5 and the provision for the Northern Ireland rapporteur, which is no longer there. I emphasise that that was the result of good work done between Lord Morrow and his team and my team in persuading the Home Secretary that we had a better solution, which we saw when we passed the LCM yesterday.

There are very significant aspects to the Bill. On the great majority of them, Lord Morrow and I are as one, along with, I believe, the great majority of the House. I am grateful that we have been able to work together on shaping the Bill. I believe that we now have a robust Bill. In intent, it is clearly the original Bill that Lord Morrow introduced, but it has been significantly improved in its practical operation by the input of the DOJ, the OLC and a range of others who were consulted. It is an example of what can happen when we work constructively together in this place — a private Member, a range of NGOs, the Department, the Committee and other officials. It is an example that we should perhaps celebrate because we have few enough examples of that constructive good work to celebrate. We now have important legislation that I believe will make Northern Ireland safer and freer from these kinds of criminals and from those who would exploit others in such a horrific way. I believe that it will make a material difference to the lives of vulnerable people.

I congratulate Lord Morrow on his achievement in bringing the Bill this far. I commend the Bill to the House and trust that we will see it pass shortly.

Lord Morrow: I barely know where to start. I am slightly overwhelmed by the many generous remarks that have been made in the House, even by those who may be on the side of the detractors. Nevertheless, it is good that even they have something good to say about this legislation. However, I will leave what others had to say until the end of what I want to say. I want to get on the

record a few important words on the Bill, which I hope will pass in the not-too-distant future.

I am very glad to have the last word in the debate. I would like to thank Members for all of their kind words. Maybe some of the comments were far too kind, but that is how debates and politics sometimes turn out.

I will not lie to Members: this process has been far from easy, and it is a good job that I did not realise what was ahead of me before I started — I might have stepped back from it. For other Members contemplating bringing a private Member's Bill, let me tell you that the process is a lengthy one that is marked with many, many hurdles. You will have many highs and lows, and, at points, you may contemplate giving up. Having gone through the process with this Bill, I can honestly say that I fully understand what Otto Von Bismarck is believed to have said, which was:

"Laws are like sausages, it is better not to see them being made."

[Laughter.]

I experienced that.

4.30 pm

One point that I would humbly make from my experience is that it may be a good idea to increase the support provided by the Assembly to private Members who seek to bring through legislation. Do not get me wrong: I have had some wonderful help throughout this process from NGOs, staff at the Assembly and, indeed, the Department of Justice. I acknowledged that earlier, and I do not retract one word of it. However, it would, perhaps, be fruitful for the Assembly, at some point, to look at how it can support private Members seeking to bring through legislation.

I hope that Members across the House will feel able to support the Bill today. I strongly believe that it is a good Bill and that it will make a real difference in responding to and tackling the crime of human trafficking. I have been privileged to bring the Bill through the House. I hope that it will send a strong message that our society will not tolerate human trafficking and we will not let the victims of such crimes down.

I have one last remark at this stage. It is my hope that, even in a small way, the Bill will have helped to raise awareness of the horrendous reality of human trafficking in modern-day Northern Ireland. The legislation, in and of itself, will not eradicate human trafficking; ultimately, that may prove impossible. However, that does not mean that we should not try. If we are to move towards that goal, we need society as a whole to be clear that we will not tolerate human trafficking, that we will be tough on those who perpetrate such acts and that we will support effectively the victims of such acts. It is my hope that this legislation will contribute to such a goal.

I turn briefly to what Members have said. I have detected that some are very enthusiastic about the legislation, some have mixed feelings about it and some want to see it tested before they give it their final approval. That is not unreasonable. However, I say this to everyone here today: doing nothing was never an option.

Raymond McCartney acknowledged the volume of work that has gone into the Bill. If you believe nothing else that I say in the Assembly, believe me when I say that there was

a massive volume of work undertaken during the process. He also acknowledged those who worked with me and the papers that we presented. We did it in a wholesome way, to the best of our ability, to ensure that those who were deliberating on the legislation were informed as much as possible. We can confidently put our head on the pillow tonight and say that we achieved that and that we gave as much information as we could to help those who were making decisions to make informed decisions.

Paul Givan has been very enthusiastic about the Bill. He has led the Committee with enthusiasm in a very talented way. I would fail in my duty if I did not acknowledge that. He posed this question to us all, not alone to me: when your political career is over — I am not saying that anyone's political career is over; I want to make that very clear — what achievements will you look back on with satisfaction?

I entered the arena of elected politics in 1973. I know that you are all muttering under your breath, "He doesn't look that age", but it was then. For the past 42 years or thereabouts, I have been in politics at different levels. I have to say that this legislation has, I think, tested me the most, and I hope that I have passed the test. When all is said and done, I hope that even those who still have reservations will one day come round and say, "Yes, this legislation is good for Northern Ireland. It does what it says on the tin, and it tackles the scourge of human trafficking".

Tom Elliott also commented on clause 15. He queried whether it would be effective. I am convinced that it will be, but, for anything to be effective, it must be enforced. We will now look to others who play that role in society, and we serve notice on them today that we will watch very carefully to see and hear of the enforcement of the legislation.

While Stewart Dickson acknowledged that it is robust legislation in an attempt to tackle human trafficking, he still has many reservations about it. I sincerely hope that, as time goes by, he will come to acknowledge the legislation's merits and effectiveness. He, again, is sceptical about clause 15, which was clause 6. I say this to Mr Dickson: I think that you will come to acknowledge that the legislation is necessary and effective. At least he acknowledged that it had overwhelming support in the House and that over 89% of those who voted voted for the clause. That boils down to something like 92% of people in Northern Ireland voting for the legislation. I doubt that any other legislation will receive that degree of support in the coming days, particularly legislation that extends to this size.

Jim Wells spoke for himself. I think that everyone is in no doubt where Jim is on the legislation. To Jim Wells I say, "Well done. I value your support. You have been an enthusiastic supporter from day one. You did not have to be brought on board. You could see the merits of it right away". I want to thank you not only as an MLA but in your capacity as a Minister.

Jim Allister acknowledged the merits of the Bill. He drew a parallel with his Bill, which I thought was significant. He said that at the heart of my Bill was concern for victims. That is right: the Bill is all about delivering for victims of human trafficking and providing support for them.

I do not think that I have Steven Agnew convinced. I see that he is not here at the moment, but he too was sceptical of clause 15. To him, I say, "You will have to wait for the

outworkings of the legislation". As time goes by, I hope that he too will come to realise, acknowledge and support the legislation, which, today, he is still sceptical of. He also acknowledged that, while he did not support the Bill in its entirety, there are many good aspects to it.

About this time last year, or a week later, I went to Sweden and met the head of the police in Stockholm, who is in charge of combating human trafficking. I listened to what he had to say. I also met the Swedish rapporteur. I listened to what she had to say. I listened and talked to prosecutors in Sweden, and I heard what they said. As a result of visiting Sweden, I am convinced that the legislation can work effectively in Northern Ireland. Although my Bill is based on the Swedish model, it is not entirely as the legislation is in Sweden. However, it can be very effective legislation. If it is as effective in Northern Ireland as the equivalent is in Sweden, the Assembly will have done everyone a favour, particularly victims of human trafficking.

Mr McCallister acknowledged that a Bill of this size called for some endurance: I am at one with him on that. You are dead right, Mr McCallister: there were times that endurance was called for. He again was sceptical of clause 15, which was clause 6 in the Bill as introduced. However, he too looks forward to the review of the Bill in three years' time to see its outworking and how effective it is. I hope that, in that time, he will be convinced that the Bill is necessary and is working.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. As a former member of the Committee, I pay tribute to the Member for the work that he has done in the background to ensure that the Bill progressed through the House. To those who are sceptical about clause 15 — formerly clause 6 — I say this: had they listened to the witnesses who were brought before the Committee and the testimonies that we heard in Stockholm, both from those involved in the sex industry and the police, it would be clear to them that the Bill is about protecting the most vulnerable people in society. It is our duty and responsibility to protect the most vulnerable, who cannot protect themselves. That includes the young lady from Bucharest who was kept in a small, filthy room and got no payment but had to service up to 19 or 20 clients a day. Does the Member agree?

Lord Morrow: Yes, I do. I still fail to understand how those who heard the evidence from, in some cases, victims cannot see the merits of clause 15. I thought that if anything would dispel the concerns, apprehensions and misgivings of those in opposition to clause 15 — clause 6, as it was — that would. I am at a loss to understand how they could listen to that evidence and still take the position that the provision is not necessary.

Minister Ford and I have had a good working relationship. I recall the very first meeting that we had on this. To say that it was frosty would be an understatement. However, there seemed to come a thaw as we progressed through the Bill. He came to the discussions, the debate and the work on the Bill in a businesslike way. I would fail in my duties if I did not pay tribute to him this afternoon. One thing that struck me — I might hold him to it in the future — was that he said that he thought it would be a good thing if DUP Members intervened more often in his speeches. I say this to the Minister: not every day will be like this. You might regret encouraging that, because you just might be taken up on it.

The Minister said that he was concerned about clause 15. He then referred to the Queen's University report on prostitution. I would be less than honest if I did not say that I perceived that report and the timing of its release as a distraction. Let me say why. The Bill has been almost three years in the making. Could I be forgiven for wondering why, on the eve of one of the most important debates on the Bill, the Minister decided to release a report on prostitution? I will let the House decide on that one. I am sure that Members might conclude that it is more than coincidental that, on the eve of an important decision being made, we got that report out of the blue. I will say no more on that.

4.45 pm

I want to return to one person. I did not know whether she was in the House when I said it, but the Minister encouraged me to do it — I mentioned Julie Wilson. If anyone is worthy of special mention in relation to all this, it is Julie Wilson, who stands head and shoulders above the rest in this respect. I made many phone calls, sent emails and letters and called meetings, and all that correspondence did not happen between the hours of 9.00 am and 5.00 pm.

This civil servant, in my opinion, went beyond the call of duty. She went what I would call "the second mile". That is not in any way saying that she supported the Bill; she did not. She never told me one way or the other; nor did I ask because I would know not to. However, I want to place on record her superb work, professional approach, the way she carried out her business at all times and her attitude. As I said earlier, the Minister should treasure her and make sure that she stays in that Department because she is a real asset to it.

I am going to stop there, but I commend the Bill to the House and I look forward to it passing, being enacted and being effective in tackling the scourge of human trafficking. I want to thank all who participated, not only here but at other levels. I very much appreciate it indeed.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill [NIA 26/11-15] do now pass.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Western Health and Social Care Trust: Impact of Cuts on the Omagh Area

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, and all other Members who are called to speak will have approximately five minutes.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I am pleased that the topic before us, the proposed savings in the Western Health and Social Care Trust and their particular negative impact in the Omagh area, has been selected for discussion. I am also grateful that Minister Jim Wells is in attendance for the debate. Knowing Jim Wells as I do, I hope that he will listen to the various points made throughout the debate and not merely rely on a pre-prepared script that may have been written for and with him by the Department. I ask the Minister to listen carefully to the points made.

Six weeks ago, on 30 October, the Western Trust announced its savings plans for the remainder of the 2014-15 financial year. The Minister will, no doubt, tell us that all trusts in the North have been asked to develop saving plans to deal with the financial deficit facing his Department. However, the Western Trust is looking at a savings plan with cuts amounting to £7 million. At the heart of this, I believe it needs to be said that our financial difficulties, as an Assembly and Executive, are largely as a result of this time of British Government — Tory Government — economic policies: cutting the block grant year-on-year and, at the same time, depriving us of levers to generate our own revenue.

I also want to state that I appreciate that, from the point of view of the Western Trust, this would have been a very difficult exercise, and I have professional respect for the senior management team of the Western Trust who have engaged with me on these issues in the recent past. However, the principles that should be observed when identifying areas for savings should be quality of patient care, defence of front-line services and retention of staff where possible. I do not always agree that making wrong choices amounts to strong leadership.

The topic before us makes specific and particular reference to the impact of proposed cuts on service provision in the Omagh area, and there is good reason for that. It is my belief that the Omagh area suffers a disproportionately negative impact, not least in palliative care, but also in dementia care, with a resultant negative impact on patient care and staff.

There is another very good reason why it mentions the Omagh area. The Omagh community is understandably vigilant about essential health services. In the past, we lost our maternity services at the Tyrone County Hospital. We then lost our acute services per se at the Tyrone County Hospital. While we await 2016 and the opening of a new local enhanced hospital in Omagh, forgive us for being anxious to retain the maximum range of services in the Tyrone County Hospital and at the Tyrone and Fermanagh

Hospital ahead of the transfer of services to the new local enhanced hospital.

I have a personal memory of being involved in putting the case for Omagh's acute services. I was with a group of community-based individuals and other elected representatives handing over the case for Omagh, and the Department at the time was pleased to take receipt of the document, which was backed up and supported by the York Health Economics Consortium, only to be told, "Thank you for the document. We will now set about rebutting your arguments". I have a memory of that. Forgive us for being a wee bit sceptical and cynical at times about plans for our community.

The Minister knows that the current proposals have provoked public protest in Omagh. There was a rally and a further protest. It was at that rally, on a Saturday in November, that I was handed a list of the services that have seen reductions since 2009: accident and emergency; ward 5 surgical; ward 6 men's surgical; ICU; recovery main surgery theatre; ENT, children and adults; community stores; laboratory; ward 12 medical; psychiatric ICU Spruce; and Ferone Drive, an alternative to hospital provision for many.

The latest proposals involved — initially, anyway — a merger of palliative care and stroke rehabilitation, with the loss of 10 beds, the merger of the cardiac assessment unit with urgent care, and the closure of the challenging behaviour ward in Tyrone and Fermanagh, and Pine C day care and community equipment stores in Tyrone and Fermanagh. That is the context, and we are awaiting decisions on, for example, the acute mental health admissions for the future.

The proposal on palliative care, in particular, provoked widespread dismay and anger in the local community. It did not make any sense to anybody. It appeared to be a most insensitive and really inappropriate mix of patients, with those receiving end-of-life care being placed alongside patients who are recovering. That proposal was greeted with widespread dismay and even anger in the community. Thankfully, the Western Health Trust did withdraw that proposal and showed some evidence that it was listening to the community. That was welcome, but then a decision was taken to reduce the number of beds in the palliative care ward, now to be kept separate from rehabilitation, from 10 to six, and there was to be a further loss of six beds in the rehabilitation ward.

One of the key phrases used by the Western Trust and, subsequently, by the Minister was that the justification for reducing the number of beds in the palliative care ward — temporarily, and to be restored in 2016 with the opening of the new hospital — was about reflecting current levels of usage.

The problem that I have with that was evidenced at the rally in Omagh and a few days beforehand, when I was sympathising with a local family on the death of their loved one. I know that the family will not mind my mentioning the lady who died who was Mrs Violet Sweeney from the Brookmount Road area. Her family were at pains to point out to me the level and excellence of care that their beloved mother received in the hospital's palliative care ward. However, at the time when Mrs Sweeney unfortunately died, the family believes that there were at least four other patients in a queue waiting to access a

palliative care bed. To me, the notion that 10 beds can be reduced to six in order to reflect the current level of usage is not borne out by that empirical evidence. I say that with all respect to the Sweeney family. Mrs Sweeney died about a month ago, and while they are obviously keen to praise the staff at Tyrone County Hospital, they want answers to that question on the current levels of usage when there was an obvious demand on the part of other end-of-life patients.

The Minister will be aware that I have tabled a series of questions on dementia care at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital. I am grateful for his replies, but, essentially, it again seems inappropriate that dementia care patients exhibiting challenging behaviour should be placed in the same setting as patients with less challenging behaviour or patients who are being assessed. It has been asked whether Ash Villa will be closing. The term "closing" was used at the beginning by the Western Trust officials, but they have now changed that and are using words such as "service reconfiguration". Anybody who is engaged with staff at Ash Villa at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital, or with family members or relatives of users of that service, will know about the great anxiety there.

The questions that I have raised have related to, for example, occupancy rates. Did the trust block admissions for a number of months in order to contrive the figures? One staff member has said to me — I am not scaremongering or being alarmist; I have to reflect what people say to me — that they wondered whether a police cell was one possibility being considered to accommodate patients with challenging behaviour who presented in a crisis situation. I have a duty to forward that to the relevant authorities — the trust and the Minister — and I have asked that question.

I asked a series of questions about the dementia care proposal, and I ask that the Minister do everything in his power to ensure that there is a strong presence at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital for patients who present with challenging behaviour, and that they are suitably accommodated there and not put alongside people who are being assessed.

Mr McKay: I thank the Member for giving way. He puts across a very strong argument, and the situation sounds very similar to that at Dalriada in Ballycastle, which Members will be aware of. The Member made reference to the stress and uncertainty that patients and families face. Does he agree that the Minister should lift that stress and uncertainty for patients in the Western Trust area today, and also for those at Dalriada? We have heard rumours that the Minister will ensure that Dalriada remains open until 31 March. Does the Member agree that the Minister should confirm that?

Mr McElduff: I support the Member for North Antrim in putting his case, and I commend him and the other parties who worked collectively with the local community to raise the issue of Dalriada. That showed great participatory democracy in that the community came here and filled the Public Gallery in support of that case.

My emphasis today has been on the reduction of the number of palliative care beds from 10 to six. It has also been on the reconfiguration — or closure — of a particular service within dementia care at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital, but there are additional issues that I want to

raise. I know that other Members will also take up the issue of domiciliary care. I would like to hear more detail about the proposals for domiciliary care in the Western Trust area. We often hear that the direction of Transforming Your Care is towards caring for patients in their own home, but these proposals tend to be undermined by a savings plan that suggests that home care packages will be reduced. I also want some certainty about that.

5.00 pm

I have been told by senior managers in the Western Trust that no member of staff or user of day centre services in Omagh will lose out, yet I am told by a lady from Mountfield, County Tyrone, that it has been suggested that her sister may no longer have a place at the day centre that she has attended in Omagh for 28 years. This is very important for her socialisation and for the activities that she enjoys there. I want that cloud of uncertainty to be removed.

I welcome the fact that the Minister, through Michaela Boyle's representations, has acceded to a request from the six MLAs for West Tyrone for a meeting. The Western Trust says — quite rightly, I believe — that the palliative care service in Omagh is not properly funded by the commissioner. Can the Minister do anything about that or address the difficulties in recruiting specialty doctors and consultants, including locums for hospitals such as Tyrone County Hospital?

I look forward to the opening of our local enhanced hospital in Omagh in 2016, with the maximum range of services and acute mental health services at the site of the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital. Forgive us for representing our people and reflecting deeply held concerns on the part of a community that has seen some very important health decisions go against it in the last 10 years.

Mr Buchanan: I also thank the Minister for his presence at the debate and for his open-door policy, which affords concerned Members a meeting on request and at a suitable time. I fully appreciate the difficult circumstances that the Minister and the trust find themselves in because of the Budget and the knock-on effect that it is beginning to have on service delivery, especially in rural areas.

I am sure that it is no surprise to the House or the Minister that the Members for West Tyrone are here again debating health care. The Adjournment debate is focused on the impact on service provision in Omagh of the cuts proposed by the Western Health and Social Care Trust. When I entered the political arena almost 22 years ago as a councillor on Omagh District Council, one of the first things I was faced with was the closure of maternity services in Omagh. Since then, I have fought year on year to retain health-care provision in Omagh, especially at the Tyrone County Hospital. The first challenge, as I said, was the closure of maternity services, which were removed to Enniskillen. West Tyrone and Omagh are still suffering the effects of the closure of that service. We are now in a position whereby there is no facility for childbirth in County Tyrone. The identity of future generations has been taken away, and children have been robbed of their County Tyrone identity.

We then witnessed the removal of acute medical and surgical care and, of course, our accident and emergency services. We lost our ENT service, which was second to none, having been built up by Dr Kate Law, not to mention

the video link service that was delivered by Dr Patterson. On all those occasions, the trust saw fit not to replace consultants when they retired. Of course, a number of other services were lost to Omagh, which the Member who secured the debate mentioned.

Of course, all this was done under the guise of Developing Better Services. Now we have Transforming Your Care, which has a more community-based focus, and I welcome that. We all know that everyone wants to stay at home for as long as they possibly can. However, in seeking to deliver Transforming Your Care, the Western Health and Social Care Trust has failed to put the proper infrastructure in place, leaving huge gaps in rural areas of West Tyrone while seeking to deliver this service. The further proposed cuts mean that the quality of care being delivered to patients will be further eroded and seriously impacted on. No doubt, we all agree here that domiciliary care for the most vulnerable is a necessary expenditure. Any moves to cut back on that expenditure will cause a lot of concern, anxiety and stress among patients, their families and their carers.

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Will the Member give way?

Mr Buchanan: Yes.

Mr Wells: This is one of many similar debates that we have had in the House on areas in every corner of the Province — from Dungannon to Downpatrick to Ballycastle — and I have no doubt that there will be many other groups. In answer to Mr McElduff, I do listen. However, it would be very helpful if someone could suggest to me a less painful way of balancing the budget in the Western Trust, the Southern Trust, the Northern Trust etc, rather than simply berating the fact these contingency plans have been made and saying that you do not like the fact that we have to find the reductions. Could the people who speak during the rest of the debate suggest to me a way of balancing the books in the Western Trust and in the health and social care system generally that will cause them less pain? It is no good for 12 different sets of MLAs to stand up and make 12 different pleas not to reduce services in their area without offering any alternative to what can be done to balance the books.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time was almost up, but he now has an extra minute.

Mr Buchanan: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. It has been clearly pointed out, including at the commencement of the debate, that Omagh has suffered again and again from cuts over the years. The removal of services has created in the people of Omagh a lack of confidence in the trust's ability to deliver services in the efficient way in which they should be delivered. In addition, it appears that the Western Trust is targeting mental health facilities throughout Omagh and West Tyrone. The list of cuts being drip-fed almost weekly is an increasing concern for health-care workers, service providers and the community as a whole. Of course, we are listening to the health-care workers and service providers, and they are the people saying that it is nigh impossible for them to be able to deliver those services in the situation that they find themselves in.

One of the things that I want to touch on, and I know that my time is almost gone —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Buchanan: One of the most worrying things is Ferone Drive, which is a 24/7 facility for those with challenging behaviour. The potential reduction or removal of that service is of grave concern. I call on the Minister to ensure that something is in place for those with challenging behaviour in the Omagh area.

Mr Byrne: Like other MLAs from West Tyrone, I find myself angry and annoyed at what has happened in our part of the world. I appreciate that the Minister is here, but it appears that, once again, health service cuts are a reality relating to crisis management. It appears that the trust makes precipitate announcements that cause great anxiety and concern and, very often, lead to undue stress for patients, staff and the wider community.

Recently, the decision taken to merge two wards in the Tyrone County Hospital — ward 5, the palliative care ward, and ward 12, the rehab ward — caused such anxiety that the trust had to bow to the pressure. As a result, it has now reconfigured the service, but, as Mr McElduff said earlier, the number of beds in the palliative care unit has been reduced from 10 to six. There was no consultation; it was quite simply a crisis management announcement.

I appeal to the Minister, who was on the Health Committee for many years and who is now in the supreme job, to exercise his authority. Let us take on the administrators and have a reconfiguration of the service.

In Omagh, there is a great deal of resentment about past decisions. Those of us who are in favour of the local enhanced hospital proposal greatly appreciate what Minister Poots did, and, hopefully, what Minister Wells will now do, in delivering that hospital. That can lead to a rebuilding of some confidence, but this sudden decision by the Western Trust saps the community's energy and confidence. Domiciliary care causes great anxiety to many families. Again, the sudden announcement of cuts at the Spruce Ward at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital and indeed the final closure of the Gortmore House care home in Omagh adds to that stress and anxiety. I have many facts and figures. The £7 million of cuts that were announced for next year and the end-of-year cuts for this year are adding to that stress and anxiety.

We have had two public demonstrations; one on a Saturday and one on a Monday. Patricia McKeown, the well-known trade unionist with UNISON, has stated that, in her experience, administrative costs are never cut. That is the same for most Departments. The albatross of administration grows; it is services at the bedside that are cut. I challenge the Minister, who I thought was a radical, to take on the status quo, whether civil servants, administrative managers, trusts or other sections of the service.

We are greatly concerned in our part of the world about a pending decision on the acute mental health unit. A strong case has been made for over a year, but the local enhanced hospital will not be sustainable if, before it is actually built and commissioned, services are withdrawn from Omagh. It will defeat the purpose.

The new hospital in Enniskillen in the south-west is a fine building with a lot of capital resources, but it lacks the resource on a day-to-day basis to provide the services that meet the needs of the people of the south-west. That sort of decision-making on capital decisions, which, very often,

are then undermined when it comes to the actual delivery of services and revenue costs causes great anxiety.

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

Mr Byrne: I made a completely different speech from the one that I had intended. I hope that I posed a challenge to the Minister: let us take on the decision-makers, who are, very often, faceless people.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Ross Hussey: you may remain in your seat if you wish.

Mr Hussey: Thank you Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank Mr McElduff for bringing this subject to the House, and I thank the Minister for being present. Mr Byrne and I had also tabled a motion on the issue because, again, it is something that causes us concern in west Tyrone.

At the outset, I ask my colleagues to remember the late David McKee, Stanley Millar and Julia McGinn, all of whom were hospital campaigners in our time. Health issues are one thing that bring all of west Tyrone's politicians together. The Minister asked what we were going to do about it. Well, Minister, when you sat on these Benches on this side of the House, you often barracked Ministers and asked them for their solution to the problem, so that is what we will do here today.

I went to Ash Villa on a Sunday afternoon and spent an hour and a half listening to the nurses. My late father was a psychiatric nurse, as was my brother. My nephew is a psychiatric nurse. I listened to the concerns of those in Ash Villa who deal with patients who have dementia but who also have challenging behaviour. The staff in that ward had over 300 years of experience between them of dealing with patients with challenging behaviour. We can draw a line between patients with dementia and those with challenging behaviour.

5.15 pm

A couple of days ago, as I was travelling towards Belfast, I heard 'Thought for the Day' on the radio put it clearly when it said that dementia is one of the most common forms of mental ill health and is growing. That is still here, but those with challenging behaviour is a very difficult subject. When I spoke to the nurses, I also decided to speak to somebody else. I contacted a psychiatrist and spoke to him about patients with challenging behaviour. He agrees with me that those with challenging behaviour should not be in the same unit as those who do not have challenging behaviour. It is understood that those with challenging behaviour can disturb ordinary dementia patients to the point where they develop challenging behaviour.

I understand that the unit in the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital was to receive an award from the University of Stirling because it achieved a benchmark that showed that it was using best practice to deliver care in the hospital. However, that ward was chosen to be downgraded. I accept the point that others made that Ash Villa is not closing; it is being reconfigured.

The consultation was a waste of time. The people who were not consulted were the families of those with challenging behaviours. I asked the Minister questions about that, and I am told that various people were consulted. I am told that the Alzheimer's Society was consulted, and I would like to know what its response was. Families were not consulted,

because they were present the day that I and others from Omagh District Council met the nurses in Ash Villa. It is causing me great concern that all those qualified staff will be distributed throughout the trust. I will stop on that particular issue because of limited time.

Look at what happened to palliative care and the stroke rehabilitation unit in the Tyrone County Hospital. Those are two entirely different areas. Someone thought that it would be a wizard wheeze to bring those two together. I said that that decision was moronic, and I stand by that. It was moronic. When you have people dying and when friends of theirs, who are probably recovering from an illness, see their friends dying in another room, that is hardly the best solution for health.

Our coronary care unit in Omagh is excellent. I was sent there by my doctor, and I am pleased to say that my health was OK. That unit is first class. There will be a 25% reduction in palliative care. Are fewer people dying in Tyrone? Do fewer people need to use the rehabilitation unit? The answer is no. Minister, you are going to come back to me on costs, but regardless of costs, let us look at the people who need the service. It is supposed to be the Western Health and Social Care Trust, but there is no care or trust being shown.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hussey: I am not going to give way, Minister. I am going to finish my comments, and you are then going to answer anyway.

I have asked several questions of you about the trust. I accept that it has difficulties. What consideration was given to the fact that we are in rural Tyrone? Mr McElduff always makes reference to rural proofing. Was this rural proofed? Were the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) figures taken into account when the decision was reached?

I will not go beyond your patience, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Thank you for your time.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate. I thank my party colleague Barry for securing it. Like others, I am grateful to the Minister for being here today to listen to our concerns.

As has been said, there is growing concern in the Western Trust area about the proposed cuts to front-line health services, particularly those at the Tyrone County Hospital and the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital in Omagh. The announcement of the reduction in palliative care beds from 10 to six, followed by the announcement on the Ash ward in Omagh, has not gone down well in the local community, and rightly so. As we know, hundreds of people took part in a rally in Omagh recently. All our offices have been inundated with calls from members of the public who are genuinely, seriously concerned about what the cuts will mean for them, their loved ones and their families.

The people in Omagh and west Tyrone as a community need to be very vigilant at this time. Both the Western Trust and the Department of Health need to be up front and honest with the people in west Tyrone. We do not want any further reduction in services at the Tyrone County Hospital as a prelude to the new hospital opening. We in the west are entitled to the same liberty and care as everyone else,

but we feel that we are being victimised. We feel that we are not getting adequate health-care provision.

I am glad that, as has been mentioned, all six West Tyrone MLAs are singing off the same hymn sheet on the issue. Minister, I am pleased that, just yesterday, you contacted my office to confirm that you are willing to meet the six MLAs to discuss the matter further. We will all be in touch with you to arrange a suitable date so that we can move forward.

Everyone recognises that the health service is experiencing pressures at this very important time. However, it should also be remembered that our health budget of £4.6 billion has been protected through budgetary processes. Indeed, as a result of all-party lobbying, the Department was allocated £80 million in the October monitoring round and an additional £200 million in the draft Budget. Minister, you have to explain why, in spite of that, the health budget was so badly mismanaged by your predecessor. It is now up to you, Minister, to ensure that any potential cuts are subject to full equality impact assessments in order to protect front-line services, and, indeed, front-line services in our rural areas. It beggars belief that, when we are faced with such cuts, we also have, annually, £34 million being paid to consultants in bonuses, increases in administration staff, and up to £65 million being paid to the independent sector.

It is vital that strategic accountability be placed on the Health and Social Care Board and the trusts to ensure that efficiency savings are targeted in such a way as not to undermine the provision of high-quality front-line care. Not enough is being done to identify opportunities for income generation or ways in which savings can be made. Minister, may I make a suggestion to you of how to make savings? One perfect example of savings being made was in our own area of Castledearg in the Western Trust area, where the use of generic as opposed to branded medicines over a five-week period resulted in a saving of £312,000. It is estimated that, if that were rolled out throughout the North, savings in the region of £40 million would be made. Indeed, Minister, you said yourself back in 2011 that £40 million would go a long way towards meeting the shortfall that we have at the moment.

There are clearly pressures on the health service, and no one is denying that. However, we need to ensure that there is adequate funding to meet the needs of the sick and the most vulnerable in our society. That requires additional resources and additional scrutiny. The Minister has said that there is still waste in his Department. We, and my party, will not be caught short on the issue. The health service is too important to be caught up in party politicking. We need to stretch ourselves to find more funding in what are very challenging economic circumstances.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms Boyle: On top of that, we must ensure that there is adequate scrutiny so that any additional resources are targeted at front-line services.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I want to identify myself with all the comments that have been made. I reiterate the point made by the MLAs who have spoken that, although all of us from different parties from the west, and West Tyrone, have great ideological differences on many things, there is a great unanimity among us when it comes to health

issues. That is shown here today and was demonstrated in previous campaigns around the hospital.

I want to pick up on the point about the domiciliary care packages. As a member of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and someone who is heavily involved in rural issues, I am concerned about the impact that this could have on rural areas. In west Tyrone, six out of 10 — 60% — of the most deprived rural output areas in the whole of the North lie between Omagh and Strabane. Those figures were provided to us earlier today at the ARD Committee meeting by representatives of NISRA.

We all know that when we look at poverty and deprivation, health, income and access to services are considered in working out those rankings. In the Omagh area, the Owenkillew super-output area, which is the rural area of Gortin and Greencastle and right up into Mountfield, is the number one most deprived area in the whole of the North of Ireland for access to services. In west Tyrone, and indeed the wider north-west, we are talking about a dispersed rural area with very little access to services.

In one of the Departments that we are involved in — DARD — we prioritised the tackling rural poverty and social isolation (TRPSI) programme in the budget. We are continuing with the maximising access in rural areas (MARA) scheme, the assisted rural transport scheme and the rural borewells scheme. We think it is really important to deal with people who are isolated and vulnerable. The fear we have now is that one area that is going to be cut back in those £7 million of proposed cuts will be access to domiciliary care packages, including wheelchairs and home care provision. Those will be restricted along with community health services.

We are alarmed about that because, in an isolated area, that can have a huge impact on people. In actual fact, it could end up in more people receiving hospital referrals, which would run against the thrust of Transforming Your Care.

I commend my colleague Barry for tabling the debate. I ask the Minister to address this issue in his response and to look at the importance of domiciliary care for people in some of the most isolated rural areas in this part of Ireland.

Mr Hussey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McAleer: Go ahead.

Mr Hussey: The Member will be aware that, with the closure of Spruce Ward, more people with mental health issues and living in rural areas are going to be more isolated because that service is no longer available. Would he agree that that could also lead to more referrals back to hospital and cause more stress for the families who have to look after those individuals?

Mr McAleer: I thank the Member for that intervention. I concur totally with him because it is the individual patient who will be affected. There is a ripple impact on the wider family and primary carers of those individuals as well, so this has a huge impact.

I was a little startled earlier when I went through the NISRA statistics and realised that six of the 10 most deprived rural areas in the North of Ireland lie in the Omagh and Strabane catchment. That is startling and flags up the importance of community care, particularly in an era when the thrust is moving to Transforming Your Care and getting people into communities.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta. I speak in support and defence of the health service across the Western Trust area. I speak on behalf of the many patients who are reliant on the health and social care services and on behalf of the staff who provide those vital services. That is the reason why we are all here.

Michaela made a good point that we are not here engaging in a party political way. I do not think that the Minister got too much of a hard touch here this evening yet, and I certainly do not intend to start. The responsibility for the majority of these problems certainly does not lie with the Minister. We will put the blame between the trusts and how they manage their budgets, and the British Government, who have repeatedly cut the allocation to the block grant over successive years. We will leave Mr Wells out of it for the day and hope for a positive response from him. It is very easy to blame him, but that is not going to wash with anybody, so we will not waste our time.

We all know that the health service is under serious pressure due to several reasons.

The cuts to the block grant have caused a serious problem. They have reduced the amount that the Executive have to distribute around their Departments. However, considerable efforts have been made to protect the health service, which has to be welcomed.

5.30 pm

The privatisation agenda driving things in England has had a knock-on impact on the funding given to the Executive. In addition, the changing needs of our citizens due to our ageing population and changes in demographics have had an impact on the range and the cost of service provision across the North, but particularly in rural communities like the Western Trust area.

There is also financial mismanagement going on within the trusts, which has caused serious problems. On every occasion that I engage with Western Trust management, they constantly tell me that it is one of the better performing trusts, and that this is the first time that it has been in deficit. It is happening across the board, but there needs to be serious action to address mismanagement in the trust. There is a complete over-reliance on the private sector — or, the independent sector, as they call it — to deliver services. That over-reliance has proved ineffective and costly, and it is certainly not in the best interests of the people we all represent.

We are all aware of the financial pressures facing each of the trusts, and the Western Trust has outlined to us the impact that those pressures will have on its delivery of front-line services. However, the manner in which the Western Trust has dealt with the financial challenge has been disappointing. The number of people from across the border who are being treated by the Western Trust in the new hospital is nowhere near good enough, and fewer people are coming to the new hospital in Enniskillen for services than went to the old Erne Hospital. If the Minister and the Western Trust are looking for ways to raise revenue in the Western Trust area, the two easiest things they can do is try to get patients from across the border who are using health insurance and try to get patients from other trust areas. The location of the hospital in Enniskillen

makes trying to attract people from across the border very straightforward.

The Western Trust produced a lengthy document, with a range of things that it wants to target, including meals on wheel, day care at Westbridge House in Enniskillen, the wheelchair service, domiciliary care, temporary staff, the Scanning Bureau service in Enniskillen and the filling of vacancies. Those are all key front-line services, and that is where the emphasis has been.

What about low-paid staff? They have borne the brunt of the pressures, and all the while senior executives are lifting over £100,000 a year and are building pension pots of over £1 million. That leaves a very sour taste in the mouths of very many low-paid workers.

We constantly hear about cuts to day care places. I do not think I have ever seen my constituency office as busy with people coming in with problems with the health and social care services. People have to wait 44 weeks for a basic occupational therapist (OT) visit; people are being relocated to Altnagelvin to give birth; there are questions over the availability of consultant neurologists for clinics, and people have to wait nearly two years for routine orthopaedic surgery.

If we look at all these issues, we can see where we can save money. Look at the amount of money we are spending on giving medication to people who are in pain because they cannot get a routine hip or knee operation. Look at the amount of money we are spending on giving people antidepressants because they have to wait nine months to see a counsellor. This is where you make the money: you invest in your services to reduce expenditure on things like medication that is not required.

I realise that I am out of time. I eagerly await a positive response from the Minister.

Mr Wells: As expected, the focus of the debate is on the Western Health and Social Care Trust's proposals for temporary reductions in services in the Omagh area. First, it is important to set the changes in context and acknowledge the service provision that the Western Trust is delivering.

Last year, 2013-14, the Western Trust treated more than 62,000 inpatients and saw over 100,000 outpatients or day cases. There were 106,000 emergency department attendances, including almost 18,000 at the urgent care and treatment centre in Tyrone County Hospital. Add to that, 385,000, allied health-care professional contacts, 202,000 district nursing contacts, 3,500 domiciliary care packages for older people and a range of child protection, social care and adult day care services. The Western Trust not only delivers an enormous volume of care to people in its area, but does it to a very high standard — over, can I add, an extraordinarily large area that stretches from Belleek to Magilligan Point.

Time and time again, Western Trust staff have featured prominently in regional and national awards such as the allied health care profession awards, the Royal College of Nursing awards and the Northern Ireland Healthcare Awards, to name but a few. This excellence extends to all fields — medical, nursing, AHP, pharmacy and support staff — and all specialities, including dementia and maternity services. Two weeks ago, I had the privilege of meeting many of the excellent staff of the Western Trust at

their staff recognition awards. I wish that all of the MLAs for West Tyrone had been at that event, because they would have seen the most extraordinarily high standard of dedication and commitment from staff in every corner of the Western Trust. I have to say, it was probably —

Mr McElduff: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: Certainly.

Mr McElduff: The Minister will accept that we are all at one on the issue of recognising the excellence of staff throughout the Western Trust. There is no divergence on that point whatsoever, but I echo Ross Hussey's point that among those staff are the staff at Ash Villa, who were due to receive recognition from Stirling University for their excellence. They should be listened to at this time.

Mr Wells: I will be coming to the Ash Villa issue later on, but I think we need to get this in perspective. There is some extremely good work being done by the Western Trust. Indeed, some of that is based in the Omagh area, such as the staff of Beltany House respite care home for adults with learning disabilities, which received an award at that event. Others deliver trust-wide services that bring them into frequent contact with people from the Omagh area, such as the dementia services and the sensory team.

I hate to keep coming back to this issue, but I have to, and I suspect I will be doing so for the next 18 months: the financial challenge that is facing not only the Western Trust but all of health and social care in Northern Ireland. Delivering excellent health and social care services has always been challenging. We are well aware of the pressures on services from the increasing demand on hospital services, the increasing number of people living with long-term conditions, growing public expectations, and new medical technology and interventions. This year, however, has been extremely challenging, exacerbated by the financial position. I have outlined those problems to the Assembly on many occasions.

To summarise, the financial challenge that we are facing for 2013-14, even with the additional funding secured in the June and October monitoring rounds, still leaves us with consequences for provision of health and social care services. It is simply not possible to maintain current levels of service provision in the absence of all the required funding. A range of competing pressures and priorities have had to be considered across the health and social care system. The focus has been to ensure that the services that we provide are safe and effective, whilst seeking to achieve financial balance for the Department.

To achieve these twin aims, in addition to the £170 million of savings that are required this year, the trusts have been required to implement a range of contingency proposals. That is why we are here this evening. Each trust —

Mr Byrne: I appreciate the Minister's giving way. I think all of us accept that the actual health-care services provided by the medical and nursing staff are superb. I also contend, on the basis of facts from the Western Trust's management, that on a per capita basis it is as efficient as, or more efficient than, the other trusts. The question that you pose to us, Minister, is what solutions we have got. You are the Minister.

Mr Wells: I was waiting; I would have opened a book on who was going to make that point. First of all, I

accept entirely that the Western Trust has been a very effective and efficient trust and has achieved outstanding performance. Indeed, until this year, it was able to balance the books in terribly difficult circumstances. The fact that the Western Trust and other very effectively managed trusts in Northern Ireland are telling me that they are finding this extraordinarily difficult tells me that there is no problem inherent within the trust's management structure.

Demand is growing so fast that even the most efficiently managed trusts cannot make the books balance.

Each trust, including the Western Trust, has provided assurances that their services will remain safe, with appropriate staffing levels. Such proposals, including the closure of some beds, will be implemented on the understanding that alternative arrangements are to be put in place to maintain safety and mitigate the impact on patient flow.

That brings me to the Western Trust's contingency plans. I have listened to Members' contributions, and I have answered the flow of questions for written answer from Mr McElduff, Mr Buchanan, Mr Hussey and so many others. Indeed, dealing with those questions has ruined many's an evening at home. You are not a very shy and retiring lot when it comes to asking questions about health in West Tyrone. I understand your fears that temporary reductions in beds could become permanent and that the realignment of dementia services might mean a worse service for the people of Omagh. However, let us look at the facts.

Looking first at Tyrone County Hospital, I said in my statement of 30 October 2014 that I expected the full engagement of the trusts in their local areas so that the public would be fully aware of the changes and their impact. The Western Trust has engaged with local people and listened to them. I know that the trust's original proposal temporarily to merge the palliative care ward and the rehabilitation ward caused a lot of concern in the mid-Tyrone community. In response to the concerns expressed by staff, patients and their families and, of course, MLAs, the trust changed its proposal. I cannot understand. If the trust listened to the concerns of MLAs and changed its proposals, why should it be criticised? For listening to —

Mr Hussey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wells: OK.

Mr Hussey: I accept that the trust changed its plans, but, as I said at the time, the plans were moronic. You cannot put palliative care in with stroke rehabilitation. It was a silly idea, and it would never have made sense. I cannot understand why the trust made such a proposal. It knew that it would be pooh-poohed by everybody in West Tyrone. It was a silly idea.

Mr Wells: I cannot accept words like "moronic", or "mismanagement", which Mr Flanagan used, about the Western Trust. It is under extreme pressure to balance the books. How can a trust be high-performing and doing well in meeting its targets one year, yet become moronic and mismanaged the next?

Mr Hussey: The proposal was.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order

Mr Wells: The staff have remained unchanged, but the pressures have developed. The wards —

Mr McElduff: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: May I also point out that the Minister has been very generous with his time —

Mr Wells: I have.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: — but I have no extra time to allocate. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McElduff: Minister, will you fast-track a community planning process? Some of those nonsensical proposals would never have seen the light of day had local councillors and MLAs been properly consulted. We should fast-track community planning for health.

Mr Wells: Since my appointment, I have explained at length that we were in a very difficult position. We had to find £70 million very quickly, and there was not enough time to consult. If we had consulted, by the time the consultation had finished, we would not have saved a single penny. That is the difficulty the trust is having.

There have been other changes to services in the Tyrone County Hospital relating to the merger of the cardiac assessment unit and urgent care and treatment centre overnight. The Western Trust has advised me that there is no direct impact on patient care from that proposal. Indeed, the merger will help to establish a single team and give staff the opportunity to build up skills in both areas. When the time comes in 2016 for the transfer to the new enhanced local hospital — I was out about a month ago doing the stone laying — all staff will have the skills and knowledge to work across both areas competently, and a seamless transfer of services —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up, but I can give you a couple of minutes to sum up.

Mr Wells: — will occur. Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

I will move on quickly to Ash Villa. In response to several Members, I want to say that the reduction in palliative care beds was the result of a reduction in usage. Indeed, in 2013-14, there was a bed occupancy rate of only 70%. That gives me a clear indication that there was a need for a reconfiguration.

Mr McElduff: I think that the Minister is talking about dementia care and not palliative care.

Mr Wells: I will reflect on that.

Members have also expressed concern about the proposals relating to Ash Villa, a 20-bed unit that provides short-term treatment for people with dementia.

It is important to realise that this is not a reduction in service to make savings but part of a redesign of older people's mental health services across the Western Trust.

5.45 pm

Dementia care is an important issue facing us all in Northern Ireland. The expected increase in the number of people with dementia will bring further pressures on our health and social care services, and we need to start planning now to ensure that our services are configured to meet demand.

It is estimated that the health and social care system already spends £250 million supporting people with

dementia. With demand increasing alongside budgetary pressures, there is an onus on all of us to consider how best to provide services to ensure that safe, high-quality services are available.

I will finish with this, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: of the last 12 Adjournment debates, this is probably the fifth secured by MLAs from various constituencies in Northern Ireland berating the fact that the trusts have made cuts in their area. Not one of them has told me where those savings could be made, apart from Ms Boyle who made some comment. For somebody from West Tyrone to stand up and say —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mr Wells: — that that is my job certainly does not help one iota.

Adjourned at 5.46 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 12 January 2015

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Education Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed to today's business, I welcome Members back after the recess.

I inform the House that the Education Bill received Royal Assent on Thursday 11 December 2014. It will be known as the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Work and Families Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I also inform the House that the Work and Families Bill received Royal Assent on Thursday 8 January 2015. It will be known as the Work and Families (Northern Ireland) Act 2015.

Committee Business

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have received the resignation of Mr Alastair Ross as Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges and that of Paul Givan as Chairperson of the Justice Committee. Mr Alastair Ross has been nominated as Chairperson of the Committee for Justice, and Mr Jimmy Spratt has been nominated as Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, both with effect from 10 December 2014.

Matter of the Day

Terror Attacks in Paris

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Danny Kinahan has been given leave to make a statement on the terror attacks in Paris. If other Members wish to be called, they should rise in their places and continue to do so. All Members called will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. I remind Members that I will not take any points of order on this or any other matter until the item of business has been finished.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome this opportunity to speak on this incredibly important matter of the day. We in Northern Ireland are well aware of the brutal realities of terrorism, yet the events in France last week shocked, I am sure, even the most hardened of us. The murderous attacks on the cartoonists and journalists at the Paris offices of the satirical magazine 'Charlie Hebdo' included the murder of two policemen and were followed by the murder of a policewoman and the hostage-taking and murder of four people in a kosher supermarket, also in Paris.

This trail of blood lays bare all the ingredients that make up terrorism in our age: fanaticism, intolerance, sectarianism and, above all, a complete lack of respect for human life.

I am acutely aware that we must not be selective when condemning terrorism. We remember the dreadful attack by the Taliban on the school in Peshawar, which left more than 150 people, many of them children, dead. This weekend in Nigeria, 20 people were killed by Boko Haram female suicide bombers, one of whom was reported to be just 10 years old. This comes after hundreds were reportedly killed by the same militant Islamist group last week.

Whether it is France, Pakistan or Nigeria, terrorism kills innocent people and is a threat to our civilisation.

The Paris attacks were an explicit attack on the freedom of speech, which is the central tenet of liberal democracy. We do not have to search very far for the motivation of the terrorists who struck in Paris; no one should give them any cover by talking of western foreign policy. The terrorists were explicit: they attacked a free press because, in their world view, the cartoonists insulted their religion, and the attack on the Jewish supermarket exposed their sectarian mindset. Anti-Semitism is appalling, as is the spate of attacks on mosques.

Let us, in our condemnation, be very clear: all institutions, including organised religions, should be subject to criticism and satire. 'Charlie Hebdo' ridiculed many institutions and all religions; it is part of the European tradition of satire. There is no absolute right not to be offended; that is something that we in Northern Ireland should always bear in mind. We should also remember the murderous attacks against the 'Belfast Telegraph' by the Provisional IRA, plus the attempted and actual murder of 'Sunday World' journalists by so-called loyalists. Terrorists cannot abide a free press.

A letter writer to 'The Daily Telegraph' said it very well this morning:

"We should show respect for other people, not their beliefs. These should be fully open to criticism, ridicule and opposition."

If we believe in a free society, rather than in a theocracy of any denomination, we must defend the Enlightenment values of free speech, freedom of democracy, liberty, equality and fraternity from all others. If I can apologise for my French, we should all be saying, "Nous sommes Charlie", and I can certainly say, "Je suis Charlie", but also, "Je suis Juif".

Mrs Foster: I join with the rest of the Members who will speak on this motion in fundamentally condemning the attacks that took place over a number of days in Paris and outside Paris.

They came after other attacks on mainland Europe, particularly the attack on the Jewish museum in Brussels. The crimes of the victims in France varied from satire, being Jewish or simply being a police officer on duty that day. A real sense of fear, even through our television screens, came across because there was a sense of the unknown pervading the streets of Paris and elsewhere.

Of course, we are very much aware that Islamic extremists were the perpetrators. Just as in Northern Ireland, where the terrorists did not speak for the community during their worst excesses, very much Islamic terrorists do not represent the Muslim world.

As Enterprise Minister, I have had the pleasure and privilege of working with many from the Muslim world over my period in office and, of course, will continue to do so.

The horrific death toll in Paris, and it is horrific, leads me on to other outrages that have occurred. Those outrages may not have occurred in the Western world, and perhaps that is why they have not had as much attention. In particular, we have heard about Pakistan and what is going on Iraq with the sectarian violence and the violence against Christians and the Yazidis. We have also heard about what is happening in Nigeria, where just last week it is believed that a town was razed to the ground and 2,000 people lost their life. That is an absolutely shocking indictment of what is going on in the world today. More than a million people have been displaced in Nigeria, hundreds of thousands have fled to neighbouring countries, and many children have been separated from their parents and simply do not know whether their mothers and fathers are alive or dead.

Back in the United Kingdom, we must be alert and work with the lawful authorities to try to prevent anything similar from happening here. I commend the work of our security services, which are working against those in the shadows and the terrorists. I also appeal to the House to support the work of international agencies to try to deal with horrors in places such as Iraq and Nigeria. A human life is as valuable in Nigeria as it is France and the UK, and I ask the House to reflect that.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Like the rest of the world, we watched with outrage what happened in Paris last week. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I extend my sympathies to all the victims and their families, and we extend our solidarity to the people of France at this very difficult time.

There can be no place for anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or any form of racism in our societies, whether in Africa, Asia, Latin America or here in Ireland. Non au racisme et à la xénophobie. I am saying, "No to racism and xenophobia" in my poor French.

Religion or religious belief is the fig leaf that will be used by some to rationalise the attack on those workers. No grievance or religious slight, no matter how strongly felt, can justify such an attack, and no cause is served by it. Such attacks are also used by some to introduce more oppression and oppressive laws and to attack fundamental freedoms, and that must be resisted.

We are also outraged at what is happening in Nigeria, Iraq, Syria and other parts of the world. Indeed, I visited Gaza not so long ago and saw for myself the pain and suffering of the people there. I do not want anyone in the world to experience such pain and suffering, regardless of where they live and what they believe. My abiding memory of that visit to Gaza is of a meeting with a seven- or eight-year-old girl. We were at her house, which had been destroyed, and her entire family had been wiped out. Like people in France, that little girl also lost her family. I have no doubt that the people of France do not want to see what is happening in Gaza happening anywhere.

French people, through their work with aid agencies, are leading from the front. Médecins Sans Frontières is leading the fight against Ebola, and many French aid agencies are doing very important work throughout the world.

Poverty, inequality and racism, wherever they occur, are unacceptable and have no place in our world. The displays of unity and resolve that we have witnessed since last week's terrible tragedies have been heartening, and, as a lasting tribute to the victims and to all victims of global racism, we must redouble our efforts to resolve conflict. The only way in which to do that is through dialogue.

Dr McDonnell: On behalf of me and my party, the SDLP, I express solidarity with the victims and survivors of the Paris tragedy.

The tragedy that struck the city of Paris, and France as a whole, last week was absolutely awful and unimaginable. Its impact has been felt across Europe and the wider world, and it is compounded by the fact that it was not an act of God or something that was outside our control. It was man-made, planned and absolutely ruthlessly carried out. Seventeen lives were lost in those brutal attacks: 11 people who worked for 'Charlie Hebdo'; four innocent individuals who were shopping in a kosher supermarket; and two police officers.

12.15 pm

People in Northern Ireland can share the pain of the people of Paris and France. The people of Northern Ireland stand in solidarity with, and in support of, the victims of this awful tragedy. We here have known our fair share of suffering and, indeed, in the context of free speech and attacks on journalism. Many of our own journalists were attacked over the years, none more so than Martin O'Hagan who was brutally murdered basically for calling it as he saw it. In the context of empathy with people, we can stand shoulder to shoulder and in total solidarity with those who were killed and injured, as well as their friends and families.

Something caught my eye in the reports on this awful situation. I must pay tribute to a young Muslim man in the kosher supermarket who managed to hide a number of possible hostages or, worse still, probable victims. He managed to hide them in the basement, away from those who would kill or maim them. That, to me, presents a true

face of the Muslim community and is more valuable and more significant than those who were doing the attacks in the name of the Muslim community.

We hope that the tragic event that happened last week can unite people in France, people across Europe and, indeed, the people of the world in solidarity against terrorism and violence. There have been estimates that more than 1.5 million people united in Paris over the weekend for the march against hatred and for history. That is positive and very hopeful when we see how they all gathered together with great respect and dignity. Indeed, we had our own small demonstration outside the City Hall at the end of last week. That was useful and positive, and I congratulate all those who took part.

The support that has been shown by world leaders, with 44 of them standing together linking arms, is unprecedented. It goes some way to showing support for the victims of this brutal attack. Terrorism has failed, and it will continue to fail. The people of Paris, France and Europe will stand up against it, and we should stand solidly in solidarity with them.

Dr Farry: The people of Northern Ireland very much stand in solidarity with the people of Paris and France. Northern Ireland itself is, of course, very familiar with terrorism. However, we have to bear in mind that terror can come in many different forms and formats and makes unique contributions to those who are affected by it and the societies in which they live.

Of course, the terror in France is, first and foremost, a situation in which people have lost their lives. Many families will be suffering as a consequence of what has happened. However, it is also an attack on a set of values. Indeed, going back to the French Revolution, France is very clearly a society that has been established around a sense of values and the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity.

We also have to bear in mind that this is not about a clash of two different, conflicting rights, with the right of freedom of speech or freedom of thought on the one hand versus freedom of religion on the other. Those rights very much go hand in hand. Indeed, they are the two sides of the same coin. If you look back through history, you will see that it was very much freedom of religion that generated the notion of freedom of thought and freedom of speech. It is important that we bear that very much in mind as we look to the future.

We are seeing acts of violence, terror and repression being carried out around the world through what is very much a warped sense of what religion means. This is not just an issue that Islam has to confront. It is one that all the major world religions have to come to terms with. We have seen major acts of violence being motivated by that warped sense of religion, whether we are talking about the recent attacks in Sydney in Australia, what is happening with IS in Iraq and Syria, or what is happening in Afghanistan and Nigeria. Other Members have mentioned all of those.

It is also right that we say that what has happened in France, and the attempted justification that has come from some quarters, in no way, shape or form represents the true face of Islam. Islam is fundamentally about peace in its true sense, just as virtually every other major world religion is also fundamentally about peace. At a time when Islam is being wrongly portrayed as narrow and bigoted, it is worth recalling that when Europe was going through

the Dark Ages over 1,000 years ago, it was the Islamic societies around the world that kept alive knowledge and the whole values around learning and the creation of knowledge. As Western societies, we are very much indebted to them for their actions in that regard.

What has happened, not just in France but elsewhere around the world, points to the importance of how we address what is happening in terms of the fragmentation of our societies. There are major forces at work that are trying to tear societies apart, and it is incumbent upon us, whether in Northern Ireland or elsewhere, to see how we can bring people together around a common sense of purpose through which, at the same time, we respect and celebrate diversity.

Mr Allister: I join in the absolute condemnation of the horrific events that unfolded. Like, I am sure, most people, I was aghast at the bloodthirsty brutality as it unfolded before our very eyes over the weekend. I welcome the most robust response of the security forces in France, their swift and effective action and the dispatching of those who had perpetrated that horror to meet their maker, not to be rewarded but to be condemned for the most flagrant breach of the laws against murder. Certainly, it is a relief that those individuals who were minded to murder as they did in that fashion will never kill again. It behoves all of society to ensure that those who think like them will not have the opportunity to kill again either.

In welcoming the condemnation, I note that it even includes those who, to this very day in Northern Ireland, continue to justify the terrorism of the IRA. There are no good terrorists, whether they have become Members of this House or not. Terrorism was, is and always will be evil, whether it was the murder of Martin O'Hagan or the litany of butchery by the IRA.

I also express my great regret at the attempt by Dr Raied Al-Wazzan of the Belfast Islamic Centre to justify and support Islamic State. I was quite shocked to hear him on Radio Ulster on Friday do exactly that. That is a man who played the injured party and the sympathy card when Pastor McConnell was being hounded in the media, but it now seems that he stands with Islamic State. Such equivocation and such support — as we saw for years from Sinn Féin on terrorism — is the very thing that underwrites and encourages more terrorism, and it, too, is wrong.

Mr Agnew: Je suis Charlie. There is no better place to discuss freedom of expression than in a democratically elected Chamber where Members hold the privilege that protects the highest standards of freedom of speech.

To hold a political viewpoint and to express it is to risk offending someone, but none of us have the right to not be offended. Disagreement is an essential part of any democracy, but, of course, those who use violence to assert their own political or proclaimed religious views do not believe in democracy and, indeed, do not respect democracy. Those who committed those murders believed that they were right and that we should all be forced to agree with them. We should all remember that, no matter how strongly we hold a view, whether it is a political view or religious belief, it is just that; it is our view, and it is a personal view. Whilst we absolutely must respect and uphold freedom of religion, we must also protect freedom from religion.

Those of us who believe in democracy and in freedom of speech must stand together to defend it, peacefully and with dignity in upholding those values that serve us all.

Mr B McCrea: I condemn absolutely the actions that took place in Paris. I offer my sympathy to the victims and their families and my solidarity with the people of France. The actions of the last few days offer a number of really significant challenges to some quite powerful forces in our society.

My colleague Mr Agnew has just used, yet again, the phrase "Je suis Charlie". One of the challenges for us is whether that is enough. I suspect that there are not many in the Chamber who will have been aware of 'Charlie Hebdo' before the tragic events took place. One of the issues for us is whether we should leave it to individuals or small groups of people to stand up for our democracy. One of the big challenges that I have is for the media: for it to impose some form of censorship on itself. The mainstream media does not take on those challenges and, therefore, leaves individuals and small entities to face them alone. I think that that is the real challenge for us: not just to issue some words of French, but to speak out when speaking out is necessary.

That brings me to the next challenge that we face, which was alluded to by Mr Allister. Where are the limits to free speech? Is it absolutely acceptable to say anything, or are there any constraints? If there are constraints, who should put those in place?

One of the other things is that democratic chambers should take on the big debates. We should not duck the issues or hide behind some sense of not wanting to offend anybody. Let us have the proper debates in the proper areas.

The final thing that I would like to say, and that I have noticed, is that far too many people try to use events to advance their own particular agendas. The real lessons from the last few days were of a need for genuine tolerance and how it is good to air things in a proper and respectful manner. It is not about seizing those issues and trying to use them for our own advantage. With that, I think that the western democracies have a lot to do to engage their peoples on the matters that really matter to them.

Mr Ross: The world watched in absolute horror as three days of terror unfolded in Paris. It started with the brutal murder of 11 people working in a satirical magazine, then the murder of a policewoman on the streets of Paris and then four hostages being killed in a supermarket on Friday. Even today, there is fear across Paris, and Jewish schools are under armed guard this morning.

It was, plainly and simply, an attack on freedom by extremists who hate freedom, liberty and democracy. It was an attack on all the things that we should hold dear and cherish, such as freedom of speech, freedom of expression and individual liberty. Just as was the case in Northern Ireland, in Israel, Nigeria, New York or anywhere else in the world, there is no justification for terrorist activity or for those who would support such actions.

The response was clearly seen yesterday as three million people took part in unity marches across the world. The Je suis Charlie signs that were clearly seen across the world on social media and world leaders standing side by side to condemn the activities sends a strong message

that people stand with the people of France to defend the French principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

That is the right response. We must stand up for freedom and freedom of speech, even if at times that freedom of speech offends or proves uncomfortable for us. It is the very basis of a free, democratic society.

12.30 pm

The response to terrorists, whether Islamic terrorists or those closer to home, is to keep living our lives and fight for the freedom that we cherish. The response has to be support for the police and for the intelligence services, even if that means that some difficult decisions have to be taken closer to home, and we have to get the National Crime Agency (NCA) operating here in Northern Ireland. We have to support the intelligence services, which will have targeted surveillance against suspected terrorists in order to keep us safe, but we must never forsake our freedom or our liberty, even when under attack.

Assembly Business

Standing Order 20(1): Suspension

Resolved:

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for Monday 12 January 2015. — [Ms Ruane.]

Election of Speaker

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we commence the election of a Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 4(2), I invite Mr Samuel Gardiner to take the Chair as Acting Speaker and preside over the election.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner) in the Chair.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): Before we commence, I remind Members that the election of the Speaker will be conducted using the procedures set out in Standing Order 4. In accordance with Standing Order 4(2), I have taken the Chair as Acting Speaker and will preside over the election.

I will begin by asking for nominations. Any Member may rise to propose that another Member is elected as Speaker. I will then ask for the proposal to be seconded by another Member, as required by Standing Order 14. If that occurs, I will then verify that the Member so nominated is willing to accept the nomination. There will not be an opportunity for speeches at this stage. I will then ask for further proposals and follow the same procedure 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 in which no Member may speak more than once. At the conclusion of the debate, or the conclusion of the nominations if there are no requests to speak, I will put the Question that the Member first proposed shall be Speaker of the Assembly. The vote can only be carried on a cross-community basis. If the proposal is not carried, I will put the Question in relation to the next nominee and so on until all nominations are exhausted. If that is clear, we will proceed.

Do I have any proposals for the office of Speaker of the Assembly?

Mr M McGuinness: Go raibh maith agat. Acting Speaker, I am honoured to nominate my friend and colleague Mitchel McLaughlin for the position of Speaker.

Mitchel and his wife, Mary-Lou, and I have been friends for 40 years, and I know well that the breadth of his abilities, his dedication —

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): Sorry. Could I draw your attention to the fact that it is just a nomination, not a speech at this stage?

Mr M McGuinness: I am honoured to nominate Mitchel McLaughlin as Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): Thank you very much.

Could I have a seconder?

Ms Ruane: Aontaím leis sin. I second that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): Are there any other nominations?

Dr McDonnell: I wish to nominate John Dallat.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): Mr John Dallat has been proposed.

Mrs D Kelly: I second that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): Are there any other nominations?

Mr Nesbitt: I nominate Roy Beggs.

Mr Swann: I second the nomination.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): Is Mr Mitchel McLaughlin prepared to serve if elected?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I am.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): Is Mr John Dallat prepared to serve if elected?

Mr Dallat: Of course.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): Is Mr Roy Beggs prepared to serve if elected?

Mr Beggs: I am.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): Are there any other nominations?

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 and that the Business Committee has agreed to allow each Member wishing to speak up to three minutes. I call Mr Martin McGuinness on this occasion.

Mr M McGuinness: As I was about to say — *[Laughter.]*

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): You can on this occasion.

Mr M McGuinness: Mitchel and his wife, Mary-Lou, and I have been friends for 40 years. I know well the breadth of Mitchel's abilities, dedication and thoughtfulness of approach to political life. I believe him to be well suited to fulfil the onerous responsibility of being Speaker of this Assembly and what that entails.

As a Derryman taking over from William Hay, a Londonderryman, this represents yet another symbolic, important step towards equality and inclusiveness. I pay tribute to William for the admirable way he represented this House and how fair and impartial his judgements were. I wish William well. I believe that Mitchel McLaughlin will, as William did, win the respect and admiration of the whole House. I have no hesitation whatsoever in nominating him as the new Speaker.

Mr P Robinson: I want to make clear first of all that there is no legal or constitutional requirement for the Speaker to come from the Foyle constituency, although I am sure that there is a recognition that there must be something special in the air down there to have the proposals coming from that constituency.

I remind the House that, when we previously looked at this issue in September, I pointed out on behalf of my colleagues that an agreement had been entered into. Let us remember, this House will not have a Speaker unless

there is an agreement, particularly between the two main parties, and therefore would not operate and function properly without it. We indicated that we would honour the agreement to have a Sinn Féin nominee in that position when Sinn Féin had agreed on the issue of welfare reform. I am pleased to say, and to see, that that has now happened. I therefore intend to honour that agreement and to give support to Mitchel McLaughlin.

I say only one thing to him and to the House. An example has been set by the outgoing Speaker, William Hay, who is soon to become a Lord. I think that everyone recognises that William, in the exercise of his duty, cut his connection from party politics. That is essential, and I make it clear: there should be no party instructions to a Speaker. The Speaker must act independently in that office, and I trust that that will happen.

Dr McDonnell: I too pay tribute to the former Speaker, Willie Hay, for the tremendous job he did. He was fair, impartial, dignified and inclusive. He certainly took the role of Speaker and placed it outside party politics and in an independent space.

On the 13 October last, I was privileged to speak on the nomination of John Dallat as Speaker of the Assembly. It was very clear then — and I am very clear now — that John is an outstanding choice for Speaker. That is why we have put his name forward. As a Deputy Speaker, he has given this Assembly and its Members exemplary service over the past seven years, showing leadership, integrity, impartiality and good judgement at all times.

John has further shown his ability and capacity to take on the role of Speaker as and when required. In October, I pointed out — it is worth repeating now — that John Dallat's long and dedicated service to the Assembly has given him wide and comprehensive experience of all the procedural and corporate functions of that office. At that time, I was disappointed that other parties allowed narrow party political self-interest to stand in the way of John's election. It seems that little has changed. It appears that the DUP and Sinn Féin have re-concocted their secret arrangements. This secret arrangement is designed to exclude the rest of us in the Assembly. In the light of those side deals and secret deals, and at a time when public confidence in the Assembly is at an all-time low, it is even more crucial to have someone of the calibre of John Dallat as Speaker. It is time that we moved to an open and transparent system of government here without back-door or side deals designed to shut out full inclusion and full democracy.

Mr Nesbitt: As we conduct the first bit of business of 2015, I am sure that many Members have aspirations — maybe even resolutions — for the next 12 months. Mine would certainly be that we move towards more normal politics. In fairness, some strides were taken in that regard at the tail end of 2014 during the Stormont House talks, including balancing our Budget and getting that right, opposition, and effective and efficient government being added to the inclusion that was at the heart of the 1998 deal. Surely, however, normal politics in a matter like this would be simply selecting the best man or woman for the job, and yet we see to our left, from the largest single party, not a single candidate considered worthy of consideration by the House.

So, despite the Secretary of State's assurances that there were no side deals at Stormont House, I commend the First Minister for admitting that the DUP's support for Mitchel McLaughlin was a side deal. I am sorry that it does not feel that it has anybody worthy of consideration. The Ulster Unionist Party does: we consider Roy Beggs — *[Interruption.]*

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): Order, please.

Mr Nesbitt: — to be a more than capable candidate. He was first elected to this Chamber in 1998, and he has defended his seat at every Assembly election since. So, there is the first quality: loyalty. There is no doubt that the Speaker has to demonstrate a number of values, loyalty being one, as is a good temperament, attention to detail — that is absolutely critical in the role — and a sense of fairness and fair play, all of which Roy Beggs demonstrates abundantly.

Being Speaker, of course, is not just about presiding over the business of the Chamber or ensuring that the business of the Assembly is conducted smoothly; the Speaker is also the principal interface with civic society. Roy Beggs has nothing to prove in that regard. I have no difficulty — indeed, I have great pleasure — in commending and recommending Roy Beggs to the House.

Mr Ford: I suspect, Mr Acting Speaker, that, last autumn, you did not imagine that you would have to do the job twice, but I suppose that today is probably a case of better late than never.

I join others in paying tribute to William Hay and the role that he performed as Speaker. He did at least break the apparent constitutional requirement that the Speaker of the House be a member of the Alliance Party, so he must be thanked for that, as well as for his work whilst in the Speaker's Chair. There is also a sad and interesting parallel: when Willie Hay was proposed, he was proposed as Speaker on a cross-community basis. We still have not reached that point today.

When we last debated the issue of the Speaker, I made it very clear that the Alliance Party would support Mitchel McLaughlin on two grounds. First, when agreements are made, they should be honoured. It should not have required the Sinn Féin rollover on welfare reform to get the agreement on who should be Speaker of the House honoured. Secondly, Mitchel McLaughlin, as Principal Deputy Speaker, has acted as impartially as any who have been Deputy Speakers and has shown that he was preparing himself to be an impartial Speaker in the same way as William Hay was and in the same way as John Alderdice and Eileen Bell were in previous Assemblies. On that basis, he should be supported for Speaker today, not out of any disrespect for John Dallat or Roy Beggs — there is no suggestion that they are not fit to do the job — but because an agreement was reached, and he has been acting as Principal Deputy Speaker. That should carry through.

12.45 pm

I also believe that, if the House is to elect a Sinn Féin Speaker today, it will make a very significant statement about people who have been at times reticent about fully buying into the institutions of the Assembly. That is a fundamental, significant and important point that should not be lost on the wider community. With that, I have great

pleasure in endorsing the Member for South Antrim as Speaker of the House.

Mrs D Kelly: I am very pleased to second my party's leader's proposal of Mr John Dallat as Speaker. John Dallat has many years of political experience, and I think that he is the longest serving member of the Speaker's Office. He has shown in the role of Deputy Speaker his impartiality and his ability to act above party politics.

As the First Minister said, we are here today with the proposal for Mitchel McLaughlin as a consequence of an agreement between the two main parties. It would do Members well to remember that the House owes its existence to both the endorsement and the agreement of the people of this island for power-sharing and partnership; not a power carve-up between the two largest parties. We in the SDLP remember well that, just a few months ago, Sinn Féin blocked the first nationalist nomination, of John Dallat, as Speaker. Sinn Féin Members had an opportunity to speak and to vote for a nationalist Speaker, and they voted, ashamedly, against it. Unlike Sinn Féin, we hold high principles and high values, and the SDLP continues to rail against the power carve-up between the two main parties. So, today, we will support Mr Dallat with pride.

Mr Attwood: First, the SDLP believes that the three candidates, Mr Beggs, Mr Dallat and Mr McLaughlin, all have the capacity and could all have the confidence of the House when it comes to the role of Speaker. However, I want to repeat two comments that I made about our candidate, Mr Dallat, when this matter came before the House last autumn. The Hansard record confirms that I said:

"The election of the Speaker today can be a watershed moment. We should measure the next 10 minutes against whether or not it is a watershed moment for the Assembly and for politics. A number of candidates have been nominated, all of whom have their particular values and virtues, but, in the view of the SDLP, more than any other candidate, the election of John Dallat as Speaker would represent that watershed moment. The election of John Dallat would be a renewal of integrity and a recognition of a good public servant." — *[Official Report, Bound Volume 98, p106, col 1].*

I then added:

For too long, issue after issue in the Assembly and in Northern Ireland has been reduced to narrow deals. It has been about the division of spoils rather than the full public interest. John Dallat as Speaker would represent something and someone different. — *[Official Report, Bound Volume 98, p107, col 2].*

In the view of our party, those comments made four months ago are as valid today as they were then. On the latter point, it will be curious to see, over the next number of days, whether politics is again reduced to a division of spoils when it comes to the nomination of a Principal Deputy Speaker. I wait to hear the voices across the Chamber in response to that question.

On the last occasion, the SDLP voted for Mitchel McLaughlin as Speaker, and Hansard records 14 SDLP votes for Mr McLaughlin and 24 votes from Sinn Féin. However, Hansard then records that, under the label "nationalist", 24 people voted against a nationalist Speaker of the House. Mr Boylan voted no. Mr Kelly voted no.

Mr McElduff voted no. Ms Ní Chuilín voted no. Mr O'Dowd voted no.

Twenty four nationalists, nationalist by their own declaration in the Members' interests in the House, voted down the first nationalist Speaker of the House. When we come to exercise our vote, we will not follow that narrow, selective, partial, limited and backward example. Whilst we support John Dallat, we will not oppose Mr McLaughlin.

Mr Allister: Mr Acting Speaker, what we are seeing today, and what we will see in a few minutes, is the first down payment by the DUP to Sinn Féin arising from the Stormont House Agreement: the delivery of this side deal.

Three months ago, Mitchel McLaughlin was unelectable. As far as I am concerned, he is still unelectable, because he is still the same Mitchel McLaughlin, who, with great notoriety, told the general listening public that that most cruel of crimes, the kidnapping, murder and secret burial of Jean McConville, was not a crime. Yet there are some in the House who think that someone of that mentality should be made Speaker of the House. The shame is, of course, that those unretracted remarks will mark the future Speaker of the House as someone who is prepared to take that stance and who has been put in that position by many of those who say that they would abhor such comments.

Of course, the position he aspires to — the Chair, as it were, that he wants to sit on — was once occupied by Sir Norman Stronge for more than two decades. What happened to Sir Norman Stronge? He was done to death most cruelly — shot and incinerated by an IRA attack on his home. One asks Mr McLaughlin this: was that a crime? It seems that some who are going to vote for him neither know nor care whether he thinks that was a crime. We know what his party president thinks of the murder of a previous Speaker of the House, for he is on record as saying:

"The only complaint I have heard from Nationalists or anti-Unionists is that he was not shot 40 years ago."

Someone of that ilk, who thinks that the murder of Jean McConville was not a crime, now aspires to hold the position of Speaker courtesy of the votes from the DUP Benches. There are some in the DUP who, in the past, have gone for a walk rather than vote for such matters. Today I suspect that they are going to walk through the Lobbies. Well, next time they walk past the memorial to Sir Norman Stronge, may they hang their heads in shame.

Mr Campbell: The position of Speaker is a very important one, and I think that some factual accuracy should be put on the record. If every unionist MLA in the Chamber today were to vote for the only unionist candidate in the field, he would still not be elected.

In the past, when Sinn Féin have made wrong decisions and carried out wrong actions as part of the republican movement, we in this party have attacked and condemned them, and rightly so. That was, is and remains our stance. We did it consistently when others walked away, and we will do it today and in the future. When they did the right thing, we acknowledged that they had done the right thing.

For example, in support for the police and the rule of law, we acknowledged that, after many years of denying and usurping that, at long last they had done the right thing. But then, when they reneged on that, with things such as

the murder parade in Castledearg, we told them that they were wrong, condemned them and said that there would be repercussions. Again, on welfare reform, when we told them that we had an agreement in private that they would implement welfare reform and they reneged on it, we said that there would be repercussions. Thankfully, they have now moved from that position: from saying that they would not implement welfare reform, they are now implementing it. So, again, we acknowledge when they do the right thing, and we condemn them when they do the wrong thing. Today, we acknowledge in word and in deed when they have done the right thing.

It is important that people be quoted accurately in this Chamber today and in the future. For example, just over a year ago when the Education Minister in this Chamber inaccurately quoted me about implementing power sharing, I accurately rectified the matter, and I am happy to do so again today. When Gerry Adams, on his departure from this Chamber, he, again, inaccurately referred to some comments that I allegedly had made, and I had to rectify the position there again.

This party stands for progress; we stand to try to ensure that we will make progress now and in the future. If Sinn Féin or the incoming Speaker, if he is elected, were to step out of line, we would condemn them. Of course, we now wait to see if all the necessary tests between now and the next Assembly election are passed.

Mr McCallister: The role of Speaker of this House and, indeed, in any parliamentary system, is hugely important. I hope that this is the last occasion on which we elect our Speaker in this way. As many in this Chamber will know, I would like to see it change. I would like it to be a gift of this House and this Assembly rather than the result of a deal done nearly eight years ago. I would like to see that separation. I think that the First Minister's point about Speaker Hay leaving his party affiliation is important, and it is important that it happens with whoever is elected Speaker today.

It is also important, and it is how I would like to change it, that they leave their constituency and all the issues that they would have to deal with, as that lifts a Speaker truly out of everyday party and constituency politics, such as writing about planning. That is why changing the way and recognising that separation and the role of the Speaker is hugely important.

The Speaker should be the champion for the Back Benches and for the work that this Assembly does in making sure that Ministers and the Executive branch of Government are held to account. That is why the role is so important, and it is why I hope that this is the last occasion on which we elect a Speaker in such a way. I agree with colleagues who said that they would have no great difficulty in voting for any of the three candidates on offer today, as I voted for them on the last occasion that we did this.

I feel that Mitchel McLaughlin, as Principal Deputy Speaker, has shown many of the characteristics that I want to see in a Speaker, including being impartial in carrying out his duties, and I hope that he will continue to do that if elected today. I just hope that, at the end of today, we end up with a Speaker. It is important that if Mr McLaughlin is elected, it signals the full buy-in of Sinn Féin into this institution and into this Assembly. It is an important point

to acknowledge and to hope for. On that note, I support Mitchel McLaughlin's nomination for Speaker.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 72; Noes 12.

AYES

Nationalist

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist

Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, 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 McCartney and Ms Ruane.

NOES

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mrs Overend.

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>[85.7%]</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>[75.0%]</i>
<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Mr Mitchel McLaughlin be Speaker of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Gardiner): I formally declare that Mr Michael McLaughlin — *[Laughter.]* — Mitchel McLaughlin has been elected as Speaker of the House. You have been very patient; you can come to the top of the House.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

1.15 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. Before we move on with the other business, I would like to say few words. First, I thank Mr Sam Gardiner for serving the House by presiding over the election of the Speaker today, as well as at the dress

rehearsal in October. I also want to express my sincere appreciation to the two Deputy Speakers, Roy Beggs and John Dallat, for the excellent working relationship that we have had, particularly in recent months. The situation we found ourselves in had the potential to be a very difficult one, but we all approached it from the perspective of seeking agreement in the best interests of the House and its procedures, and I think that that will serve us well in the time ahead.

Since October, we have all gained a better understanding of the issues and the pressures that the Speaker has to manage. That insight has served only to strengthen my admiration for the service that Speaker Hay gave to the Assembly. It was regrettable that Speaker Hay did not have the opportunity to be here in person when he stepped down from the Chair. I know that Members will wish him well now that his health has improved and as he prepares to take his seat in the House of Lords. I hope to have an early opportunity to invite Speaker Hay back to mark his major contribution to the Assembly, and I know that that will be endorsed by the Assembly.

Finally, I want to thank Members for their support today. I say to all Members, those who supported me and those who did not, that I am conscious that I am here to uphold the impartiality and independence of the office and the interests of the House on behalf of all of you. I know that there will be times when I, as Speaker, will have to make judgments that will not please everyone, but I am focused on that and on what I might be able to do to help increase understanding and agreement inside and outside the Chamber. We are, I believe, in a more positive political environment now than we have been for a few years, and we have much work to do. Like any debating chamber, the Assembly symbolises the rights of Members to discuss, to agree or to disagree or to decide to or to decide not to compromise. I look forward to the cooperation of all Members to exercise those rights constructively and to show collectively what this place can achieve on behalf of all our constituents.

The next item of business is a motion —

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I request, Mr Speaker, that you might review the Hansard record, in particular the comments made by Mr Allister in relation to comments made by a third party, not in or a Member of the Chamber, in respect of the attacks in Paris and France over the past number of days. I ask that you review the Hansard report and determine whether those comments were appropriate.

Mr Speaker: I will review Hansard, and I will seek the advice and counsel that is available to me as Speaker to see whether an issue of such did arise.

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

Mr Speaker: Is it further to that point of order or is it a new point of order?

Mr Allister: It is further to it in one sense, but it — *[Inaudible.]* — a new point of order.

Mr Speaker: Point of order.

Mr Allister: On a matter perhaps more relevant, given the moment, would it be in order to ask whether the current Speaker of the House regards the murder of a predecessor as a crime?

Mr Speaker: That is not a point of order, but let me take an early opportunity to mark the cards of all Members, including you: do not abuse the procedures or I will respond appropriately.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Committee Business

Budget 2015-16

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is a motion from the Committee for Finance and Personnel on the draft Budget 2015-16. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to four hours for the debate. The proposer will have 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have seven minutes.

Those who are departing the Chamber should do so quietly.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): I beg to move

That this Assembly takes note of the draft Budget 2015-16 announced on Monday 3 November 2014 by the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can I be the first to congratulate you on the appointment that you have received? It is obviously a first for the House. It is the first time that Derry has won something twice in a row. Barry told me to say that, and no one deserves it more, Mr Speaker. I have served with you on the Finance Committee in recent years, and the respect in which you are held by all parties in the House is second to none. I trust that you will do a fantastic job in the time ahead, following in the footsteps of Mr Willie Hay, who I have to say — I speak on behalf of party colleagues as well — always served fairly and justly in any of his dealings with the Assembly.

The Committee tabled this motion to provide the Assembly with the opportunity to debate the Executive's draft Budget 2015-16. The coordinated report on this draft Budget examined issues at a cross-cutting and departmental level and was informed by the responses from each of the applicable Assembly Committees and by written evidence from representatives of the business and voluntary sectors, economists and the trade unions. The intention is that the report and today's contributions will inform the Executive's considerations and help influence the shape of the final Budget outcome.

At the outset, I point out the shortcomings of the Budget process in its truncated nature and the fact that there has been considerably less scope than normal for input by the Assembly and wider public. Committees experienced difficulties with the time available and a lack of information from respective Departments. The coordinated report has highlighted how the current process has fallen short in good practice and again stressed the need to put in place the memorandum of understanding between the Assembly and the Executive to ensure that the shortcomings are addressed and that future Budget processes meet the needs of the legislature and Government.

We must also recognise that, on this occasion, particular difficulties and challenges gave rise to the delays and time pressures. The Committee has been mindful of the extraordinary Budget challenges that the Executive are facing. A Budget was drafted in the context of unprecedented public expenditure reductions. These reductions are, of course, set against the backdrop of a British Government who are absolutely unyielding in their adherence to a strict austerity policy. Added to that, we face additional local difficulties, including increasing

pressure on the health budget, a slower rate of economic growth and recovery than other jurisdictions and inherited burdens on public expenditure arising from the legacy of the conflict, which are distinctive and additional to those faced by other regions.

Last year, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecast that, overall, resource departmental expenditure limits (DEL) would decrease by a further 13% in real terms by 2018-19. In emphasising the tough choices ahead, the Minister quoted Nelson Mandela, who once stated:

“May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.”

I can think of other words from Madiba that are also fitting in this context, when he reflected:

“after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.”

Clearly, there are immense budgetary challenges ahead. There will be a responsibility on all of us, across the House, to work constructively and collectively to climb those hills together in the interests of all the people we represent.

In that regard, I welcome the measures contained in the financial package delivered as part of the Stormont House Agreement, providing spending power of almost £2 billion. As well as additional capital borrowing provision, this will include new and additional funding, flexibilities to protect resource spending and measures that could also help to generate substantial year-on-year savings.

It was clear that more information and clarity is required on key issues. Many queries raised by Assembly Committees with their respective Departments remain unanswered. In the budget allocations for different Departments, for example, a number of aspects were not clear, including the basis on which bids were prioritised and the rationale for proposed departmental allocations; the proportion of budget allocations contractually or legally committed; the proportion of allocations available for ministerial prioritisation or discretion; and the criteria to be used to determine which services or programmes will be cut or scaled back. Quite clearly, there are a number of lessons that need to be learned from the process that we have just gone through.

Another key area we looked at is how the Budget will impact on the wider economy. This includes the impact on the public sector and the impact on university and further education and training places. As regards the public-sector workforce restructuring plan, a number of Committees highlighted a lack of detail on the shape, scale, timing or impact of the proposed restructuring. Various Committees and stakeholder groups singled out specifically the area of university and further education places for concern as well. The Committee has made specific recommendations to ensure that the risks in this regard are addressed.

A further key issue on which the Committee sought clarity was in relation to the £133.2 million provision for increased employer contributions in respect of public-sector pension schemes. It was not clear why this huge pressure was not flagged up sooner, nor was there confidence as to the accuracy of estimates used in the calculation. The Committee has called on the Department and the Executive to provide complete information on all options for raising additional revenue through charges and

further devolved taxes and duties. This should provide transparency on projected costs, benefits, risks and impacts with a view to facilitating a fully informed and mature public debate on how best to help meet the further budgetary challenges in coming years.

Given the future requirement for further savings and the associated need to focus on priorities, it is vital that Departments apply the lessons from the last two spending review periods as highlighted in the Committee's report. In particular, there is a need to avoid the salami-slicing approach to savings. Moreover, the Committee has identified a fundamental weakness in our system of budgetary control and oversight, with DFP's role having changed following devolution:

“from one of challenge to one of ... co-ordination”.

Taking account of the particular governmental structures in the North, there remains a need for a robust external advisory and challenge function to be exercised within and across all Departments in respect of budgetary savings and efficiencies. It is likely that, if this weakness is to be addressed, the Executive will need to make separate arrangements for:

“an external ‘panel of experts’ or commission”.

This would report directly to the Executive, offering an independent critique of planned savings and ongoing implementation. Such an expert panel would require access to all the necessary information and would provide a level of assurance to the Assembly and the wider public that Departments are maximising savings while protecting front-line services.

Other issues on which the Committee has sought assurance include the need for a greater focus on preventative spending; the need to recognise the limitations to the in-year monitoring process in the current context of financial constraint and to establish a formal Budget review mechanism to operate on an annual basis, looking ahead at the subsequent financial year as a complement to multi-year planning; and, finally, the need for an agreed approach to promoting uptake of financial transactions capital in respective Departments.

I will now turn briefly to the Department of Finance and Personnel's individual budget position. Regrettably, the Department failed to lead by example or to set a standard for others to follow in the quality of its consultation paper.

Instead, the Department's paper to the Committee amounted to what can only be described as a holding response with little in the way of specifics or substantive information on savings or revenue proposals. The dearth of information presented a barrier to meaningful consultation and impeded the Committee in exercising its statutory advisory function. The Committee has endeavoured to examine a wide range of issues at a strategic and departmental level. Its recommendations are offered as a constructive contribution to inform the considerations of the Executive in finalising the Budget.

1.30 pm

I will make a few brief comments from a party perspective, a Cheann Comhairle. Obviously, this is not a Sinn Féin Budget — if it were, it would be completely different — but at its heart is a Budget that we are forced to live with as a

result of our lack of ability to influence our own economic destiny.

Whatever the outcome of the elections in May, Westminster will still impose austerity on us from above, regardless of the amalgamation of parties that comes through over there. The Tories have made it quite clear that they would send us back to the 1930s to introduce another Great Depression on our schools, hospitals and public sector workers.

The parties to my right, I am sure, would say, "Take your tonic. Sure Westminster is good for you". Quite clearly, it is not. The figures for economic growth and job creation show that we are quite clearly lagging behind the rest of this island and Britain, where there are greater levels of growth. That is for many reasons, one of which is partition and another is the reduction in public spending, which is more to do with ideology in Westminster than macroeconomics and building prosperity across society.

Sinn Féin is the party of education. We led the way in securing a £500 million commitment to the schools capital build, when others gave up on securing anything more from the British Government. In this negotiation, we held out. We got commitments that other parties had given up on, and that will stand us in good stead. However, schools here need more. The Department of Education is the most important Department for economic growth, because it represents the future. If we do not invest in our future, how can we be expected to improve on it?

The Committee for Finance and Personnel carried out an inquiry into flexible working. I believe that it has a huge potential to realise savings and to change people's lives. I am thinking about people who commute from Ballycastle, Derry and Enniskillen into Belfast five or six days a week. Departments need to embrace the Committee report, rather than just saying that they will note it and then stick it on a shelf with other reports. If senior civil servants in some Departments embraced the report, it could radically change the way in which people work and would, according to the report recommendations, lead to greater productivity, lower sickness levels and allow for more public finances to go towards front-line services. Given that we are possibly heading into another four years of austerity, we absolutely need to look at each and every opportunity to realise savings and to put money towards front-line services, the Fire Service, the health service and education. There are gaps, and we need to fill them.

More so than ever, other parties need to be open to having the great debate about fiscal powers. At the moment, we have a piecemeal approach. We have looked at corporation tax and air passenger duty (APD). We need to have a debate about fiscal powers in their entirety and how we can change the rates and have those powers transferred. Quite clearly, given the outcome in economic growth and job creation, if it is broke, we need to fix it. As long as the levers of financial power remain with Westminster, things will not change. We need a full debate about the powers that we want to be transferred.

My party's position is that we want all powers to be transferred, but other parties need to be more open and less ideological about that. I give credit where credit is due: some parties have moved more in that direction. However, the urgency is there now. The Tories, if they get in at Westminster, will lambaste us with another four years of

austerity and send us back to the 1930s. If that is to be the case, we need to have a serious debate about taking those powers for ourselves and looking at what is happening in Scotland and saying, "Well, you have a choice: you can decide things for yourselves, or you can let the Tories visit upon us rack and ruin in the public service, the health service, in education and so on and so forth."

I welcome the debate and look forward to the contributions from other Members, but we are still in very difficult economic times, and, to find an economic solution to our economic problems, we need to have economic levers.

Mr Girvan: From a Committee point of view, there has been a lot of good work undertaken on many aspects associated with the process and the way that we move ahead. Unfortunately, one of the areas that I have major problems with is monitoring rounds. Departments have depended greatly on monitoring rounds to deliver some of their key functions, and I will use the Department for Regional Development as an example. Everyone knows that fixing potholes and street lights are key functions of that Department, but, unfortunately, it decided to use monitoring rounds to fund those key parts of its job. As a consequence, when it has not received adequate money through monitoring rounds, it has decided to arbitrarily cut delivery of priority functions. The issue is how people have identified what are priorities and what are not priorities, and that is another area that has caused concern.

I appreciate that we are going into very tough times. There has been a major cut to our block grant over the last four years, and we are potentially running into another area of cuts. Effectively, we are seeing a reduction in real terms of 1.6% — in the region of £200 million — in our 2015-16 Budget. That does not take into account some of the areas that were dealt with in the Stormont House Agreement and additional funds that will be brought forward.

I appreciate that a draft Budget was put forward. Some of that will change during the next number of weeks as we work our way through things, but it is not easy to say where the problem lies. A lot of people want to say that the problem lies with London. I do not necessarily agree that that is where the total problem lies. We have problems associated with how we break budgets down at a local level, and sometimes harsh decisions have to be made.

I appreciate that there are major pressures on our resource DEL, and, as a consequence, some very hard decisions will have to be made. Unfortunately, sometimes we are not necessarily that good at stepping up to the mark and making those decisions, but we have to demonstrate our ability to do so. That is vital.

The issue is what should be agreed as priorities. Unfortunately, one Minister might have a priority for his Department and not necessarily agree with what the civil servants in that Department see as the priority. As a consequence, everybody has a different opinion.

We have, I believe, demonstrated that the issue is how the customer is affected. At the end of the day, the front-line customers are the ones who will feel the effects on delivery of any cuts that are made. Therefore, if something will affect how the general public feel about a service, we should not be making cuts in areas that will have a great impact.

There are those in the Civil Service who have decided, and maybe Ministers have been allowing this to happen, to make cuts that are seen as painful to put forward a message. That does not necessarily deliver anything good for the Chamber or the public.

I appreciate that there are areas that, we believe, should be ring-fenced and protected. I identified health and education, and I appreciate that job creation and how things go forward in DEL, in conjunction with DETI, are also areas that we should look at to ensure that we grow our economy and keep up.

Some of the areas associated with the financial package that has been produced in the last few days are on savings that can be brought forward and, in fact, on capital borrowings that can be put in place to help to fund a voluntary exit scheme. A voluntary exit scheme of somewhere in the region of, I think, £700 million has been identified as a possibility for that area. On the back of that, there is an opportunity for some of that resource, which would have been used over the next number of years, to work its way back into delivery.

I appreciate that the Civil Service is really for delivering services to the public; it is not an employment agency. The message needs to go out that we need to justify every job in the Civil Service and ensure that there is delivery from those jobs and that we have not created a bureaucratic monster and a somewhat bigger problem. I appreciate that we have a vastly inflated Civil Service in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, our private sector has suffered to a great degree. In moving forward, we should focus on job creation and on some of the tools that we intend to use and the opportunities that are now there for us, primarily with corporation tax and the possibility of having the powers to vary our tax-raising ability in that. That is another tool that could be used to attract inward investment, and it is something that we need to look at.

People have said that they want to do all sorts of wonderful things, but they have never given us any examples of where the money to deliver those wonderful projects will come from. We do not have a bottomless pit. We achieved what I think is a reasonably good financial package in the Stormont House Agreement. Some people say that there is no new money, but there is a significant amount of new money to be brought forward over the next number of years. I appreciate that there is also the opportunity to use some of that money to deliver savings.

I appreciate and support the work that has been done in the Committee.

Mr Byrne: First of all, I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on becoming Speaker of the House.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion, which is long overdue. It asks that the Assembly take note of the draft Budget presented to us last November. It is a draft Budget that, in my opinion, was poorly conceived and fails to protect the interests of the people of Northern Ireland. Its creation was never open or transparent, and its existence serves only the implementation of savage Tory cuts by the haphazard alliance of the DUP and Sinn Féin.

It is not simply the parties outside the Sinn Féin/DUP axis whose criticisms of the Budget have been dismissed. An independent report by PricewaterhouseCoopers derided it as lacking "any worthwhile insight" and accused it of

misunderstanding "the complexities of public expenditure". Sinn Féin preaches anti-austerity in the South while endorsing deep cuts in the North. It branded it the best Budget possible before the consultation process had even got under way. It is only fair for me to commend the SDLP's Minister, Mark Durkan, for his outright opposition to the draft Budget. Minister Durkan and the SDLP recognise that the draft Budget is an anti-worker Budget, with the use of pay freezes and redundancies ensuring an adverse effect on jobs. The draft Budget neglects the working poor, the unemployed and young people. It does nothing to bridge the regional divide between east and west, failing to recognise that a thriving and prosperous economy is unsustainable while regional imbalance persists.

1.45 pm

Any worthwhile budget prioritises economic development and job creation, but this Budget slashes jobs in the public sector. In fact, the Budget relies heavily on that job reduction, but there is no economic plan to create private-sector jobs. That is an extremely short-term solution that disregards the even greater long-term problems that high unemployment will cause for our economy and society. That is particularly pertinent in the north-west, where a high proportion of people are employed in the public sector.

I recognise that the Budget has not been as savage in my area of responsibility of agriculture as it has been in others, but it has still left the sector wanting. There are several areas in the Department that could make more savings, reduce wastage and perform in a more efficient manner overall. I welcome the proposal to move DARD headquarters out of Belfast but recognise that a cost analysis is crucial. That is still lacking. As it stands, there are only approximate costs for the proposal. The proposal also lacks proper financial and human resource analysis.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way on that important topic. Like me, he is a member of the Agriculture Committee, and we have expressed concerns on a number of occasions about the wisdom of spending so much when money is scarce. Will the Member agree that even the farmers are a bit concerned about what is happening? I am a Member for Strangford, and a lot of my constituents are employed in Dundonald House, and they will certainly not be going to Ballykelly.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Member for that. I believe that the decentralisation of senior civil servant jobs is crucial. It is important in balancing regional development going forward. However, I note what Mr McCarthy said.

The proposal also lacks proper financial and human resource analysis; that is its biggest shortcoming. The SDLP and I require a more detailed costing and business case before any move is finalised and implemented.

The Budget proposes a voluntary exit programme, seeking a reduction of 300 staff in DARD, and aims to save an estimated £5.6 million in the ensuing year if implemented. It is critical that any redundancy scheme be completed on a voluntary basis and that the reduction of jobs be divided up between spending areas across the Department. I also believe that a skills analysis is vital to see exactly how staff reductions would be carried out and how they would

impact on the services provided by DARD. The front-line services to the farming community are crucial.

The SDLP has serious concerns about the impact on such services, as that reduction in staff is timetabled to happen in the middle of the budget year. The resulting reduction may cause the loss of valuable and irreplaceable skills. We are concerned that proposed staff reductions may cause the Department to lean and depend on higher-costing consultants, which would ultimately defeat the point of using staff reductions to save money. We accept that administration costs need to be reduced but not at the expense of vital job roles in the Department. The draft Budget needs to present more information on how reductions in staff and the loss of skills and expertise will affect front-line services.

DARD is commissioning a new IT system. However, the history of government commissioning IT systems in Northern Ireland is not good. We believe that the current computer system proposals, which earmark £84 million for the new Northern Ireland food animal information system (NIFAIS) IT system, may be very costly. The result of total capital, which is £25.8 million, and the resource costs of £28.3 million spread over 10 years leads me to question whether the project is particularly necessary in our current economic climate and whether more cost-effective schemes should be looked at. Again, the Committee has been very concerned about the totality of the costs that have been signalled without there having been any detailed analysis of how such a system can be effectively implemented.

The SDLP recognises that a farmer's time is better spent on the farm. To that end, I believe that, if DARD worked together with the DOE and the NIEA, cost savings relating to farm inspections could be made more effectively. That would help with the daily running of farms and ensure that our farmers had more time on the farm without the need to deal with extra bureaucracy.

The bureaucracy of DARD continues to frustrate and challenge our farming community. The SDLP would like to see ongoing internal DARD reform. We believe that the Department should be restructured into more of a farm advisory service rather than a cumbersome bureaucracy for the farming community.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he not agree that that has already been done and that we are looking at ways of collaborative working and streamlining the Department?

Mr Byrne: I thank Mr McMullan —

Mr Speaker: Sorry, but the Member's time is up. It was a very late intervention, but it was your decision to take it. I have to call the next Member to speak, who is Mr Leslie Cree.

Mr Cree: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and congratulations on your elevation.

This has been a difficult year for the Budget-setting process. Although the Minister brought a Budget to the House on 3 November last, the issue was not settled, and it became part of the talks process in the run-up to Christmas. The absence of detailed information in certain areas and time pressures have meant that Committees have not had adequate scrutiny of their respective budgets. Although acute financial pressures appear to have emerged after the June monitoring round, we now

know that the Executive were informed of their allocations for 2015-16 as part of the 2013 spending round in June 2013. An obvious question is this: why were the problems not identified and addressed during the previous 12 months?

One of the main problems with the draft Budget was that Committees were not able to scrutinise departmental bids and proposed allocations, including any supporting evidence, prior to the Executive agreeing it for public consultation. We do not know whether a consistent approach was taken across Departments and whether the funding of particular central strategic pressures justified the resultant reduction in departmental resource budgets. I fully support the Committee's recommendation that the final Budget document should provide further information and clarity in that regard.

At this difficult time, it is disappointing that half of the Departments are recording increases in administration expenditure. That area needs to be carefully monitored and reported on. It is also in stark contrast to the reduction in the public sector pay bill anticipated in the draft Budget. Indeed, the alarming figures for potential redundancies being forecast by some Departments are a major concern. We need to have certainty in that area, and, if they are to materialise, we need to see a credible restructuring plan agreed corporately and published by the Executive as soon as possible. It is wise to assume that future budgets will bring pressure on limited resources. It is vital that front-line services be protected. Therefore, consideration has to be given to ways of raising additional revenues as a matter of urgency — not just talk but an action plan.

The Minister introduced the prospect of a Northern Ireland investment fund that could utilise financial transactions capital. I would be pleased to know the outcome of the feasibility study and whether the Treasury has agreed to the operation of such a fund. I certainly hope so, as the scheme has real merit. We still do not have the involvement of all Departments on financial transactions capital, and an agreed approach to promoting awareness among Departments and in the private sector is urgently needed. FTC now makes up a significant percentage of our capital budget, and we have to increase our uptake of it. I seem to remember saying that before. There is £115.6 million in the Budget, but the projects "require ... refinement". I would be pleased to have confirmation that those projects have now been agreed and will be delivered during the year.

On the issue of repetition, perhaps the Minister can update the House on another interest of mine that would have the capacity to improve the whole Budget process. I refer to the review of the financial process, which was agreed by the Committee and supported by the House but has been lost in the Executive for several years. We need this approach more than ever.

I understand that an agreement has now been reached on welfare reform. Again, we do not have the details, but it would be appreciated if the Minister could share them with the House. Is it likely that we would get some of the penalties refunded in this regard?

When the Assembly debated the Pensions Bill last year — the Chair referred to this — there was no reference to the possibility of increased costs to the public purse. However, £133 million is included in the draft Budget to cover

increased employer contributions. Can we be sure that this figure is sufficient? What is the risk of other sudden and significant increases in the future?

Finally, there was £10.7 million resource DEL and £8 million capital DEL held at the centre for allocation as part of the final Budget. It would be good to know how that money will be allocated and how and when Departments can bid for it.

Mr Speaker: Order. As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, we have insufficient time to complete the contribution from the next Member to speak. I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Ms Anna Lo.

The debate stood suspended.

2.00 pm

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair)

Oral Answers to Questions

Social Development

Benefits: Financial Support Services

1. **Mr Hazzard** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the results of the recent Social Security Agency pilot scheme on financial support services for benefit claimants which cost £311,000. (AQO 7275/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): The financial support service was part of a wider package of measures designed to support claimants to achieve and maintain financial independence. These measures include the departmental funding of front-line advice services delivered by the advice sector and also the provision of benefit entitlement checks, which are carried out by the Social Security Agency's improving benefit uptake team. These checks help ensure that claimants across Northern Ireland receive all the money they are entitled to, in an effort to tackle poverty and improve the lives of those who are most vulnerable. Where appropriate, claimants were offered access to loans and grants from the social fund discretionary provision, benefit entitlement checks and information about the support and advice services available to them in the independent advice sector. Uptake of the support and advice provided by the independent advice sector was voluntary.

The service was delivered face to face and by telephony. The face-to-face service was piloted from 19 May to 15 August 2014 in the Falls Road, Strabane and Omagh jobs and benefits offices. The telephony service was provided centrally from Omagh jobs and benefits office.

The evaluation of the pilot showed that some elements of the service were more successful than others. Results of referrals to the agency's improving benefit uptake team for benefit entitlement checks were positive, and 142 claimants were identified with a potential entitlement to benefit, while 14 claimants have successfully claimed another benefit. The total of annual benefit and arrears for the nine claims is £48,780.51. Up-to-date details of the actual entitlement cannot be obtained at this time, as claimants need time to claim benefit for the benefits to be assessed. However, indications are that the benefit entitlement for claimants referred from the financial support service will increase as time progresses.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Given that just more than 2,500 claimants were interviewed, at a cost of more than £100,000 per office involved, can the Minister outline his analysis of where the money could have been better spent in the whole process?

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): I appreciate the concerns that have been raised in relation to the overall cost of the pilot. I certainly have asked that we take cognisance of the fact that this was a cost.

It is worth having the breakdown of the total spend on the financial support service on the public record. The project team salary costs were somewhere in the region of £221,000. The operational staff salary costs were £47,000. The general administrative expenses were £8,000, and the capital costs — that is, IT development — were something in the region of £35,000. So, when you look at the ballpark figure, it certainly raises the question of whether the money was spent in the best way.

I am reasonably content that we got information from the pilot that can be used when we look at how we roll out the service as part of the wider benefit take-up process. I would not conclude that this is the only show in town or the only way to do this. Lessons have been learned, and we need to ensure that those lessons are implemented as we move forward, particularly with the introduction of universal credit.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): As Members can hear, we are picking up some interference. I ask Members to check their electronic equipment to make sure that it is in an appropriate position and not causing disruption.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Following the Minister's previous answer, can I ask him what successes were achieved by the financial support service pilot?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for her question. In any pilot, you want to try to establish the successes and the lessons learned that we could continue to implement in some other way. The collaborative process between the advice sector and the Social Security Agency worked well during the pilot and fully demonstrated how the Department, the agency and the advice sector could work together in a joined-up and coherent way that embraces the concept of providing enhanced support for claimants.

One of the key issues for me in terms of how we roll out the services to our constituents is that there is a joined-up-working approach between the Department, the Social Security Agency and the vibrant, strong and independent advice sector that we have in Northern Ireland. That was one of the key elements, because it was involved in drawing up the process and was engaged fully through the pilot. Its advice and help in the process was invaluable.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the fact that major changes are coming in the welfare area — major cuts; some want to call them “reform”, I prefer to call them cuts — what has he learned from the pilot scheme that will benefit people on benefits in the new situation?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I am not really sure where the Member has been for the last number of weeks in relation to the line trotted out about benefit cuts. One thing that I have seen over the last number of weeks since coming to the Department is that, if you look at the projection of benefit uptake in Northern Ireland, we will move, between now and 2018, from a welfare bill of somewhere in the region of £4.4 billion to one of somewhere in the region of £6.3 billion. I am somewhat at a loss to know exactly what the Member means in relation to benefit cuts. I assume that he is really making reference to the challenge that we will have in ensuring that the needs of the people who face particular challenges are addressed. That is part of what I believe

we have achieved in relation to the Stormont House Agreement.

It is also a duty on my part, and the Department's responsibility through social security to ensure that, as I said in the previous answer, through the independent advice sector and the work that my Department carries out through the Social Security Agency in relation to benefit uptake, whether through the pilot carried out or other schemes we are currently looking at, we do all we possibly can to ensure that all relevant, useful and valuable information is available to claimants so that they make the right decisions in relation to this very particular piece of work, which impinges on many households right across Northern Ireland daily.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I advise Members that questions 2 and 10 have been withdrawn.

Housing Executive: Multistorey Blocks

3. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the progress made in relation to developing a strategy for Northern Ireland Housing Executive multistorey blocks. (AQO 7277/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Member will be aware that my predecessor had raised with the Housing Executive his concerns about the lack of maintenance and investment in relation to the existing social housing stock and, in particular, concerns about delays in maintenance and investment in the Housing Executive's multistorey tower blocks. Having come into the post, I share those concerns.

In relation to the multistorey tower blocks, the Housing Executive was asked in May last year to review and identify the necessary work required and then develop a focused maintenance strategy for the 32 tower blocks sited right across Northern Ireland. To deliver on that, and as part of my Department and the Housing Executive's asset management commission, which is currently being carried out by Savills, technical survey reports for the Housing Executive's multistorey tower blocks are due by March of this year. A draft multistorey asset management strategy is then due in May of this year. These consultancy outputs will then be taken forward by the Housing Executive to develop and progress a strategic solution for multistorey blocks in 2015 and beyond.

However, whilst this work is ongoing and awaited, I tasked the Housing Executive to prepare an interim investment plan based on its current understanding of the stock. The Housing Executive has now submitted to me an interim investment priorities plan, which is built around a number of themes, including bringing forward work to be carried out to the multistorey tower blocks. The purpose of the interim approach is to effectively bridge the gap that exists between now and the development of a comprehensive strategy for maintaining all the Housing Executive's housing assets, leading, in turn, to a clear long-term funding strategy.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he outline what else is being done in the interim to improve the Housing Executive stock? Particularly in relation to multistorey blocks, what progress has been made on the cladding of the outside of those buildings, which has been previously suggested?

Mr Storey: In relation to what is being done in the interim to improve the Housing Executive stock, my officials met Housing Executive officials in October 2014 to discuss the position with the maintenance and investment strategy, particularly the strategy for the multistorey tower blocks. It was agreed at that meeting that an interim investment priority plan would be developed, and the Housing Executive submitted its investment priority plan in November. It was built around the tower blocks, non-traditionals with reference to the non-fines pilot, the stock transfer, thermal efficiency and so on.

In relation to the issue that the Member raises in regard to the cladding, at present there is a scheme on site in the Cuchulainn tower blocks. The Department and the Housing Executive's asset management commission have made preparation for a new tower block strategy. As I said, Savills has inspected the external structure of all the tower blocks and has been asked to provide recommendations on the need, the cost and all the ancillary works. I am waiting to get a report on how that is progressing to see what lessons we can learn in relation to this. Indeed, I am meeting the Housing Executive chief executive next week to continue to discuss this particular matter and to see what progress is being made and how we can develop it further.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his very detailed answers. I think that about 25% of the tower blocks are in north Belfast, so I have a special interest in them. Minister, in relation to the survey that has been carried out by the Housing Executive, will there be a focus on the type of tenancy in relation to the future tenancy in tower blocks? Will there be an additional concentration on energy efficiency in relation to tower blocks?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for yet again reminding me about the needs of north Belfast, which he does regularly. He raises an issue in relation to occupancy, and I think that that should not be anything different from occupancy right across the housing stock. However, given the nature of tower blocks, there are particular issues that need to be looked at, and I think that the Housing Executive does endeavour to give particular consideration to that. However, given that the Member has raised the point, I will undertake to have that as part of the discussion when I meet the Housing Executive next week.

With the work that is ongoing, I have a concern not only about the tower blocks in the Member's constituency but others across Northern Ireland, 32 in total. I have gone to see particular issues with tower blocks in the Member for South Belfast's area and I am concerned that we have allowed that particular element of stock, in some places, to deteriorate in a way in which the conditions in which individuals are living are not acceptable. Given the nature of tower blocks, we have to give particular consideration to whether there are additional measures, given the way in which we are now looking at how heating is delivered in those particular properties. I think that is a particular challenge for the Housing Executive. I give the Member an assurance that I will come back to him with more information in relation to his first point.

2.15 pm

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his answers to date. He has referred to external cladding. Will the Minister inform the House of how many companies in Northern Ireland are capable of that work and what steps he will take to make

sure that there is no accusation of impropriety and that, when making a decision to appoint a contractor to do that in those properties, there is no connection with his party or any of its elected representatives?

Mr Storey: I have to say, I am disappointed that the Member has to lower his political activity in the House to that level. I will give the Member an answer. I do not have the numbers of the specific organisations that can apply, but I give an assurance to him and to the House that, whatever contracts are carried out under my responsibility, they will be done in a way that is open to public scrutiny and is in accordance with the law, and there will be no grace or favour given to any organisation that has any association with his party or any other party in the House. I do not think the Member would expect anything else from me. I am disappointed that he has levelled that accusation at the very beginning of this sitting of the Assembly.

Welfare Reform Bill

4. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Social Development for his Department's most recent analysis of the Welfare Reform Bill. (AQO 7278/11-15)

Mr Storey: In December 2014, my Department published a series of update reports to show the potential impact of welfare reform on local people. Those information booklets can be found in the statistics and research section of the Department's website under the heading "Welfare Reform Briefing". Following the political discussions that led to the Stormont House Agreement, I will bring forward a paper to the Executive that puts forward further detail on the agreement and the modalities of implementing the changes. That would then enable the welfare Bill to progress through the Assembly.

Sometimes Ministers come to the House and refer to something that is on their Department's website, and then when Members go to it, they find that it may be less than fit for purpose. I assure the Member that, if he visits the website in relation to the welfare reform briefing, he will have enough material and information to keep him reading for the next number of days. It is detailed, because it is a detailed issue in relation to all of the various component parts of our welfare system. That information was updated and is relevant, and I think that it will be valuable, not only for the Member and other Members but for the general public.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for that very detailed answer. He referred to the Stormont House Agreement. Is there any aspect of that agreement on how to progress welfare reform that could not have been agreed at any stage over the last couple of years?

Mr Storey: I think that is maybe not a question for the Minister but for others who were responsible for not allowing us to progress the Welfare Reform Bill. Whatever that may be, and however one will interpret what has happened to date, we are in a better position. Let us remember the scenario that was being painted before Christmas. We were facing the collapse of these institutions and a situation where people did not know if they were going to have the imposition of welfare reform that had no changes to it.

I think that, when people begin to see the detail of what has been agreed, in addition to what was agreed previously — let us remember that what was agreed previously was put

out to the public domain by me when I came into office, and it received a fair wind and a fair hearing. I think that we need to build on the achievements of the Stormont House Agreement. There is a huge amount of work. I have given an undertaking to the Assembly in relation to the information that we will bring to the Assembly, in terms of the guidance notes and how the Bill will make its passage through the House. That will be subject to a paper that, I trust, I will be able to bring to the Executive shortly, so that we can progress the issue in a way that is efficient and effective, and so that no one in Northern Ireland is adversely affected as a result of the changes.

Mr Campbell: The Minister will be well aware, as are the rest of us, that the Welfare Reform Bill is now proceeding with no additional resources being brought to bear from Westminster, which Sinn Féin said it would never do. However, now that it is being done, will the Minister give us an outline, even in approximate terms, about the cost to his Department and to taxpayers for the non-implementation of welfare reform to date?

Mr Storey: In the past, the Member has had the figures relating to the fines. At the commencement of today's debate on the draft Budget, concerns were expressed, and the party was worried about the amount of money that was being removed from Departments. We want to ensure, to the best of our ability, that we reduce and remove the additional fines that would be incurred as a result of the non-implementation of the Welfare Reform Bill. Unfortunately, money has gone in the first part of the process, and I trust that lessons have been learned by those who imposed delay, because that has undoubtedly cost us money in the Northern Ireland Budget allocation.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, in your initial answer, you referred to the detailed information on the website, which is true, but we need to distil the very complex regulations into key core messages. I have been asked about that on the street. Will you state categorically that there will be no bedroom tax in Northern Ireland? Will you give some further insight as to whether there will be a cap on benefit paid?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for her question. Those two key issues — the bedroom tax and the cap — were already agreed in the previous package. I trust that we will soon see the detail that will come to the House and will be able — I was going to say, “in a very simple way”, but I think that it will always be difficult with a complex process, because there are so many component parts, whether it is the bedroom tax, the cap, PIP or any of the elements that make up the welfare reform package, to be definitive in every situation to the final point. However, I give the Member an assurance that we are endeavouring, through a campaign that we will run, to provide information to the public that will be distilled in a way that will make it easy to understand and easy to grasp the impact on them and their families as we roll the process forward over the next number of weeks and months.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I will home in on a little bit of detail. Will the Minister provide an update on the suggested supplementary payment fund following the talks and, in particular, what, if any, further work has been done on calculating the level of support that it will be able to offer to people who fall outside the funding under universal credit?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for the question, and therein lies one of the issues that we have to face: the detail. We are working on a paper for the Executive so that we will be able to bring that issue and a raft of other issues that are in the package to the House and start the debate in the Assembly. However, I will put the caveat that we do not have a huge amount of time. I want to be able to move as quickly as possible to bring the process to the Assembly so that the issue that the Member and the previous Member referred to is in the public domain. It will be necessary to address some of this in the guidance issued by my Department. What I said during the talks and am happy to say now in this public forum is that we will endeavour to ensure that the guidance and implementation will be done in a way that understands people's needs. If anything has been learned from the way in which universal credit in particular has been rolled out in the rest of the United Kingdom, it is more about its implementation than the overall policy intent. I want to ensure that this is rolled out on a practical day-to-day basis across jobs and benefit offices in such a way that people are not disadvantaged and can genuinely have confidence that, if a problem arises, it will be addressed and dealt with in a fair and effective way.

Benefits: Financial Support Services

5. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Social Security Agency consulted with any of the major advice agencies regarding the design of its financial support services pilot scheme. (AQO 7279/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department worked in close partnership with Citizens Advice and Advice NI on the development, implementation and delivery of the financial support service pilot. The key representatives with whom the Department liaised and engaged were Mr Bob Stronge, chief executive, and Kevin Higgins, head of policy, at Advice NI, and Pól Callaghan, head of services at Citizens Advice. They were instrumental in the design of the service, including the training of front-line advisers, and in designing a mechanism for measuring the outcomes for budgeting and debt support. There were a number of very successful engagement events with front-line advisers in the advice sector and the Social Security Agency. All organisations included in the design were also involved in the evaluation of the scheme.

In addition to Citizens Advice NI and Advice NI, there was engagement with other support organisations such as Lifeline, Women's Aid and Mencap to inform them of the scheme and to gain their agreement and cooperation to provide their contact details in a signposting leaflet.

I appreciate greatly the commitment, time and effort afforded by my departmental staff, agency staff and the advice sector in helping to support the financial support service trials to inform an integrated joined-up service that provides a more positive claimant experience and ensures that claimants can easily access the advice that they require.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat. Can the Minister confirm whether the agencies to which he refers have carried out successful benefit uptake campaigns?

Mr Storey: Yes, I can. We all need to appreciate that the benefit uptake campaign has been very successful, and those organisations were involved in that. I think that we

all have seen how that particular scheme has brought huge benefit to many families who would neither have had access to nor benefited from it had the campaign not been in place. I am keen to ensure that it continues and that we build on the success and learn from the process, which, in this pilot, was not perfect by any means. However, I think that the collaboration, as I said in response to a previous question, has given us an indication of how we need to continue to work to make sure that people have access to appropriate information and, as a result of that information, become the beneficiaries of access to benefits.

Mr Hilditch: Does the Minister plan to further test the financial support service in other offices?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his question. On completion of the pilot, the decision was taken not to proceed with a roll-out of a further test of the financial support service. That decision was taken on the basis that the pilot did not demonstrate that a roll-out would be cost-effective at present, given concerns raised at the very beginning of Question Time about its cost. However, the elements of the pilot that were successful — I have tried to give some outline to those previously, such as the benefit entitlement check and the provision of the leaflet detailing the organisations that offer advice and support — will be taken forward and introduced into existing service provision across the network of offices. I think that that is something that we need to continue to work at, particularly in the light of the questions that were asked earlier on the roll-out of welfare reform. If there is going to be considerable change to the system, as undoubtedly we will see over the next weeks and months, it needs to be done in a way that ensures that people have all the relevant advice available to hand. This will play a key part in that.

2.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That is the end of listed questions. We will now move on to topical questions.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

T1. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in Northern Ireland have benefited from the boiler replacement scheme. (AQT 1901/11-15)

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for the question. The boiler replacement scheme was launched back in 2012. It provided grant funding of up to £1,000 to households with an income of less than £40,000. There was also grant funding for the replacement of inefficient boilers over 15 years of age. The latest available figures show that, since the launch of the scheme, to date, over 22,000 applications for the grant have been approved and over 17,000 households have had work completed. The replacing of an old, inefficient boiler will, on average, save households something like £400 a year and will improve the thermal comfort of the home. I think that this is obviously a good news story and something that people have benefited from, as they have seen very tangible benefits as a result of the scheme.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his response. Certainly, constituents in my area have benefited from the scheme, which has made a real difference to their lives. Will the Minister give consideration to extending it beyond March 2015, when the current funding will end?

Mr Storey: Obviously, I have had a number of requests to extend the scheme. I am giving consideration to that. One of the other additional benefits of the scheme is that somewhere in the region of 2,000 different installers have carried out work as part of it. That obviously had a particular benefit to the local economy. Just in case some Members of the Ulster Unionist Party are listening, let me say that none of those contractors had anything to do with my party or me as an individual, so I can declare that no pecuniary benefit came to me as a result of that. Extending the scheme is something that we are giving serious consideration to. I had a meeting with Phoenix gas at the end of last week, and it has been very complimentary of the way that the boiler replacement scheme was introduced and implemented. We took on board comments that it made on the scheme in particular. So, it is in the in tray, but I may need to have further conversation with the Finance Minister to make sure that funds are available so that we can progress accordingly.

Landlord Registration Scheme

T2. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development how successful the landlord registration scheme has been since its introduction last year. (AQT 1902/11-15)

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for the question. Obviously, some landlords have come to me to express concern. There are those who believe that sometimes you can have over-regulation in that particular area. However, the current position is that, to date, over 12,000 landlords have registered and provided details of over 26,000 properties in Northern Ireland. Landlords have until 25 February to register under the scheme.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his answer. In light of the fact that we are about six weeks away from the date by which landlords are required to register — 25 February 2015 — I ask the Minister what is being done to remind landlords of that deadline.

Mr Storey: The Member is right that the scheme's deadline is 25 February. I am sure that the Member has seen that we have begun a television advertising campaign; we also have advertisements on the sides of buses and on streetliners to get the message across. However, I have to say that we are not trying to be in any way draconian in imposing this. I genuinely want to get the message across. There is a benefit here for the landlord and also for the people who live in the properties. Therefore, I trust that it will be our experience that as we get closer to 25 February, it is more likely that the large number of those who still have to register will comply and those registrations will take place. You will probably find that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Members, we are picking up interference. Again, I ask you to check that electronic equipment is not set in a position that will cause difficulties.

Regeneration Bill

T3. **Mr Wilson** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the reason for the delay in bringing the Regeneration Bill to the Assembly, which has resulted in a delay to the transfer of regeneration powers to the new local councils. (AQT 1903/11-15)

Mr Storey: When I took up office, or, rather, when I was informed that I was taking up office, it was clear to me that, on a number of issues, we needed to have a conversation as to why we were still in a state of delay. One of the issues was regeneration. The Bill was then known as the Regeneration and Housing Bill. Members on the opposite side of the House will, I trust, bear testimony that I endeavoured to address the issues seen and raised. Previously, there had been correspondence with my predecessor particularly around concerns that, in the context of the Bill, there were issues with regard to housing. I quickly moved to have those elements taken out so that we could, if possible, ensure a speedy progress for the legislation.

By the time all that had been done, it became apparent that we were not able to get the Bill through the processes of the House and get Royal Assent before the summer of this year. Therefore, agreement on accelerated passage was not possible. That is why, next week, I will introduce the Regeneration Bill, not the Regeneration and Housing Bill. The name of the Bill has now been changed, and I trust that I have addressed the issues and concerns that have been raised with me. I am disappointed in the delay; however, the legislative process of the Bill will commence in the House next week.

Mr Wilson: Maybe the Minister will spell out whether that delay was caused by Sinn Féin's refusal to allow the Bill passage through the Assembly? If that is the case, given that the budget that will be devolved to local councils will now be much smaller than what it would have been had powers been devolved this year, will he spell out how much Sinn Féin's delay tactics will cost local councils in regeneration expenditure over the next number of years?

Mr Storey: The Member gives an overview of the current position. The budgetary implications will be determined when we conclude the current process with regard to the draft Budget and when I know exactly the financial position of the Department. However, I think that the Member is right and that it will lead to a situation where the amount of money to be transferred along with the powers will be smaller than previously envisaged. Obviously, it is convenient for some Members that that will happen under a particular Department other than their own so that the blame can rest with the current Minister as the person unable to deliver the full package.

However, I remind Members that, as far as I am aware, there was still a five-party mandatory coalition when I came to the House today. The issue is an Executive responsibility.

I will say this, however: I have had discussions. The Minister of the Environment set up a panel to look at transition for a range of issues. I attended its first meeting just before Christmas, at which I gave an undertaking to the councils to go out to them, sit down with the new authorities and, as far as is possible within the power that I have in the Department, work with them to mitigate the elements of the reduction in the budget and ensure that, in the transition, my Department and the councils give priority to the schemes that the councils would like to progress in their area. In fact, the dates for those visits have almost been secured in my diary. Be under no illusion —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Minister's time is up.

Mr Storey: — there is no doubt that it will be challenging —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Minister's time is up.

Mr Storey: — and will have a financial impact on the councils.

Affordable Warmth Scheme

T4. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of his Department's new affordable warmth scheme, particularly in light of the restructuring of local councils. (AQT 1904/11-15)

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for her question, which follows on from her writing to me. I thank her for taking the time to give a very comprehensive assessment of practical issues that she has heard being raised on the ground. I trust that she will receive the response soon, if she has not already done so, as it was signed off on. The Member raised issues around the capacity of councils and said that there is a risk that a targeted approach is not equitable.

I believe that the scheme will be valuable. It will add to the previous scheme. There are undoubtedly challenges around any implementation, but I have endeavoured to make sure that comments made to me in correspondence from the Member are listened to and addressed and that we roll out the scheme in a most efficient and effective way so that people who have been targeted in a particular way, differently from how they were targeted under the previous scheme, will be addressed. I trust that that will give a greater sense of urgency to addressing their needs.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his comments. Minister, you said "efficient and effective". I welcomed, and our party welcomed, the scheme's extension and the inclusion of a greater number of people able to access help with warming their home, but was the scheme subject to a value-for-money review?

Mr Storey: Yes, and a business case for the new scheme was examined by the Department's economists and submitted for approval from DFP.

Hotel Feasibility Study: Portrush

T5. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the rationale for the recently announced hotel feasibility study in the Portrush area. (AQT 1905/11-15)

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for the question on Portrush. The Portrush regeneration strategy, which was produced a number of years ago, indicated that the development of a large four-star hotel could have a major regenerational impact on the resort. My Department is responsible for urban regeneration, so we have been working closely with Coleraine Borough Council to bring forward the project identified in the strategy, including the hotel. The scoping study is an important piece of work, because it will, I trust, be used to determine what the next steps should be in the development of a new hotel for Portrush.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for his answer and for his interest in the issue. He will be aware, of course, that there is a very real prospect of the Open coming to Portrush as early as 2019. Will he outline what plans his Department has in preparation for what will undoubtedly be a momentous event?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member. The Member has raised with me the concerns of some local hoteliers about even the scoping exercise that we are currently carrying out, as has his councillor colleague Mr Trevor Clarke. The Member will know that we have agreed to meet those local hoteliers who have raised some practical issues and we intend to do that pretty soon.

2.45 pm

On the issue of the Open, I believe that Portrush needs to continue the progress that has been made. Anyone who has visited Portrush recently will, I think, undoubtedly be impressed by the public realm works that have been carried out, particularly those in front of Barry's and on the east and west strands. Also, anyone who has been in Portrush over the holiday period and in recent days will have seen what I have described as "a restaurant revolution". The number of people who now see Portrush as a night economy location for restaurants is, I think, a credit to those involved.

The Portrush regeneration strategy, Coleraine Borough Council and my Department will carry out further work to ensure that every step possible is taken to have Portrush in its best shape when the Open comes to Northern Ireland. That is something that we all need to work towards. That is why I also plan to bring a paper to the Executive that I trust will be supported by my Executive colleagues on how we can, collectively, continue to enhance Portrush for the local tourist industry and wider tourist improvement, on which I believe it will be well placed to deliver.

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Questions 4 and 6 have been withdrawn.

Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System

1. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the total anticipated cost of the implementation of the Northern Ireland food animal information system. (AQO 7290/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The intention to procure an ICT system to replace the animal and public health information system (APHIS) was notified in the Official Journal of the European Union in the first week of July 2014. The value of the contract was given as from £56 million to £65 million, excluding VAT, over an anticipated lifetime of 15 years. That value was based on the projection and estimates employed in the outline business case. It includes the costs of the initial development and testing of the NI food animal information system (NIFAIS), support for the migration of data and transitioning from DARD's existing systems. The anticipated cost also covers the system's support and maintenance over its 15-year lifetime and any further development, enhancement or upgrade that may be required within that period.

Mrs Overend: Can the Minister give a commitment, as her Department enters a budgetary cycle that she admits is immensely difficult, that she will review her decision to

spend so much on the new system and, in particular, revisit it to determine if there are any areas in which cost savings could be made?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that the Department has done its homework on the outline business case and on making sure that we cost the system fully. That has all been done and has been fed into the estimate set out in the journal. You have to remember what this system does: it gives us quality assurance; it allows us to stand above others when going into other export markets and targeting new markets, because we can say that we are fully traceable and have a system that stands over that. That is the value of the system.

On the scale of things, £56 million to £65 million sounds like a considerable amount of funding, but you also have to remember that this is over 15 years, includes ongoing maintenance and will be able to respond to any changing needs that the industry may have. So, I think it will be a worthwhile investment that the industry and we require if are to be successful in achieving the aims set out in Going for Growth around targeting new markets.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her comments on NIFAIS. Can she assure the House that a project team is in place and will bring in a cost-effective system within an agreed timescale that meets the needs of the farming community?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I can again assure the Member that we are doing everything we can. This system is so important to the industry; it records all the data, all the information. It is important that we work our way through the process, which has been some time in the making to get us to the stage of going out for tender. It is important that the system is right, appropriate and fits the needs of the industry. That is certainly what the project board is establishing and working up, as we speak.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat. Will the Minister elaborate on the necessity for such an ICT traceability system?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. Again, I have made this point on a number of occasions but it is important that we make it: what we are talking about here is somewhere between £3.7 million and £4.5 million per year over 15 years, which gives us full traceability for the industry, allows us to target new markets and to really showcase what we have to offer.

The Member will be acutely aware that our industry was able to stand above others over the recent horsemeat issue because we had a full traceability system. That is the value of this system and why we need to procure it to make sure that we have a new system in place that will help our vet service and traceability within the industry. As I said, it helps the vet service around TB work and everything else that happens. It is a necessity for the Department. The project board is making sure that we have crossed all our t's and dotted all our i's in making sure that we are getting absolute value for money and that the system is able to respond to the needs of the industry. I am confident that that is what we are going to have.

Tollymore Forest Park: Food Franchise

2. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the efforts being made to attract a food franchise to Tollymore Forest Park café. (AQO 7291/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Forest Service has used funding made available through the Executive's economy and jobs initiative to make the listed building known as the Tollymore Teahouse compliant with modern requirements for public access and fire safety. That work is complete and the building is at the stage where it can be made available for operation and fitting out by a franchisee or developed for an alternative use.

Forest Service is working in partnership with Down District Council on the council's plans for the overall development of Tollymore Forest Park and officials attended a presentation of the consultant's advice to the council shortly before Christmas. Forest Service was informed that the council anticipates a need to provide catering facilities. Details for further involvement by the council or a franchisee have still to be developed.

Efforts to find a franchisee continued for some time after the previous tenant left in 2002, without success. The chief reason is believed to be the high cost of operating the building and the difficulty for someone in making an adequate financial return. Since then, Forest Service has offered a mobile catering franchise to meet summer demand, and tenders for the 2015 season are invited by 23 January.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for her response. Tollymore Forest Park is one of the most utilised outdoor forest parks in Northern Ireland. Will the Minister do everything she can to see that there is some food provision for this summer, given the number of local and international tourists who visit?

Mrs O'Neill: I agree with you and I agree with the potential for the forest. As I said, officials are continuing to work with the council to make sure that we at least have the current arrangement in place for this summer. Obviously, however, we are more keen that we get a sustainable, longer-term solution and we are actively working with the council to do that.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Will the Department give an assurance that it will consult and cooperate with councils before making any forestry franchises, particularly because the councils have spent quite a bit of money in putting business cases forward for such facilities?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, absolutely. The development at the forest has been in conjunction with the council and, as I said, departmental officials attended that meeting just before Christmas with the council officials. We are very keen to make sure that we work with our partners. The key to the Department and Forest Service's social and recreational use of forests is that community partnership and the partnership with councils. For me, that is vital; it is the only way that we can take these projects forward if they are going to be successful.

Local Action Groups: Social Partners

3. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the process to recruit social partners to the new local action groups. (AQO 7292/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased to report that 40 events have now been held across the rural North to encourage rural dwellers to join the new local action groups (LAGs). It is

encouraging that over 2,000 people have expressed an interest in being a social partner on the new LAGs and, indeed, have completed a membership form. Six hundred people have indicated further that they would be prepared to be a LAG board member and others have expressed an interest in being involved in the day-to-day work of the LAG, such as sitting on assessment panels.

This is great progress and I believe that these figures show that there is clear evidence of the interest in rural communities for people to have their say in how funding is invested in their rural area. The LAG process will continue, with LAG boards being selected by the end of January. I look forward to awarding the new LAGs their contracts as soon as the operational programme is approved by the European Commission.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her answer. She said at the end that she was waiting for some sort of clearance from the European process, but has she any indication of when the application bids will open?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. The operational programme is with the Commission. We had hoped to have some initial conversation with it or confirmation of its views on the programme. That has not happened yet, but we are still aiming to get things sufficiently signed off by June. In the absence of that, however, we are going to develop the local LEADER programmes, which will be delivered by the new local action groups. They can be working on that, and we hope to open for what is called animation — open and ask for expressions of interest for new projects coming forward — towards the end of April and the start of May.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her answer. Can she give an update on how LAG staff members will be transferred between the old and new LAGs?

Mrs O'Neill: I can give the Member more detail in writing; I do not have that detail here. Suffice to say, we are working with councils because they were the employers. That is a process that is being worked through at this time, but I am happy to provide the Member with more detail in writing.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her response so far. Could she advise the Assembly on the suitable social partners? Would those include conservation groups, which already do excellent work throughout Northern Ireland?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, absolutely. We are really keen that we get as many views as possible around the table. That is why we have gone out and run hard to try to reach people who were not necessarily involved with the LAG structure in the past. Given the numbers that have come forward, from a quick look through the list, there is a wide range of people, including conservation groups.

Mr Irwin: Is the Minister confident that the time frame of June can be met for the opening of new applications?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. We are not sitting back and waiting for Europe to confirm the programme. It is with them, and we hope to get approval ASAP, but there is a lot of work we can do. There is the animation work on the ground, asking for applications and getting things started. So, yes, I am pretty confident that, by about May, we should be able to have applications sitting on the desks.

Beef and Sheep Farming

5. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she plans to sustain beef and sheep farming in the less favoured areas in the future. (AQO 7294/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am committed to supporting beef and sheep farmers in our less-favoured areas (LFAs) and have ensured that there is a range of support measures available to support the sustainability of these farms. In January 2014, I agreed to a further less-favoured area compensatory allowance (LFACA) scheme for 2014-15, providing stability to beef and sheep farmers in those areas during this transition period to the new CAP support framework. I announced this morning that payments rates under the scheme will remain unchanged. I expect payments to issue from early March.

Direct support under pillar 1 of the CAP is vital to our farming industry and currently around £160 million goes to farm businesses located in the LFAs. Implementation of CAP reform this year will bring changes for many farmers but the overall level of direct support going to LFAs, particularly the severely disadvantaged areas, will increase slightly, year on year.

The new rural development programme (RDP) will provide opportunities to join a new agrienvironment scheme, help to facilitate integration and cooperation in supply chains, and provide training, advice and support to help to improve efficiency. The proposed farm business improvement scheme will include a portfolio of measures to support sustainable growth in all farming sectors.

In June 2014, I announced the new areas of natural constraint (ANC) scheme for the first two years of the next RDP period. This will replace the current LFACA scheme. I intend to implement a one-year transitional payment for farmers in the disadvantaged areas, as these areas will no longer be eligible for this support under new EU rules.

I will not change the current LFA boundaries in the short term. The redesignation of these boundaries can be considered in tandem with a review of the ANC scheme, which is planned to commence later this year.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for her very detailed answer. Minister, what exactly will be the shape of the advice and guidance given to the farmers?

Mrs O'Neill: We are going through a period of change because of CAP reform, and everything is changing for farmers in their support, their single farm payment being split into three payments and all the changes around greening. A considerable body of information is coming towards farmers, so we are out on roadshows to try to give people information in person. There is a question-and-answer section on the DARD website, and we have a DARD helpline. I encourage farmers who are in any doubt about any issue to seek advice and guidance.

Our College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) advisers assist farmers with their business development and how to take their business forward. So, a lot of advice is available through CAFRE also. Again, I encourage farmers to use those services.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answer thus far. How can the

Minister support low and volatile incomes on LFA beef and sheep farms?

Mrs O'Neill: I recognise that LFA beef and sheep farmers operate in what is, by the nature of geography, a challenging economic environment. Farmgate prices are not as high as farmers would like. Input costs have increased in recent years, exchange rates are volatile and the current weakness in the euro all impact on returns from exports and reduce the value of single farm payments.

I have worked hard to ensure a fair deal for LFA farmers under CAP reform, which will come into effect this year. The new RDP also contains much that will benefit LFA farmers. I have also continued the LFACA payment into 2015 and maintained the level of payment per hectare. Overall, my Department is delivering a package of measures that will improve and sustain LFA beef and sheep farmers.

3.00 pm

Mrs Dobson: Will the Minister clarify how many farms that received less favoured area support in 2014-15 will no longer be eligible to receive such support? Will she provide an update on the estimated value of the one-year transitional payment?

Mrs O'Neill: There are approximately 17,000 farm businesses in the LFA scheme. In terms of the number that will lose out — remember, they will lose out as a result of an EU change, not a departmental change — Europe has said that, next year, there will no longer be a payment to disadvantaged areas. I do not have the figure to hand, but suffice to say I was very concerned that those people would miss out on a payment, so I secured agreement with the Executive for the transitional payment. It is no bother to send the Member information on the number of farmers who will be impacted upon, and the rate will be struck accordingly at the same time of year as usual.

Agricultural Property Relief

7. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the future availability of agricultural property relief on holdings let in conacre. (AQO 7296/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The position on agricultural property relief was outlined in a letter from the British Treasury to the then Ministers of Agriculture and Rural Development and Finance and Personnel in December 2009. That position remains unchanged and clarifies that land let in conacre will qualify for agricultural property relief, provided that the deceased owned the land throughout the seven years immediately prior to death and that, throughout that period, the land was farmed, either by the deceased or by another person.

Although all taxes are kept under review, I am not aware of any plans to change the rules around agricultural property relief and, in particular, how it relates to conacre. As taxation law is complex and liability depends on individual circumstances, it is important that professional advice is sought for specific cases.

Mr Kinahan: I declare an interest as I let out land on conacre. I am still very concerned that those who have done so may find themselves, because of the change in the definition of an “active farmer”, losing out. Is the

Minister taking advice from HMRC about the future to ensure that farmers are protected and do not find that their future has changed and that they cannot hand their farms on to the next member of their family?

Mrs O'Neill: The assessment by DARD as to whether a business is eligible for a particular scheme under the common agriculture policy is not the determining factor when it comes to taxation liability. I assure the Member that, as we go through all the changes from CAP reform, our Department is working very closely with the DSO to make sure that any legal issues that may arise are fully explored. Those are the types of questions that we are being asked by farmers, so we want to provide as much clarity as possible.

As I said, the British Treasury has not made any changes to the scheme that it has on its books, and it has made it very clear that, under current rules, land let in conacre can qualify for agricultural property relief provided that it has been owned by the deceased and farmed, including by another person, through the seven years immediately prior to death. It is a very specific and detailed area, but I can give an assurance that we are working with the Department's solicitors to make sure that we clarify these issues.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers so far. She has probably covered some of the answer to this question: what is the importance of being classified as an active farmer?

Mrs O'Neill: That is the question that comes up time and time again in relation to this topic and other topics. We have worked very hard on trying to provide that detail for people. Unfortunately, Europe was a bit slow to filter the information, but I encourage any farmer who is in any doubt to contact the DARD Direct offices, contact Orchard House or contact the Department in any way. Use the question-and-answer section on the website, use the intranet and use all the avenues that are there to make sure you clarify that you are, indeed, an active farmer. The purpose of CAP reform is to weed out the inactive farmer and make sure that supports go to those farmers who are farming the land.

Farm Management Deposit Scheme

8. **Ms Sugden** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the farm management deposit scheme, suggested by the Ulster Farmers' Union, as a risk management tool against future market volatility. (AQO 7297/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The farm management deposit scheme, which operates in Australia, is one of a number of mechanisms that can assist farmers to deal with fluctuations in their annual farm income. The deposit scheme allows farmers to set aside pre-tax income in years of high income and then to draw on these deposits in years of low income, with tax being paid in the year in which the money is withdrawn. This type of system could be beneficial for farmers. However, taxation policy is not a devolved matter and the introduction of such a scheme here is not within my gift. Our own tax system permits farmers to average profits over a two-year period, which allows farmers to spread their tax burden. I would support extending the number of years over which this averaging can take place, but again this is not a devolved matter.

Fluctuating markets is not a new problem, but it remains a very difficult issue for farmers. For me, it is one of the reasons why direct payments, such as the single farm payment, are so important to the agricultural industry. These funds provide a regular income stream, the value of which is reasonably well known in advance. I fought hard to maintain the system of direct payments in the recent reform of CAP and will continue to do so.

Ms Sugden: I thank the Minister for her answer. She spoke briefly earlier about departmental assistance to help farmers with their income. Does the Minister acknowledge the current absence of a specific mechanism designed to mitigate price volatility?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, pricing is a commercial issue. There is a whole range of things that the Department can do to assist the industry, particularly around knowledge transfer, providing advice, helping people to work up business plans and promoting greater efficiency on farm. In looking at what I and the Department can do, we will concentrate on those areas. The other key area that we have to concentrate on at Executive level, not just my Department but DETI, is new markets. We need to explore new markets for the industry. Again, that will help the price in simple supply and demand. These are the areas that we are focusing on in the Department. Your initial question was around being able to spread the farm deposit scheme across a number of years. I would be very supportive of that, and I have actually written to DEFRA to raise that point.

Mr G Robinson: As the trend is towards continuing growth and expansion opportunities for our farming communities, does the Minister agree that it is important to assist our farmers through these difficult financial times?

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. We have seen prices fall in the dairy industry and, at the end of last year, in the beef sector. Thankfully, they have improved, but it is a very challenging situation. As I said in a previous answer, we have had a rise in input costs. The value of the euro and all the challenges that are there seem to be conspiring against the farming industry at this time. It is so important that my Department does all that it can to help people through what are very difficult times. One of the things that I did recently was to have a meeting with all the main banks around their being flexible in dealing with their farming customers, given the pricing situation that we are facing. That was quite a positive engagement. I was accompanied by the UFU, which was quite positive in that we were speaking with one voice in asking the banks for a bit more flexibility for the industry as it goes through what is a very difficult time.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí seo. The Minister mentioned the dairy sector in her last answer and knows that it is a difficult time for that sector. What support can DARD provide to the dairy sector at this time?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, both I and my Department are fully supportive of the dairy industry. We will continue to do what we can throughout this difficult time. One of the recent issues was the introduction of the Russian ban on dairy imports. The Enterprise Minister and I wrote to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs advising of the concerns that were expressed by the local industry, particularly around the ban. We emphasised the need for support from EU level. That is something that

I also raised with Commissioner Ciolos when I was in Brussels in September. I continue to lobby DEFRA on its approach to Europe. We have very different views about supports for the industry. However, I will always fight the corner for our industry.

As I said earlier, I, alongside the UFU, recently met the banks to discuss cash-flow concerns. That was a very useful conversation. We have asked the banks to be very proactive, sympathetic and flexible and to work with the industry. We are hopeful that that will be the experience of farmers. Given the drop in prices, the Russian ban and all the other challenges that are there for the industry, it is so important that I continue to do whatever I can. Alongside the supports that we provide, particularly around advice, we need to be looking at new markets and at what support we can provide for the industry to get into those new markets. How can we target them? What do we have to offer? What is our unique selling point?

I am keen to work with DETI on those areas to live up to the aspirations of the Going for Growth strategy.

Wind Energy

9. Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to examine the greater use of wind energy on her Department's estate. (AQO 7298/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department recognises that the further development of renewable energy is a key commitment in the 2011-15 Programme for Government. In 2010, the Executive approved the strategic energy framework, committing that, by the end of 2020, 40% of electricity would come from renewable sources. My Department — Forest Service in particular — is actively investigating the opportunities to support those commitments and obtain value for money. Work from 2009 onwards confirmed commercial interest in the Forest Service estate. A wind energy development manager seconded from the Strategic Investment Board since the start of 2014 is progressing work on site selection and assessment, commercial analysis, policy development and community participation and benefits. This is a large and complex piece of work that is looking at multiple sites. The business case must be robust and must pass the tests of the approval process. I am pleased to report that a strategic outline case to support the work was approved in November 2014, and the next stages of business case development are ongoing.

The Department's business plan requires Forest Service to publish a procurement strategy for the exploitation of wind farm development opportunities on its estate. In the first half of 2015, we intend to offer selected sites for the market to take forward. Those sites are on forest land adjacent to operational, consented or wind farms under development and offer the best potential to deliver projects in a reasonable timescale. In parallel, we intend to assess further sites on forestry land that offer significant larger-scale wind energy potential. I am committed to ensuring that the work is done in consultation and in collaboration with local communities and representatives and making sure that all stakeholders benefit equitably so that Forest Service projects become an exemplar for schemes that provide community participation and benefits from wind farms.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for that comprehensive

reply. Does she have any plans or can she give any consideration to, if you like, community benefits resulting from such developments on the Department's estate?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. In parallel with public acceptance, the theme of community benefits and participation is absolutely central to the process that I am interested in taking forward. It is a specific work stream of the wind development plans that the Forest Service is taking forward to review and report on the community participation and benefits models that exist in Ireland and other relevant jurisdictions; to stress-test those models and their suitability for deployment on publicly owned sites — that is, Forest Service lands; and to present that information to community stakeholders in advance of wind farm plans coming forward. It is key that we have community involvement from the initial stages and that communities are very much part of it. As I said, it is essential to the successful exploitation of opportunities on the Forest Service estate to ensure that all stakeholders benefit equitably. In particular, that means early and appropriate engagement with community stakeholders to ensure that, whatever schemes are proposed, community participation and benefits are understood and considered acceptable. That may require the Forest Service to show leadership in that area, potentially in advance of the work that is being taken forward by DETI, as DETI is also in the process of developing an action plan. My Department works with that, but, in waiting for that to come forward, it is important that community benefits and participation are key to any projects that move forward.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as a freagra cuimsitheach go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her comprehensive answers. In light of the collapse of the wind turbine at Fintona, will she provide us with some detail of what health and safety, construction and location guidelines are used by her Department in the construction of turbines on departmental lands?

Mrs O'Neill: I have been watching closely and have talked to some of the residents in that area. I believe that what happened is quite an unusual event, but that is not to say that there should not be a full investigation of the ins and outs of what happened and why it went wrong — there needs to be. I believe that that investigation is under way, and we look forward to the outcome. Health and safety concerns will have to be absolutely central to any project going forward on Forest Service land. That will all be built into the programme and the planning, and I assure the Member that the health and safety asks will be of the highest standard in what we will require for anything that goes onto Forest Service land.

Mr Buchanan: My question is along the same lines: exactly what consideration will the Minister and her Department give to the safety issues of any new wind farms proposed on land belonging to the Department?

Mrs O'Neill: It is the same answer. They will have to be key to any project. They will be inbuilt.

3.15 pm

Civil Service: Voluntary Exit Scheme

10. **Mr Ramsey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline how the proposed voluntary exit programme will affect her staffing complement. (AQO 7299/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The draft budget for DARD envisages that we will reduce our staffing by around 300 posts by the end of September 2015. For the second half of 2015-16, that would effect a saving of £5.6 million and an annual saving of around £11.2 million thereafter. We anticipate staff leaving the Department under the voluntary exit scheme from the autumn of 2015.

The 300 posts will be spread widely across the functions of the Department, but it is not yet possible to be precise about which posts or functions will be affected. My priority will be to continue to deliver services to our customers in the most efficient and professional way, but this may mean changes to services and how we deliver them. My officials have commenced a number of reviews of the Department's structures and operating models to identify where the reductions will come from and how services will need to change.

The Department is committed to a review of advisory services and the development of our customer contact model. We are also exploring the greater use of new technologies and digital services to achieve further savings.

It is not yet possible to estimate the number of DARD staff who may avail themselves of the Civil Service voluntary exit scheme, but we will use other opportunities to achieve staff savings, such as natural turnover through retirements, resignations and other leavers. The Department is also participating in the Civil Service-wide embargo on recruitment and promotion and is reviewing the use of agency and casual contracts.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): That is the end of the period for listed questions. We now turn to topical questions.

NI Water Industrial Action: Impact on Farming

T2. **Mr Ó Muilleoir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she has taken to minimise the negative impact on farmers of the recent NI Water industrial action. (AQT 1912/11-15)

Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur ar an Aire maidir leis an gníomhaíocht thionsclaíoch ag Uisce Thuaisceart Éireann agus a thionchar ar fheirmeoirí.

Mrs O'Neill: The situation is very unfortunate, to say the least. As well as the risk to individuals, homes, water supplies and vulnerable groups, it has the potential to affect farm animals, which rely on fresh drinking water. Farmers also need clean water supplies for dairy hygiene purposes.

My officials are working closely with NI Water to find ways to minimise any disruption. Farmers who are experiencing significant water shortages during the current industrial action should contact NI Water in the first instance. Advice on water requirements and dairy hygiene has been made available on DARD's website, but I encourage farmers who

are experiencing any animal welfare problems to contact the DARD helpline on 0300 200 7852.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Go raibh maith agat, a Aire. The Minister plugged the hotline. Will she tell us how many calls have been made to the emergency hotline in that regard?

Mrs O'Neill: I suppose that I should have added that we are working closely with DRD. There is a daily multi-agency teleconference, and the Department is involved in that.

The helpline has received only two calls from farmers in Fermanagh, and the veterinary service will follow those up. Those were more about seeking advice on how long the strike has the potential to last. There are concerns, and, as I said, I encourage farmers to contact that helpline if they need any support.

Beef Sector: US Market

T3. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department is doing to help the Northern Ireland beef sector to access the US market, given that she will be aware that, following a two-year campaign by the Southern Government, Irish beef is back on the US menu after a 16-year ban. (AQT 1913/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Core to the work that we did around Going for Growth and the strategy that has been set out was the need to target new markets. We are also working closely with DETI and Invest on the work that they do around the world on that. I go back to the problems that we talked about earlier, the difficulties that farmers face: unless we find new markets, prices will continue to be low, so it is important that we do.

In recent months, new markets have been opening up, South Africa being one. We hope to get into the American market and will work to make sure that we do that. We are a small island, and what we offer has full traceability. We are working closely with the Department in the Twenty-six Counties to make sure that we have full traceability across the island. When we achieve that, there is no reason why, when export markets open up for the Twenty-six Counties, they will not also open up for us.

So, I am very keen to ensure that we explore all those new markets and to work with DETI to make sure that that is what we do for the industry.

Mr Buchanan: Minister, you are right to say that new markets are vital for the beef sector here in Northern Ireland. Have we any indication when that sector will be able to enjoy and see the coming to fruition and opening up of those new markets?

Mrs O'Neill: No, we do not have an indication of that at this stage. It is very difficult. You will know that, for some time, we have been chasing the Chinese market in connection with pork exports and we have come so close. We are waiting for another veterinary inspection. We hope to have that very soon and we are pushing very hard for it.

My Department has a role in the export certificates, and we are working very hard to prioritise the markets that the industry is targeting. China is obviously a big market that we are exploring, and I have been there on a number of occasions. I will continue to do that until we break in to that market for pork and obviously all the other products that will come after that.

Farm Business Improvement Scheme

T4. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she expects to be in a position to announce the roll-out of the farm business improvement scheme. (AQT 1914/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that, as part of the draft consultation, I set out that, over the next year, 2015-16, we are going to work very closely with farmers. We have set aside a draft allocation of funding to work with farmers on developing their business cases and getting them ready to be able to bid in. We have also set aside some money for the actual physical delivery of the scheme. At this moment in time, we are talking about somewhere around £3 million. However, that is the draft Budget position, and I hope that we will be able to increase that as part of the consultation that I have been having with DFP and Executive colleagues. It is my intention that that will be rolled out before the end of the year.

Mr Campbell: Obviously, things are pretty difficult in many sections of the agriculture community. Can she identify which sectors are most likely to be able to benefit from the scheme when it is announced?

Mrs O'Neill: The scheme is not prescriptive, in that it is not favouring one sector over the other. Those in the whole industry, whether it is the poultry sector, the dairy sector or the beef sector, or, indeed, horticulture or all the many other sectors, are very keen to be able to develop their business, and although they do not all have business plans, they all have business improvements in mind. So, it is important that the Department does the work with the industry, develops people's business plans and helps them to make informed choices on how they will invest their own money and apply for public funds.

Agriculture: Budget Priorities

T5. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she has acted to protect her priorities in the 2015-16 Budget. (AQT 1915/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I will start, as I always do when it comes to Budget discussions, by reinforcing our dismay at the extent of the Tory cuts to fund public services here and the challenging position that they put all of us in. The scale of reductions is unprecedented, and, particularly when it comes to my Department, trying to find £29.9 million resource is quite a challenging task. That being said, I have tried to take a very balanced approach, and we have tried to address the challenges that lie ahead. I am resolved to deliver the commitments that were assigned to DARD in the Programme for Government, as well as my key policy objectives, particularly Going for Growth, tackling rural poverty and social isolation (TRPSI), areas of natural constraint (ANC), the LEADER approach, DARD HQ and flood alleviation. Those are key areas for me, and, as I set out in the draft Budget position, those are what I feel we need to focus on.

To protect the funding for the key priorities, I have considered all elements of the DARD budget. That review included the scrutiny of DARD's operational running costs, as well as opportunities to leverage additional sources of income. The draft Budget proposals include £6 million of additional income that will help to deliver a balanced budget.

In addition to the savings plans, I am also resolved to seek and secure additional funding to deliver the commitments that the Executive made back in June. That includes funding to support the new rural development programme and Going for Growth in particular. I am aware that, previously in the House, the Finance Minister expressed words of support for Going for Growth, and we now need to see that translated into a financial commitment.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for her answer. She has acted to protect the TRPSI programme. Will she outline what is allocated from that programme in 2015-16?

Mrs O'Neill: The rural poverty and social isolation programme is, I am glad to say, on course to meet its full spend allocation that we had allocated up until this year. The proposal to extend the programme into an additional Budget year provides more funding to tackle the key issues of rural poverty and isolation. In reviewing the responses to the DARD draft budget, DARD stakeholders and partners have seen it as a positive development. The resource allocation allows DARD to continue to support all existing schemes at the required levels in 2015-16, and that includes the great projects such as maximising access in rural areas (MARA), the arts, the connecting elderly rural isolated project, the farm family health checks and young entrepreneur projects. We are also able to do more work to improve broadband in rural areas. We will open a rural challenge programme providing community and voluntary groups with access to small-scale capital funding. So positive work is being done through the programme of about £4.7 million for the 2015-16 year. Obviously, we will plan for the schemes in 2015-16 and onwards.

Dairy Farmers: Pressure

T6. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what she or her Department can do to ease the pressure on dairy farmers whose plight has been well highlighted over the past two or three months. (AQT 1916/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Yes, you are absolutely right. It has been a dire situation for dairy farmers, and we have been working very closely with the sector. As I said earlier, I met the banks recently to ask them for flexibility, support for the industry and sympathy for the fact that incomes are reduced by so much. It is important that we continue to drive home the message that farmers need a fair return for their product. That is the key message that I will continue to drive home. We work very hard with the industry to make sure that we transfer knowledge and provide support for efficiency, education and training, technical support, and Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) research programmes. There will be opportunities to support the industry under the new rural development programme. So we are targeting quite a number of areas of work, alongside new markets.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for her answer. My supplementary question was to ask the Minister to meet the banks. You have already said that you met the banks, but did you get a fair hearing?

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Yes, I did. I met the banks with the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU). The leaders of all the main banks were there, and we did get a fair hearing. They understood

our call for flexibility and support for the industry. What that translates into on the ground will be evident to farmers themselves. I will continue to apply political pressure when I can to those who can assist the industry, and banks are obviously key.

Decentralisation Programme: Down/Derry/Tyrone/Fermanagh

T7. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the decentralisation programme to Down, Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh. (AQT 1917/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I remain committed to taking all reasonable steps to ensure the transition of the Belfast-based headquarters to Ballykelly, the relocation of fisheries to south Down, forestry to Enniskillen and the Rivers Agency to Loughry Campus in Cookstown. We are on target to deliver by the dates that we originally set out: later this year, we will see the first of those moves being completed with Forest Service and fisheries. I am delighted that that is ongoing. It is a considerable piece of work. The Member knows that I am committed to the relocation programme. It is about a fair distribution of public-sector jobs and fairness across the public sector. We will continue to drive that forward. I have set out my commitment to the capital allocations in the draft budget position.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an bhfreagra sin. I thank the Minister and I welcome the decentralisation to my own constituency and that it is on target. Could the Minister provide an update on the staff surveys that have been carried out to identify interest in relocating to the new areas?

Mrs O'Neill: Surveys have been completed for all four locations in order to gather more detailed information, after having done some scoping work in the past. Whilst there were concerns at the start that a number of people in DARD headquarters did not want to move, the further work has generated an overwhelming response, with over 4,000 staff registering an interest in one of the posts. That is many more applicants than posts. It shows very clearly that there is a need for a change in the public sector. Individuals want to find a better life/work balance and a job closer to home. Over 1,500 wanted to apply for Ballykelly alone; over 1,000 for Cookstown; almost 1,000 for Downpatrick; and 435 for Enniskillen. That shows a significant appetite for posts outside Belfast. Detailed analysis is now under way to determine grade matches between those who have expressed an interest and the positions at each location. I am very enthused by the numbers of staff who have decided that they want to work in a location outside the greater Belfast area. That is very positive and shows that there is a need for this change across all Departments.

3.30 pm

Going for Growth: Young People

T8. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, following her comments about the issues associated with Going for Growth, what mechanism is in place to ensure that young people are encouraged into farms in Northern Ireland. (AQT 1918/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is really key that we get young people to come forward. The average age profile of a farmer is somewhere in the early 60s. That obviously has to change. One of the things that we can be encouraged by is the fact that we have had so many people who feel that they are eligible for the young farmers' scheme under the new common agricultural policy. That shows that we have quite a significant number of people who are head of holding and are taking over farms. We have never seen that age profile before. We now have supports in place. We have put the maximum amount of support in place for the top-up to the single farm payment for the young farmer. That has obviously been a factor, in that it is perhaps time for some people to move aside and let the younger people in the family come on to the farm. I am quite enthused by that.

Committee Business

Budget 2015-16

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly takes note of the draft Budget 2015-16 announced on Monday 3 November 2014 by the Minister of Finance and Personnel. — [Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel).]

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I welcome the opportunity to outline the views of the Environment Committee on the draft Budget for 2015-16. I will refer to the information provided by departmental officials when they briefed the Committee on 27 November 2014 on the possible impact on the DOE budget since the Committee has not yet had any details on the more recent Budget agreement.

The Committee raised concerns about a number of issues. Most significantly, officials indicated that at least 500 staff, representing around one third of the workforce, would need to be released to stabilise the Department's medium-term financial position. The proposed exit scheme will not be targeted at specific grades or posts, so the Committee believes that that may result in a disproportionate loss of more experienced staff, particularly as DOE has a large number of staff at professional and technical grades, rather than general administrative staff. Such a policy may prove more costly in the longer term if that expertise is lost to the Department and has to be bought in subsequently. It was suggested to officials that a strategic review should be undertaken first to identify essential areas of business and that, as far as possible, the Department should prioritise the delivery of front-line services. The Committee also considered the wider implications for the economy of the loss of those public-sector posts, particularly at a time when there are not yet sufficient private-sector posts available to compensate for the job losses. Some Committee members suggested that there should be a more gradual reduction in staff numbers rather than an immediate and widespread cut.

On the impact on local government, departmental officials indicated that the application of the 15·1% reduction in the draft Budget proposals will result in a shortfall of £3·9 million in the derating grant to local councils and of £2·8 million in rate support grants to less-well-off councils. Committee members expressed their concerns that councils in the north-west would be hit disproportionately by budget cuts and forced either to reduce their service delivery or to increase rates. A balance of £1·2 million still had to be allocated. The Committee was extremely concerned that road safety education be deemed a priority, particularly in view of the rising level of road fatalities and the imminent implementation of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill.

Members were also concerned to learn that no match funding for future EU programmes has been provided in the draft Budget. The Committee has been urging the Department to maximise its update of funding opportunities, and match funding is an essential element of the effective use of such opportunities.

This may also impact on environmental research posts, such as those in the ReNEW project, and on jobs in the

community and voluntary sector. The Committee is very much aware of the Department's reliance on community and voluntary organisations and believes that this partnership results in a more effective use of the available funding.

Committee members were particularly concerned that rural areas may suffer a disproportionate impact from proposed budget cuts. The Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, when enacted, will have a greater impact on rural young people than those who can avail themselves of public transport in urban areas, and the dangers of rural roads may increase through a reduction in road safety advertisements.

Moving on to capital funding, Committee members expressed some reservations regarding the proposed use of financial transactions capital for the Arc21 development since this project has not yet received planning permission. Officials were clear that this funding allocation would not influence the outcome of the planning application, but members believed that there was an element of presumption in such a specific allocation of funding by the Executive.

I now wish to say a few words on behalf of the Alliance Party. My party colleague Mrs Cochrane will speak more comprehensively on this issue later on. Northern Ireland's public finances are currently unsustainable. We recognise that some cuts to public spending are necessary as our block grant is reduced. However, Alliance is concerned at the absence of a sufficiently strategic approach to the draft Budget and that allocations have been made based more on historical spending measures than any objective assessment of need. A key challenge is the cost of division. There are the direct costs of policing riots, civil disturbances and parades, the distortions to policing that arise from the security threat and the cost to a wide range of agencies in repairing damaged buildings and facilities. There are the indirect costs of providing duplicate goods, facilities and services for separate sections of the community, costs that are borne by the public sector and the private sector. There are also opportunities lost from inward investment and tourism. It is essential —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw her remarks to a close?

Ms Lo: — that the Executive acknowledge the cost of division.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I will begin with a few remarks on behalf of the Education Committee. I am aware, of course, that this is a draft Budget and is likely to be subject to some change. The Education Committee is disappointed by the very limited information provided for scrutiny of the Department of Education's draft budget and the highly compressed timescale for consideration of what is a challenging draft budget. I also want to acknowledge the very large number of letters and petitions. Over 1,700 individual items were received by the Committee on the draft budget within the last two weeks.

There are four areas that I wish to highlight. The first is schools. This is a complex picture. For a start, the Education Department seems to be proposing the "baselining" of additions made to the common funding scheme earlier in 2014 of £10 million for targeting social need plus £15·8 million plus other small sums previously

identified as transitional funding. The Department then proposes to increase targeting social need by another £10 million while reducing the aggregated schools budget by £78.7 million.

When all of this is added up, it may appear to amount to a small change to an overall budget of about £1 billion for schools, however this masks the individual impacts on schools, some of which calculate the reduction in their budgets to be in hundreds of thousands of pounds. As with previous changes to the common funding scheme, the Committee has been denied the information that would permit it to consider the aggregate impact of the budget proposals by sector. It is also not completely clear whether all of the £78.7 million cut in schools funding will be met through reductions in the age-weighted pupil unit. The Committee has therefore sought assurance that the 2015-16 Budget will not be used to provide cover for further amendment of the common funding scheme, with unknown consequences for sectors and rural communities.

Secondly in relation to jobs, in oral but not written evidence, officials referenced a cut in the number of jobs by 2,500 — 1,000 teaching and 1,500 non-teaching. It was suggested that an attempt should be made to complete the bulk of the necessary redundancies by 1 April 2015. It is simply not possible for any large organisation, private or public, to achieve a 5% reduction in its workforce within that timescale. When consideration is given to the chaos that such a measure would create in schools, particularly around time-scaling and existing course commitments, compounded by the difficulties that the Education Department experienced when it was managing a much smaller number of redundancies in 2014, it seems highly unlikely that that was ever a serious proposal.

It is unclear why the Department adopted that strategy and made those pronouncements. I can only speculate as to what it hoped to achieve and what officials thought the impact on teachers' morale would be. The Committee is very dissatisfied with that critical aspect of the draft Budget process.

On the funding of policies, initiatives and other organisations, the Committee struggled to fulfil its scrutiny role, given the lack of supporting information. Again, that is extremely unsatisfactory. The Committee noted the apparent lack of a strategic approach. For example, the Education Department proposes to decrease special educational needs capacity development for teachers while at the same time increasing support for SEN services. The Committee would naturally support the latter, given, for example, the 67% increase in the number of schoolchildren diagnosed with autism in the last five years. With that in mind, the former makes no sense at all and appears to be counterintuitive. Hard decisions are required on budgets, but common sense, consistency and fairness are also required.

The Education Department was quite circumspect about the funding of third-party organisations. Officials highlighted cuts to departmental administrative spending of 9%, but did not appear to mention what I understand to be considerably larger cuts to third-party and sectoral organisations. The draft Budget includes references to efficiency improvements for school catering, yet, incredibly, it does not reference the relevant PEDU reports. Given the size of the challenge facing the Education Department, it was also surprising that there was no

reference to the change fund or European Investment Bank projects.

Finally, I would like to talk about pensions. The Northern Ireland teachers' pension scheme has significant liabilities. Those liabilities are to be revalued. The increase in employer contributions may consume a sizeable proportion of the £133 million central fund. No information has been provided to the Committee on that subject as yet, nor on the recurrent costs associated with employers' contributions in future years.

Those examples illustrate the very unsatisfactory nature of the information provided by the Department of Education to the Committee on critical policy and financial matters, and the difficulty that the Committee has had in undertaking its scrutiny function.

This was always going to be a difficult Budget. It represents a sea change in education in Northern Ireland, and the required hard decisions should be made in a transparent manner. They should be sensible and defensible, and should protect front-line services where possible. To ensure that that happens, all relevant information must be made available to stakeholders and the Education Committee in a manner that allows analysis and time for consideration and amendment.

I would just like to add a few words as a DUP MLA. One of the fundamental problems that run through what I have said up to this point is that the school timetable runs across two financial years. Timetables have been set and funds have been allocated. Cuts to the classroom at this time pull the rug from beneath principals and undermine the teaching of the children. The stress that that has placed on principals in managing budgets, concern about classroom provision and managing staff morale is incredible. I am deeply concerned about how that has been handled and by the comments of departmental officials. There is a fundamental need to protect the classroom, and I believe that there are ways in which the Department can ensure that finances are directed there.

Time is limited today, and I will expand on that in tomorrow's debate on the issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw her remarks to a close?

Miss M McIlveen: It has been shown that when education budgets are placed in the hands of schools, they have been spent more effectively and efficiently. We want to see that freedom of management rolled across schools. That way, we can see the majority of the education budget —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member's time is up.

Miss M McIlveen: — being spent in the best interests of our children and young people.

3.45 pm

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I want to reflect on the Committee's findings on the draft Budget. I particularly want to focus on the issue of strategic priorities. When the former Minister briefed the Committee in September regarding the 2014-15 financial position and his request to the Executive at that stage for an additional £160 million, he stated that the areas of

spend that he was going to have to pull back on, which we are now witnessing, were not in any way strategic but were simply based on stopping money where it was not contractually committed.

Those remarks made it clear to the Committee that the Department has an understanding that if spend has to be curtailed, there are areas in which it can be targeted that will not undermine its strategic priorities. We were told that, for 2014-15, there was not sufficient time left in the financial year to do that. However, that should not have been the case for the 2015-16 Budget, given that the Department is fully aware of the pressures that it is facing, including a 6% to 7% increase in demand from the trusts. Therefore, the Committee believes that the Department should be in a position to approach the draft Budget in a planned and strategic manner so that the allocation that it receives is spent on priorities rather than on things that are simply committed to at an early stage of the financial year.

The Minister advised the Committee that his top two strategic priorities are the provision of high-quality front-line care and the implementation of Transforming Your Care. Whilst the Committee has no issue with those as priorities, it is clearly concerned that the priorities are not reflected in the Department's approach to allocating its budget. The Department's emphasis seems to be more on using the budget to maintain existing services. Whilst the Committee accepts that the Department is required to provide certain services to fulfil its statutory obligations, it believes that more consideration could be given to how those services are provided. That should not be limited to whether the service is being provided in a resource-effective manner or whether it provides value for money; rather, we need to look at the outcomes of the services and whether they provide high-quality front-line care and whether they reflect the principles of Transforming Your Care. So, when the Minister told us during a recent evidence session:

"At the moment, I do not know if we will have the luxury in the next 18 months to have much strategic thinking on this. Unless something changes radically, we are going to spend most of our time trying to balance the books",

we were concerned that the strategic priorities are not driving how the money will be allocated. Indeed, one of the expert witnesses who appeared in front of the Committee recently described the Minister's separation of strategy from spending as disturbing.

Given that the provision of high-quality front-line care is the Minister's number one strategic priority, the Committee asked the Department for its definition of front-line services, and we were quite surprised when officials informed us that they do not have a ready definition. Without such a definition, therefore, the Committee is not clear how the Department will ensure that resources are directed to that end or how it will ensure now that the additional £200 million for 2015-16 will be spent as intended by the Executive.

We know that the Finance Minister announced that an oversight mechanism will now be developed to monitor how that £200 million will be spent. As a Committee, we think that is important to ensure that the maximum benefit in health outcomes is achieved from that additional resource. However, we have no further details from the

Department of Finance or the Department of Health as to what that oversight mechanism may look like.

I would like now to address my remaining comments as a Sinn Féin MLA. It is important to reflect that health has been protected in this ongoing round of discussions, with the additional £200 million that has been allocated in 2015-16 and the £80 million allocated in the monitoring rounds. The big discussion in health is whether the current spend is going in the right directions to ensure maximum health provision and outcomes. On two separate occasions, the Finance Minister referred to his concerns around the management of the current health budget. We have now ensured, thankfully, that additional oversight is in place on how this budget will be allocated, but the Health Minister does need to take the tough decisions. It is, in effect, poor leadership when we are told that a Minister wants to protect front-line services, but then his very Department admits that it does not have a definition of such services.

Mr McCarthy: I am very grateful to the Member for giving way. Does she agree that this Assembly should have great concern in view of the fact that we have just come through a crisis in A&E? Do we have a Health Minister? He has not been seen since the crisis came about. Given what the Member has just said, we should all be concerned that the Minister is around to oversee what is happening.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Member for his intervention. Yes, I certainly agree that the Minister's silence has been deafening over the past week or 10 days. I would hope that, in the next 24 to 48 hours, he will step up to the plate on a number of issues.

It is right that the Minister is there to provide strategic leadership. He needs to increase investment to community and primary care and preventative models of care. Only £25 million has been shifted from acute to community care. Is it therefore any wonder that emergency departments are in crisis when we are not investing in alternative models of preventative care? Again, we note the issue of protection of front-line services, but in the very same week, the Minister allowed trusts to bring forward proposals that slashed the very services that were needed. We have seen the issues around the proposed closure of Dalriada, the decision to cut home care for over 500 elderly people and the decision now, wrongly, to close the respite facility at The Cottages in my constituency. These decisions are contrary to the policy of Transforming Your Care and have not been subject to proper equality impact assessments.

There has been a 20% increase in administration in health and social care. The Minister therefore needs to initiate a robust root-and-branch review of the health and social care system. There is over-administration, duplication of commissioning and a lack of transparency and accountability in decision-making. We must have the debate around the current spend going in the right directions. There is £34 million going to senior consultants' bonuses; £55 million to £65 million every year to the independent sector; and £134 million to the private sector over three years. Is this value for money? The Minister must bring forward proposals for revenue generation. We need proposals on generic medicines, the sale of real estate and savings on all-Ireland working as recommended in 2009.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member's time is almost up.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Health cannot stagger from crisis to crisis. The Minister now has the opportunity to provide that leadership and take the tough decisions.

Mr McQuillan: We unfortunately continue to live in difficult economic times. However, some positive growth is emerging, which we should work to strengthen and grow further. Unemployment is thankfully on the decline. While this offers a general positive outlook, I appreciate that it may not be felt on the ground by those who are without employment.

The overall picture of the draft Budget points to one of more pain five years after the comprehensive spending review. This pain is reflected through cuts imposed by Westminster to the block grant, in sharing the economic burden and reducing the deficit. However, we must be realistic and take the positive from this Budget, which is the very fact that it exists. While its content is not necessarily good reading, it is a statement of fact in reflection of the need for the Executive to make savings and efficiencies. The need to make savings is known to many hard-working families outside this place who, for too long now, have had to make choices based on economic circumstances; to heat or to eat, for example. Our only way out of this is to ensure that we continue along a path of economic growth which was present in 2014 and is expected to be present in 2015. Growth is and will be slow, but it is happening.

I want to see these stories of economic growth emerging in east Londonderry, which, in 2014, was the victim of the loss of the DVA office in Coleraine, which was moved to Swansea. This is why I have endorsed the increased budget for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in order to deliver more economic growth through securing foreign direct investment and, in turn, jobs. Manufacturing has taken a major hit in recent years, and while there has been some growth in the sector, I would like to see more, along with growth in construction, another sector that has suffered tremendous losses in recent years.

I am pleased to see that our Executive and my party have protected front-line services in health. An increase in the overall health budget, which currently represents the largest portion of the Budget, is a huge thing, reflecting not only a commitment by the Minister and the Executive but a willingness to limit the economic pain being felt on the front line. At this moment, I want to express my appreciation to all those health workers on the front line who deal with the pressure of the job along with showing care and compassion for those who they look after. They are a credit to society and the health and social care system.

I, like others, want to see Northern Ireland become an economic driver and net contributor to the UK as a whole. The Stormont House Agreement makes light of this objective in what is promised in the economic package.

I will continue to support the draft Budget and commend it to the House. While we might see other parties jump up and down to condemn it, I ask this: could they have done better?

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a

LeasCheann Comhairle. Speaking on behalf of the Social Development Committee, I want to first thank the Finance and Personnel Committee for tabling the motion today. It is an opportunity for Committees and Members to put a number of positions to the House and for Members to take note whilst deliberations are ongoing — hopefully concluding shortly — to agree a final Budget proposal to come to the House for proper and full debate.

The Finance Committee requested that all Statutory Committees provide a submission, if they wished to do so, by Friday 5 December. The Department officials were with us on Thursday 4 December. Therefore, the Committee did not have an awful lot of time in which to respond to the briefing in any real detail. However, it is fair to say that some of the detail we got from Department officials was necessarily vague. Certainly the Committee did ask for further information, and I will go through that in a moment or two. We want to thank the officials for coming to the Committee on 4 December, on behalf of the Minister, to provide a briefing on the proposals. They made it very clear that they were draft proposals and of course the Committee makes all its comments in that context. Hopefully it will not end up that these are the final proposals for the Budget.

The Committee acknowledged the difficult position that the Department and the Minister were in. As a Committee, we recognise that there is a smaller amount of money in the block grant from which we can provide the types of services that people have become rightly and justifiably used to receiving over the last number of years. We anticipated that none of us could, with hand on heart, entirely welcome the draft Budget proposals. We will probably find that the Budget itself is difficult. It is a one-year Budget; we know the reasons for that, and I do not want to rehearse all the arguments that a number of Members put forward earlier in the debate and that others will no doubt make following my presentation. Suffice to say, the Committee was concerned with a number of the proposals. The Committee agreed to respond and submitted a formal response to the Finance and Personnel Committee. That is a matter of record.

The Committee was pleased when Department officials made it clear, on behalf of the Minister, that they wanted to protect the social fund, the Supporting People programme, the provision of social housing, community need and disadvantaged communities. However, there were of course a number of proposals in the draft Budget that contained a reduction in public-sector jobs and cuts across the range of the Department; for example, to housing, the Social Security Agency and the community sector. The Committee was very keen to hear more information on the jobs projected to be lost. The Department officials gave figures of several hundred. Having queried it, I think that members were a little surprised to hear that. Maybe the information could have been more fulsome, but maybe part of the nature of the beast is that there needs to be a lot more discussion across all Departments. Since it is going to be done on the basis of a voluntary severance scheme, it is not yet clear, from Department to Department, where all the job reductions may come from.

Officials presented projections that several hundred jobs would go. When that was queried, we were told that some of the jobs were “posts”. I asked what that actually meant and was told that there are jobs, then there are posts and

then there are vacancies. Jobs have people in them, and others are posts that are sometime vacant. We asked the department to come back as early as possible to give a clearer definition of what all that means. Are hundreds of posts unfilled? Do they need to be filled, or should they be written off the baseline? That is a big discussion that needs to be had across the public sector, and we are keen to hear more information about that.

4.00 pm

We were certainly led to believe that a reduction in the number of posts would clearly have an impact on services. While the cuts imposed on the Social Security Agency, for example, would have no impact at all on benefit claimants, it certainly would impact on the service delivered and how long it might take to resolve claims and so on. That could have some impacts.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair)

As I said, the Committee's response to the Department made it clear that it was very concerned that cuts to disadvantaged communities, if you like, could be much more devastating. In an area of disadvantage, which the Department has a statutory obligation to tackle, a small amount of money taken from a project could kill it off; for example, the loss of one post could kill off an entire project. There are choices to be made. We welcome the fact that the Minister and his officials were clear that they wanted to protect the most vulnerable sectors of our community, and we say that those choices have to be made and, hopefully, the Department and the Minister, in conjunction with the Minister of Finance, can meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities. As I said, the Committee looks forward to hearing the outworking of the Budget discussions, which we will no doubt hear fairly soon. The Committee recognises the difficult position that the Department and the Minister are in but makes it very clear that it also wants the most vulnerable to be protected in the communities that we all collectively represent.

I will say a few words on behalf of my party. All of us know that this is a difficult Budget. It is a one-year Budget. We know that it is the result of years of British government cuts coming directly from London to our block grant. That is an inescapable. When we talk about "inescapables", that is one of them. Any party or representative in the House who wishes to acknowledge or suggest otherwise or to blame people in the Chamber, for I have no doubt that all the Ministers want to provide the best services possible to our communities —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Maskey: We recognise that the Budget cuts come directly from London. The unity of purpose shown in the recent talks proves that, when all the parties here work together, we can get a better result and a better deal for the people we represent. Long may that continue and be improved on.

Mr McKinney: I welcome the opportunity to take part in today's debate on such an important issue, and I do so as the health spokesperson for the SDLP, commenting on the health aspect of the Budget.

We are debating the draft Budget presented for 2015-16, but the actual context was set in 2011. The SDLP said

then that there was not enough money for health, and I think that we have been proved right. The shortfalls in money have had a growing negative impact, which is now reaching its climax. Forgive me, Mr Deputy Speaker, if you have heard some of this before, but just because it is repeated does not mean that there is a weakness in the argument, quite the contrary.

In 2011, the health authorities knew that there were problems on the horizon, which is why a plan was put in place that recognised those problems. While we saw a privatisation agenda in that, much of the core analysis was not wrong. It identified areas of growing concern, which were the expense of hospital costs and weaknesses in community provision. The problem was that the Budget was already set, so they had no money to pay for it. TYC was not strangled at birth, but it certainly was deprived of oxygen. Basically, that has been the narrative ever since. The biggest change plan at the heart of the health service for years recognised the major and emerging strains that were coming down the track but did not have the money to deal with them, except out of in-year monitoring. We all know where that is now. You wouldn't, to use a colloquial phrase, bet the farm on getting anything out of that now.

The health service continues to provide a service, but it does not have at its core a properly funded and managed strategy to deal with the growing strains in the system, and this Budget does not do anything about that. We do not have to look too far to see where those strains are. In the past few days, we have seen the headlines; we have witnessed extensive waiting times at A&E departments across the North; and we have seen a curtailment of elective care provision, with the cancellation of nearly 180 appointments across all trusts in the past few weeks. Those are just the most recent headlines. The year has been dominated by them. In fact, 2014 started with a crisis that the Department desperately tried to convince us was a one-off. If I read the headlines in the papers correctly, even yesterday, it seems that the health authorities have learned absolutely nothing and are calling this a unique spike. It is not a spike; it is a result of a failure of strategic thinking.

When we look at the statistics, we sometimes miss out on the personal impact — the stories behind the headlines. May I quote one line from an email sent to my office this week? It is from somebody who had their operation cancelled at the last minute, with very short notice. The person said:

"I am devastated. I am so ill at the moment, and now I have no idea when this hell will end".

There are personal stories about the impacts that this failure of strategic thinking has on our ill and vulnerable citizens.

I will make a point that I feel compelled to make during all these health debates: there is a need to differentiate between those who work in the system and those who set up the system and created the failures in it. I would like to praise our doctors, nurses and ancillary staff for the tremendous effort that they put into ensuring that we are looked after no matter what — be it a minor ailment or major surgery. Our health personnel are among the best, and they want to deliver the best. It is the system that is broken and puts them, the patients and the public under such strain. I have said before that the crisis witnessed in

our A&E departments is the symptom, not the cause, of a failed approach to the health system and health finances.

Although we welcome the £200 million of additional funding to protect our front-line services, we will not see the delivery of the core strategic plan. In its current form, it is destined for failure. We have to ask at what cost. Remember that it is still being funded, but it is not delivering. So, at what point does the plan become the drain on resources rather than the solution to the problem? This is evident from the fact that the £70 million required for its implementation over a supposedly three- to five-year period has not been delivered: £38 million has, and £15 million to £17 million has been set aside in this Budget. In recent comments to the Committee, the Health Minister talked about it no longer being a five-year plan but a 10-year plan. Our Programme for Government target — a shift left of £83 million from the hospital-based community — has not been met.

If one thing sums up the lack of strategy, it is the way that the trusts set about the savings plans towards the end of the year. There is a complete lack of strategic focus, but there is, of course, a focus on the bottom line. Remember what TYC said on investing in community and compare that with some of the decisions that individual trusts made to meet their bottom line. They have been referred to before. Even when the decisions were made, some, such as that about Bangor's minor injuries unit, were quickly reversed. That underscores the fact that there was not a strategic focus. Of course, we have Dalriada, among others.

Frankly, I am bewildered when it comes to health service strategic decision-making. Before Christmas, the board told us that individual cuts were the trusts' responsibility. After Christmas, it was clear that the trusts had been told that the approach was to cut elective care procedures. Who is running the system? Added to the contradictions around strategy is a plan to protect the front line and a plan to cut funding to arm's-length bodies, of which the Fire Service is one. How mad is that? If the Fire Service is not front-line, nobody is.

One of the biggest issues for me is the need to ensure that all appropriate options for savings are considered. Significant waste has been identified in the health service. I will reiterate the examples once again: £50 million was spent on bank and agency staff, 30% of which went to private administrators, not the front line; £50 million was spent on sickness; £40 million was spent on fraud; and, between them, patients and hospitals cancelled 360,000 appointments last year. That is a failure in the system. As I have repeated here on numerous occasions, we have to pay for some of those situations twice because we have to buy in the private sector to shorten the queues.

Missing from all this is a comprehensive strategy that fundamentally recognises —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr McKinney: — just as the Stormont House Agreement did, that we have legacy issues that need to be resolved. We need a joined-up government approach to deal with those matters, because Health cannot deal with those issues that are, ultimately, creating the demand in the system.

Mr Swann (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I welcome the opportunity

to outline the Committee for Employment and Learning's considered views of the 2015-16 Budget.

As with all Committees, the time for scrutiny of the draft Budget's impact on the Department was short. The Budget's fluid position over the Christmas period was such that Committees were initially considering the broader picture in the absence of the relative detail from all Departments. Although there was an eight-week consultation on the draft Budget from the Minister of Finance and Personnel's statement on 3 November, the process for responding and the implications for each Department were still filtering through close to the deadline for responses.

The Committee for Employment and Learning, however, began its informal discussions, immediately meeting with the three Northern Ireland universities, the University and College Union (UCU) and Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) on the possible impact of the proposed budget cuts. The Committee has also received written responses in the consultation on the draft Budget from Queen's University Belfast, the University of Ulster, the Open University, Stranmillis University College, St Mary's University College and Colleges NI.

On 4 November, during an informal meeting with the heads of the three universities, the vice chancellor of the University of Ulster and the vice chancellor of Queen's University Belfast advised that, between them, the proposed cuts could lead to a loss of 1,100 university places. They said that that would have a damaging knock-on effect on the skills base for promoting inward investment and developing home-grown talent. The universities also warned of an impending brain drain if the proposed cuts were initiated.

On 5 November, during an informal meeting with representatives of the UCU on the effects of the cuts, the union was of the opinion that whole subjects and areas of study could be cut from both universities, which could result in the loss of student places and staff.

On 19 November, in the absence of a paper from the Department for Employment and Learning on the outworkings of the proposed cuts, the Committee discussed areas that it wished the Minister to clarify. Minister Farry briefed the Committee on the Budget on 26 November and returned for a further briefing on 10 December, after his draft departmental budget had been published. During the briefings, the Minister outlined his Department's financial situation for the coming year. He advised that, although the proposed Budget referred to a reduction to his Department of 10.8%, or £82 million, the actual impact will be 16.7%, as he is already implementing £35 million in cuts from the 2014-15 budget.

The Minister informed the Committee that, through his savings delivery plans, he has identified approximately £33 million of the £82 million in savings, leaving a shortfall of £49 million. He said that his options are limited, given contractual arrangements and his intention to protect certain core areas, such as the shared skills programme, narrow STEM provision in universities and colleges and the continued development of the apprenticeship and youth training strategies.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. The figures that he highlighted are quite significant. Can he give us any indication of what impact they would have, particularly on

the regional colleges? I have been lobbied quite strongly by staff and those who use the South West College in Enniskillen, Fermanagh, Dungannon, Cookstown and Omagh. I just wonder whether he can give us any indication of what sort of impact that would have.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member has an additional minute.

Mr Swann: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Member for his question. It became apparent from the Minister's presentation that the further education colleges were going to lose 16,000 places, mostly at level 1, and that there would be a reduction of 500 staff. So, there is going to be a dramatic effect across higher education (HE) and further education (FE). Up to 17,000 young people will be left, as the Minister said that day, with no plan B for where they go once they leave school.

The Minister also advised that he hoped that there would be room for more money in the final Budget from the Executive for the Department. Given the central focus in the Programme for Government on the economy, the Minister believes that the Executive will give a fair hearing to a certain amount of protection for the Department for Employment and Learning if more money becomes available. The Committee supports that approach. I think that the Finance Minister had indicated that the Department for Employment and Learning could be looked on favourably if Barnett consequentials were to come forward. However, the Minister was unable to provide any detailed answers to members' questions on what the impact would be on staff and services, but, based on a 10% reduction within his own Department, there could be reductions in staff of up to 400. That would lead to some services in the Department being discontinued.

4.15 pm

The Committee asked the Minister why he was asking the further and higher education sector to plan for cuts when he had already identified £33 million of in-house cuts. He said that he was working with colleges and universities to mitigate the impact of the 10.8% cut or to reduce that cut, with the primary objective of protecting as many front-line services as he possibly could. He identified that approximately 70% of his budget goes directly to the colleges and universities, which, because of their status as autonomous bodies, have responsibility for their allocated budgets, and it is up to them how that falls into place.

The Committee asked what the impact would be. First, there would be job losses, but 17,000 places would be taken away from young people when they left school. The Committee asked what was being done to mitigate the effect, and the Minister was quite clear in pointing out that there was no fallback position. He was clear in his view when he told the Committee that:

"if we end up in a situation where we are removing places, we are denying life-changing opportunities to young people that would help them progress up the skills ladder, access employment in due course and engage with the labour market."

The Committee is also clear that a number of those young people will leave Northern Ireland and that that will seriously impact on the marketing of Northern Ireland as a place with a young, trained workforce. The pressure on

those not in education, employment or training, a group that the Committee has tried hard to help, will be vastly increased. Students who cannot afford the £9,000 fees will not be able to go to Great Britain to study. When the Committee asked the Minister whether he had any plans to increase student tuition fees, he said that that, in his opinion, was a viable option for the future.

A £2.2 million cut to the teacher training colleges was also highlighted in the Minister's £33 million savings. The Minister stated that no agreement had been reached on that issue. In response to questions about the impact on Northern Ireland's two teaching institutions, Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College, the Minister pointed out that he has taken the decision to remove the small-scale premia and special institution premia that had been paid to St Mary's and Stranmillis. He also said that he was aware that:

"That will have a major impact on Stranmillis and St Mary's."

There is a concern that although the international report on teacher training is already out there and not yet complete, the Minister has used this Budget to bring forward his political agenda.

One of the main issues raised by the community and voluntary sector was to do with the European social fund. The Minister has indicated that he intends to use part of that fund to increase and support his own core departmental projects. That has caused wide concern in the community and voluntary sector across Northern Ireland. We have had representations from the sector at the Committee, and I know that departmental officials have met representatives of the sector to address some of the concerns that have been raised.

In conclusion, we hope that the Minister fully explores the utilisation of additional funding streams that are available —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Swann: — such as the change fund, to assist him in his task. The Committee also urges the Executive to look to the long-term impacts of damaging our education, skills and training base.

Mr Irwin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I will speak as Chairman of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and will represent the views of that Committee. The Committee received a copy of the DARD consultation document on the Budget on Friday 21 November 2014 and took evidence from DARD officials on the Budget on Tuesday 25 November 2014. The Committee was pleased to note that DARD was one of the first Departments to produce its budget plan. The Committee noted that officials had stated that the Budget reduction faced by the Department was as a result of a reduction in the block grant from the UK Government.

In carrying out its scrutiny of the plan, the Committee noted the following issues and concerns. First, and most important, the Committee is adamant that front-line services to farmers and wider rural communities should not be affected. That is with particular, but not exclusive, reference to the new basic payment under common agricultural policy reform. The Committee indicated that

at least a continuation of the level of service regarding payments to farmers was its first and main priority. The Committee received assurances from DARD officials that the basic payment system is also the number one priority for the Minister and the Department. In exploring this further, the Committee questioned officials on the proposals for staff reductions and received assurances that the reductions in staff numbers would not affect the payment timetable.

That leads me to my second point regarding staff reductions. The Committee noted that the DARD proposal to reduce staff posts in the core Department by 300 would provide a saving of £5.6 million. The Committee agreed that that should be done on the basis of a voluntary exit scheme. The Committee noted that the DARD core Department has 2,650 staff and that the reduction would therefore represent just under 10% of all posts. DARD officials indicated to the Committee that the £100 million for workforce reduction, as outlined in the DFP ministerial statement on the Budget, was to cover the entire NICS and its arm's-length bodies.

The full details of the scheme are unknown, with details not likely to be available in the short term. DARD officials also indicated that they expected additional staff post reductions to arise from AFBI and CAFRE but were unable to quantify what those reductions might be. The challenge with staff reductions will be to ensure that essential business continues as normal. The Committee heard that DARD intended to put more of its services and interactions with customers online so as to release staff posts.

The Committee expressed concern that there was insufficient funding in the £100 million pot from DFP for workforce restructuring to cover all the NICS and the arm's-length bodies. It is the opinion of the Committee that the workforce restructure fund is likely to be oversubscribed. That will make it difficult for DARD, AFBI and CAFRE to realise their reductions without substantial additional costs to the Department's own budget lines. The Committee emphasises that the priority is to ensure that front-line services to farmers, particularly the basic payments, are not affected by the staff post reductions. Although the Committee acknowledged that DARD has recognised the risks associated with the staff reductions, it felt that DARD had not thought through clearly what it may have to do if the full scope of the workforce restructuring plan is not realised. It is not an immediate requirement, but the Committee would encourage DARD to create and put into the public domain the contingencies that it would consider if the full £5.6 million of savings could not be realised in 2015-16.

The next major issue that I want to cover is the Northern Ireland food animal information system (NIFAIS), which is the replacement IT system for the animal and public health information system (APHIS). The Committee had a full and frank discussion on NIFAIS with officials and asked for further information. The Committee is not convinced that NIFAIS in its current format represents value for money and urges the Minister to revisit the programme to ensure that it is fit for purpose and has not got unnecessary elements built in. The Committee remains to be convinced that what is proposed by DARD is not a Rolls-Royce model.

Farm inspections are an important aspect of the work of DARD and other agencies to ensure compliance with EU

legislation. The Committee is of the opinion that further work could be done to drive efficiencies in that area. We would like to see inspecting officials coordinating their efforts, in order to create, where possible, a scenario where a farmer has one visit in which all his inspections are done. The Committee is also of the opinion that other agencies with an inspecting role, such as NIEA, could have their functions transferred to DARD to enable and facilitate a coordinating inspecting role. That would ultimately generate efficiency savings. The Committee strongly recommends that the Department engage with DOE on the issue of a single inspection mechanism with NIEA.

The Committee noted that administration costs had risen between 2011-12 and 2014-15. When questioning officials on that, the Committee noted that the increase appeared to be attributed to two causes: increasing pay inflation and pension costs and increasing staff levels. The Committee agreed that it was not content with that and would urge the Minister to ensure that, notwithstanding the reduction of 300 staff posts, a close watching brief be kept on administration costs to ensure that they are reduced immediately.

The Committee noted that it is DARD's intention to raise additional revenues through its veterinary service seeking a further £4 million from EU veterinary fund receipts and from AFBI generating £2 million from external sources, including Horizon 2020. On the potential to generate a further £4 million from the EU veterinary fund, the Committee asked why, if it was available, it had not been applied for in previous years.

Regarding the potential for AFBI to raise an additional £2 million, the Committee heard, as a result of a recent PAC investigation, that there may be an increase in the rates charged by AFBI. However, it is the Committee's understanding that DARD is one of the biggest customers of such services, and any increase in prices may ultimately create an increased bill for DARD.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Irwin: The ultimate cost saving to overall departmental resources could, in such a scenario, be minimal. The Committee was disappointed that that angle had not been properly explored. The Committee noted, with disappointment, that —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is up.

Mr Irwin: — the plan held very little information on how the budget cuts and savings could be implemented by the arm's-length bodies.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate.

We continue to face tough choices because of the sustained and persistent cuts to our Budget imposed by the Westminster Government. Those cuts have reduced the allocation of funding to our Executive, and it is in that context of reduced finances that the Executive have chosen to defend core services.

The limited fiscal and economic powers available to the North of Ireland limit the extent to which we can address budgetary challenges, provide public services and tackle unemployment. All fiscal, economic and other powers should be transferred to the North. Any claim

that our political institutions or politicians would not be fit for purpose is entirely spurious. Full transfer of powers to our institutions makes economic sense. Politicians, businesspeople, workers and families who live here should make the decisions about our future, not a Cabinet of Tory millionaires who know nothing and care less about the challenges and day-to-day struggles of ordinary people here in the North. Do we really want to remain within the constraints of a Westminster economic and fiscal system that has short-changed us in every Budget and remain bound by the economic decisions of a Tory Administration who are locking us further into a no-growth austerity agenda? We could make the vital decisions to stimulate our local economy that would allow us to build the local economy and unleash the potential from a all-Ireland economy — an all-island economy.

Westminster promises only further poverty. Sinn Féin is committed to transforming the life chances of our people, but Westminster wants to keep our people in their place. Our economy needs investment not cuts, but budget cuts have become the price of economic governance from Westminster. Every person struggling with the impact of poverty is a member of our society who is unable to play their full part in economic life. All this does is hold back our efforts to build a stronger and more equal economy in which all have the opportunity to flourish.

Without powers over tax, benefits and employment for the North, we can never fully balance our books, deliver employment and social welfare or grow the local economy to its full potential. We have been promised powers over corporation tax, but that is only part of the picture. We lack the authority over income tax and National Insurance and are constrained in our ability to use those powers to make starting and developing a business or hiring new employees that much easier. We do not have the powers to develop a progressive taxation system to ensure our economy is balanced. We cannot adjust VAT rates to support our tourism and hospitality sectors or encourage investment in repairs and maintenance, which would support the construction sector and local communities.

We do not even have any influence over the Crown Estate commissioners, who manage our seabed and foreshore, yet it is companies here in the North that are developing and investing in the technology to capture the wave and tidal power around our shores. Control of our seabed would allow us to fully coordinate the efforts of manufacturers, the energy industry and those involved in regulation and planning to help deliver the full benefits of a marine renewable energy revolution for the North.

4.30 pm

With control of the tax and benefits system, we could create a fair regime for workers that builds real participation in work and removes the poverty traps. There is no point hiding behind estimations of the fiscal deficit. The only way to close the fiscal gap is to build a fiscal economy strategy for local needs, free from the scourge of Tory-driven austerity. Access to full fiscal and economic powers would allow us to use the combined powers over business investment, employment creation, taxation and welfare to secure stronger levels of economic growth, from which all the people of the North and this island could benefit. The levers of fiscal and economic responsibility will enable us to put the local economy on the right footing

to tackle the long-term challenges of inequality and the need to secure greater prosperity for all our people.

It is our people who are bearing the cost of the Tory economic policy through reduced wage growth. Working people are thousands of pounds worse off than they were in 2010, and there is a cost of living crisis here. Standing still and passively accepting cut upon cut from the Westminster Administration will achieve little. Fiscal devolution is not the alleged moral hazard of spending money that we do not raise. It is the ability to travel in a different direction without suffering the full financial consequences of decisions taken on public services in England. We must embrace the process for change and create genuine ownership of the economy by the people.

Mr Ross (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): As this is my first opportunity to speak in the capacity of Chair, I wish to acknowledge the work of my predecessor, Paul Givan, who was Chair for the past three years. During that time, of course, there was regular scrutiny of the Department of Justice budget and savings plans. More recently, the Committee has spent some time considering the 2015-16 draft budget proposals.

Unfortunately, as other Chairs have indicated, there is a lack of detailed information available from the Minister on the proposed allocations and likely implications. Therefore, it has been impossible for the Committee to properly examine and reach definitive conclusions on the Department of Justice draft budget at this time. It is also regrettable that the Department did not publish detailed spending allocations and savings plans for each area, agency and NDPB before the consultation closed on 29 December 2014, to enable key stakeholders and the public to properly assess the budget proposals and make meaningful contributions to the consultation.

At the meeting of 26 November 2014, departmental officials provided an overview of the 2015-16 draft Justice budget for resource and capital funding, outlined the Minister's high-level priorities and provided an initial assessment in very broad terms of the likely implications of the budget reductions for the main spending areas.

The Committee was broadly content with the Minister's stated priority areas, which include front-line policing, ensuring that the PSNI has adequate additional security funding and protecting other front-line areas across the Department, as far as possible, with the aim of protecting outcomes for the public. It agrees that funding should be targeted towards these priorities. The Committee also welcomes the assurance that it received from the Department that the budget allocations will support the Programme for Government commitments that fall to it to deliver.

However, as I have already indicated, the detailed information on the proposed allocations for each spending area and the proposed savings plans has not been provided. Therefore, it has been impossible for the Committee to undertake a proper assessment of whether the funding is actually being targeted at the priorities. Whilst officials have advised that reductions in staff numbers will be necessary, the Department has not yet provided the Committee with any information on the likely level of reduction in posts required or how many staff could leave as part of the voluntary redundancy scheme. It has, however, indicated that the majority of the Department's

budget goes to arm's-length bodies and is, therefore, staff-related. It is therefore clear that significant restructuring across the Department and related organisations is likely to be necessary. The Committee has urged the Department to clarify the position as soon as possible.

Given the scale of the emerging pressures facing the Department, in-year and for 2015-16, the Committee is very concerned that front-line services may not be protected. Back in June, the previous Chair highlighted the major budget and resilience challenges that the PSNI is facing, particularly in relation to sustaining the number of warranted officers that it believes is necessary. Having discussed the budget pressures with the Chief Constable of the PSNI in October, the Committee is well aware of the potential impact that further reductions in the PSNI budget will have on the delivery of front-line policing, including community policing. Protecting and prioritising funding for policing to any degree does, however, have a substantial impact on the rest of the Department and NDPBs, given that policing accounts for two thirds of the overall justice budget. It is therefore imperative that detailed and accurate information on the proposed budget is available to ensure that the best decisions are made regarding the allocation of scarce resources.

In addition, the Committee has expressed some concerns about other areas of the DOJ budget. The Committee has indicated that it finds it difficult to see how the Northern Ireland Prison Service budget can be protected given the budget pressures. The 20% reduction in DOJ core directorates will clearly have an impact on organisations such as NIACRO, and we have heard more recently in the media about the drugs rehabilitation facility at Railway Street in Ballymena. The Committee has expressed some concerns that the loss of such facilities will ultimately result in more pressure being placed on other areas of the DOJ budget, putting more pressure on the police, the courts and the Prison Service.

The Probation Board is also facing a significant reduction in its budget and is very concerned about the likely implication on its ability to undertake the appropriate level of monitoring and management of some of the most serious offenders, such as sex offenders and violent offenders, who live in the local community. There are also, of course, the ongoing issues with legal aid costs. That has been highlighted for a number of years now and will be a continued pressure as we move forward. It is an issue that the Committee is keen to address. There is also a 24% reduction in the capital baseline for next year, and so it is clear that prioritisation of capital projects will be essential moving forward.

In conclusion, it is clear that the Department of Justice faces a difficult budgetary climate in 2015-16 and that funding will have to be carefully managed to ensure that key priorities and targets continue to be delivered to the required standard. We require detailed information on the proposed allocations and the likely implications and impacts as a matter of urgency to enable the Committee to properly scrutinise and assess the budget proposals. The Committee has requested the attendance of the Minister of Justice to discuss the budget further and, in particular, will want to be assured that budget reductions in one area will not be a false economy and have a detrimental impact on and add additional cost to other areas of the criminal justice system. The Committee also expects

the Department to be innovative and collaborative in its approach to the delivery of services and to explore all funding opportunities for front-line services, including European funding streams, assets-recovery funding and the change fund set up by the Executive.

Mrs Cochrane: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate today as a member of the Finance and Personnel Committee and to highlight some key points on behalf of the Alliance Party.

In the absence of a formal Programme for Government to cover the 2015-16 financial year, the draft Budget was predicated on a carry-forward of the five key Programme for Government priorities. That would not seem such a bad approach if the previous allocations had proved to be a perfect fit. Alliance believes, however, that continuing to allocate funding as per 2011 is not the most sustainable or reasonable approach and that instead there should be a fundamental reassessment of the need for each service, with money allocated to the Departments on that basis. There should also be an assessment of the relative importance of what have been termed inescapable pressures versus the impact of the cuts elsewhere to meet them.

The Committee's report underlines the importance of allocations based on need by recommending that DFP gives more consideration to setting out the wider economic impact of the specific departmental reductions, and that is particularly relevant to the proposed cuts to the Department for Employment and Learning's budget. In the Programme for Government, we have a priority to grow a sustainable economy and invest in the future and we know the importance of the availability of third-level talent for attracting FDI and building our economy, yet the draft Budget puts at risk the provision of some local university and further and higher education and training places.

Other decisions that need to be questioned are, for example, DARD's proposed departmental move to Ballykelly. At a time of limited public resources, the costs of that project should surely be redirected to front-line services. The Finance Committee's report also highlights the need for greater transparency so that the Assembly can determine whether a consistent approach is being taken across Departments in prioritising service delivery.

Although there has been no blanket protection for any Department, it has been recognised that the health service is facing significant pressures. However, we need to be careful that we do not simply continue to allocate resources to that sector without it properly pursuing its efficiency agenda, too.

There is little transparency of what is being protected and little scrutiny of what are deemed as inescapable pressures. We have all heard the A&E and waiting list stories, but money alone will not resolve those problems when there are underlying issues. For example, my daughter was on a waiting list to see a consultant paediatrician. I received an appointment letter to take her to a private clinic for a scan and to another private clinic to see a consultant. That was part of the measures that were being used to reduce waiting lists and, as a service user, it was welcomed. However, when we went to the review appointment last week, it turned out that the consultant paediatrician had no records of the scans or the previous appointment, and she spent the time negotiating a very slow computer system to try to make some sense

of what she was meant to see my daughter about. The final outcome was a quick blood pressure check. In other words, valuable consultant time is being lost in an ineffective system. That is not the fault of the staff, but it is a classic example of where operational and technological improvements can and should be made.

We do not need to start from scratch, as much work has been done to highlight where there is significant scope for reform in the health sector, but we now need to drive those things forward. Reforms to the estate are also required, but there needs to be serious political commitment to that. We cannot expect managers in trusts to make savings and then respond with political outrage because we have not looked at the bigger picture. I asked OFMDFM whether it would consider reallocating the resources associated with the junior ministerial posts in that Department to posts in the Health Department to allow a much greater focus to be given to that important task, but the idea was rejected.

The challenge of reform is, of course, not limited to the Health Department, and it is very clear that the deteriorating resource DEL position will necessitate proactive measures across all Departments to find efficiencies. Figures over previous years have shown that the public-sector pay bill has continued to increase over and above inflation, despite the so-called pay freeze. Therefore, incremental rises for no extra work output are unfortunately no longer sustainable. All Departments need to be benchmarking and market testing, not to outsource services, but rather so that all services are examined to ensure that they are being delivered in the most cost-effective manner. If the current system can absorb £30 million of sick pay in one year without a noticeable reduction in output, efficiencies can clearly be made.

I am sure that nobody will be surprised if I raise the issues of the costs associated with providing public services within a divided society. While those savings may not be able to be realised within a very short one-year time frame, it is nevertheless important that efforts are made to quantify such distortions and plans to release such savings for reinvestment in improving public services are taken forward. There was a commitment in that regard in the T:BUC document, and the recent Stormont House Agreement reinforced that. Therefore, Alliance calls for that independent audit to be a formal Executive commitment in the 2015-16 Budget. As I said, we know that a one-year Budget will not allow all those problems to be solved, but the fiscal challenge that we face demonstrates the need to overhaul public services in Northern Ireland entirely. This Budget needs to lay the groundwork for doing so and ensure that our resources are not continually wasted on maintaining divisions.

Finally, one other area that the Committee report highlighted was that the pressure on public finances will increase in coming years and that fiscal contractions are often best addressed with a ratio of spending cuts and revenue raising. The Committee report recommends that the Executive should publish a consultation paper on the options across all Departments for raising additional revenue, which would set out all the benefits, risks and impacts on the economy, consumers and the most vulnerable. Only then can an informed debate take place and only then can we, as a devolved Administration, start to take some real responsibility for managing the budgetary challenges. Alliance is supportive of that

approach; however, we are clear that we cannot ask people to contribute additional revenue to the Executive if it is being allocated to public services that are not operating efficiently, or if it is simply being used to sustain a divided society. Fair revenue-raising structures must go hand in hand with other reforms. It is a major challenge, but one that the people of Northern Ireland expect our Executive to deliver on.

Northern Ireland is not the only region that is being adversely affected, and the bottom line is that we need to up our game in agreeing a balanced Budget —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mrs Cochrane: — that delivers the best we can for the people of Northern Ireland.

4.45 pm

Mr Clarke (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate in my capacity as the Chair of the Committee for Regional Development.

I am particularly grateful to the Committee for Finance and Personnel for allowing me to debate the draft Budget today, because it is an opportunity that the Minister for Regional Development denied me and my colleagues on the Committee. Instead, he chose to inform the Committee of his sensationalist and draconian budget by email approaching 5.00 pm on the evening of 29 November, before skulking off to appear on the 6.00 pm news and wave his brand of mass hysteria.

Listening to the Minister on the news and having subsequently scrutinised the budget proposals set out by DRD, one image sticks in my mind. It is the image of a pensioner standing on a gnarled and frozen footpath by the side of a ravaged, potholed road that may never be repaired, waiting for a bus that may never arrive, and standing under a broken street light that may never be fixed. That is the reality that the Minister and his Department have presented — the reality that makes no attempt to protect our most vulnerable citizens and the reality that faces our most isolated.

Let us not beat about the bush. The Minister may have scurried off to complain on the news and to the press about his budget. However, it was a budget that he agreed should be punitive and a budget that he agreed against the allocation provided by the Executive. You can dress it up as much as you like by saying that he abstained from the Executive vote on the Budget, but the reality is that he did not vote against it. The reality is that he took his allocation, and the reality is that he sensationalised it through attacking the most vulnerable in our society.

If I may, I will touch on some specific elements contained in the Department's draft budget. The Committee is extremely troubled at the Department's proposals with regard to the reduction in the Northern Ireland Water allocation. Northern Ireland Water has changed significantly from the bumbling bureaucratic beast of the freeze/thaw period into an organisation that is significantly closer to closing the efficiency gap between it and its counterparts in England and Wales. It is already woefully underfunded and facing a historical and pre-devolution multibillion-pound deficit in respect of its capital

investment. Its investment programme is independently established through the Utility Regulator, which has set a very challenging programme of efficiencies over the next control period that will bring it to 2021.

We question, therefore, the rationalisation of imposing further cuts on NI Water and the absence of strong contingency plans in relation to water quality in the coming years. The risk of infraction proceedings, particularly in relation to the ongoing pollution of Belfast lough, is already significant. Imposing a further reduction in the ability to invest will not convince the European Commission that we are serious about addressing the issue but will, rather, almost inevitably lead to the certainty of infraction proceedings.

I turn my attention to the provision of public transport. I will immediately state that the Committee continues to support the Executive on their decision to fund the concessionary fares scheme. The Committee is also pleased that the Department is finally sitting up and taking notice of the substantial Translink reserves. We fully endorse the continuing funding of reductions in Translink through those reserves and its other commercial activities and assets. However, once again, we are critical of the scaremongering undertaken by Minister Kennedy and his Department in stating that the proposed reductions would:

“inevitably lead to a combination of increased fares and reductions in, and the cessation of, some bus services.”

The Department has accused the Committee of being disingenuous in suggesting that the permanent secretary, at a briefing on 29 November, had not asked for the list of towns threatened with total discontinuation of bus services to be kept confidential. First, I believe that it is wrong for the Department to have allowed every single town and village in Northern Ireland to wonder whether they were on the Minister's hit list. We should have been informed, and the public should have been informed, and there should have been an informed debate on those particular issues; something that the Minister and his officials seem to shy away from.

Secondly, I find it rich that the Department accused the Committee of being disingenuous, particularly when the Hansard report of the Committee meeting shows that the permanent secretary and his officials were less than forthcoming about the fact that the list even existed. The Hansard report shows that the permanent secretary stated that he did not have a list, that there was a process, that Translink had a list, that he did not have the list with him to give to the Committee and that there was an indicative list. When pushed to release it to the Committee, they suggested that it be exempted under freedom of information, and that those who were being so severely impacted on should be denied the opportunity to voice their opinions. If anyone is disingenuous in the whole charade of the budget, it is Minister Kennedy and his Department. The routes identified for cessation or a reduction in services will negatively impact on the most vulnerable and those living in our rural areas. How can the Minister for Regional Development convince our citizens that he and his Department are committed to Programme for Government (PFG) targets for rural poverty and social inclusion?

In evidence sessions for the Committee's inquiry into comprehensive public transport delivery structures,

officials reluctantly agreed that the current legislation allows Translink to cherry-pick its routes. It would appear that this reluctance has been abandoned by the Department, which is essentially saying, “Translink, go ahead. Get rid of the most unprofitable routes, even though they may be the most essential. Cherry-pick your routes. Save yourselves money and build up your hard-hit reserves. Let the old, the isolated and the most vulnerable worry about these routes”.

Just to rub salt into the wounds, during the very delicate process of trying to agree a draft Budget, not only is Translink allowed to show once again its lack of regard for the general public by announcing a 5% increase in fares, but it goes ahead with this decision without consulting the Committee, stakeholders or, most importantly, passengers. This further strengthens the Committee's desire for Translink to become an increasingly self-funding entity. It strengthens the Committee's view that the current structures are ineffective and that the Department and Translink are in cahoots with each other.

The pain does not end there. The Committee has asked the Department how Translink intends to reverse its loss-making trend and has been told that Translink plans to recover its losses —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Clarke: — through a combination of income-generating and cost-reduction measures, including reductions in non-front-line staff and internal organisational changes, fare increases and service changes, which will involve looking at reducing the services that make the greatest losses.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is up.

Mr Clarke: I commend the motion.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leat as an deis labhairt anseo. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I will speak initially as Chair of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

In DETI's assessment of the draft Budget proposals, its baseline position consists of an overall 15·1% reduction distributed pro rata across the Department and its arm's-length bodies. This assessment provides little indication of any prioritisation of expenditure in the Department. The Committee wants to see further analysis to ensure that the impact of reductions is lessened on areas of strategic priority for the Executive.

More than 90% of Invest NI's budget for the coming year is already committed. DETI officials informed the Committee that current proposals would mean that Invest NI will be unable to support its current level of activity, presumably resulting in fewer jobs being promoted and consequently leading to fewer jobs being created. This is at a time when the economy and the local business environment look to us to prepare for the devolution of corporation tax powers to the local Assembly. Officials stated that Invest NI would have to scale back its targets for any future Programme for Government and economic strategy, which is a concern for DETI and Invest NI. DETI's understanding is that the assurance provided that no worthwhile inward investment for job creation would be rejected due to budgetary constraints remains in place. It would be helpful to receive

an assurance from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that this is an accurate assessment. However, reduced activity by Invest NI will undoubtedly result in fewer opportunities being identified, leading to fewer worthwhile proposals for inward investment and, therefore, fewer jobs created.

The Committee is very concerned, as is the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, that the Health and Safety Executive has had to target programme expenditure disproportionately, as a large proportion of its budget is for administration. The Committee is concerned that, under the budget proposals, all farm safety campaign activity will be suspended. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development believe that, given recent high-profile tragedies, this programme should not be suspended.

Before considering reductions in InterTradelreland and Tourism Ireland, there should be further assessment of the impact of austerity measures in the South on the budgets of these two organisations. The Committee has asked that the Department give us a detailed breakdown of actual out-turn of expenditure for the two North/South bodies compared with the Department as a whole and Invest NI. That is particularly relevant at a time when we are promoting research, innovation and development. InterTradelreland has a key role in both parts of the island in helping to draw down funds, especially from Horizon 2020, for some of our more innovative companies and to support further innovation. Those two bodies have a very relevant role to play, but especially InterTradelreland. That should provide appropriate evidence for the Executive to consider the budgets of the two organisations in more detail.

I will now speak in an individual capacity. In light of the revised financial priorities and commitments negotiated through the Stormont House Agreement, a cross-departmental task force, incorporating the Strategic Investment Board, should be set up to work on two interlinking and key areas. One is to prepare capital projects to avail themselves without delay of any new or reallocated funds. We have heard so much about that in recent times. That should become a priority. It is of major significance to the construction industry and the supply sector at a time when both could do with more than a little support from the public sector, especially from the reallocation of funding and the capacity to do so.

The second is to strategically prepare for the consequences of the devolution of corporation tax-varying powers. Amongst the issues for assessment is this: aside from upping general public sector performance and dealing with overseas investors, there are issues around skills and infrastructure, including water, roads, electricity, communications, broadband, mobile phone capacity and office accommodation capacity, especially for the areas that have been neglected and discriminated against in the past, such as rural areas west of the Bann.

I say with some assuredness that, tomorrow, the Enterprise Committee will discuss an inquiry into the implications of corporation tax and how we should prepare and upskill ourselves. It will be an inquiry that considers what the requirements are and takes evidence from key stakeholders in the area. I am sure that the Committee will agree to engage in that inquiry and support Departments in doing the work that is so necessary to help to attract trade and industry at times when we will see

very substantial and significant cuts in the public sector, which will have major consequences for the posts that are declared vacant. Also, due to the lack of disposable income, the cuts will have further implications, especially for the retail sector.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, as, unfortunately, you still are, although I have no doubt that you could have complied with a much more elevated office — you are a good friend and a highly skilled politician — I will conclude on that point. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):

As Chair of the Committee, I welcome the opportunity to participate. I thank the Committee for Finance and Personnel for bringing the matter to the House. The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister received an oral briefing from officials on the Department's expenditure proposals for 2015-16 at a meeting on 26 November 2014. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend, but I put on record the Committee's appreciation for the frank briefing that officials provided and the detailed discussion that followed. The Committee also received responses from a number of the OFMDFM sponsor bodies when we requested information on their priorities and detail of any engagement that they had had with the Department on the Budget, which helped to inform our consideration of the issues.

The draft Budget proposes an allocation of £65.4 million of resource departmental expenditure limit for OFMDFM. On the face of it, that represents only a 0.6% reduction from its 2014-15 baseline, which, of course, is much less than that proposed for some of the other Departments. However, the Committee heard that that includes sums of £5 million for the historical institutional abuse inquiry and £3 million for victims and survivors that were not included in the 2014-15 baseline and which were normally allocated in-year, so, in effect, there is an additional £8.4million, or 12.8%, reduction in non-ring-fenced resource departmental expenditure limit.

5.00 pm

The officials also pointed out that savings have been made in each of the last three years and that a further £10.3 million should be achieved in the current financial year. Furthermore, continued reductions to the baseline of the current CSR period amount to approximately 9%. In view of those factors, officials advised that the ability to protect front-line services and staff from the impact of further reductions cannot now be guaranteed.

I believe that all on our Committee welcome the protection given to the historical institutional abuse inquiry through the decision to ring-fence £5 million for it, not least given the unnecessary trauma felt by victims and survivors when they heard the suggestion that June monitoring might not be able to fulfil the commitment to allow it to continue.

Officials confirmed that reductions expected from its sponsored bodies are likely to fall at between 10% and 15%. That will include the 4.4% reduction already made during the current financial year, although the size of an arm's-length body may affect its capacity to absorb any further cuts. A number of ALBs raised concerns to the Committee and the Department about their ability

to continue to discharge their statutory functions. The Committee is determined to monitor that as we go forward.

The Committee also welcomes the additional £3 million allocated to victims but notes that the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) will, like the other sponsored bodies, still be required to deliver savings. It is unclear at this time what the VSS baseline will be for 2015-16, although officials confirmed that it will exceed its 2014-15 baseline. Savings with the Department include discretionary spend, such as on research, and there will be a reduction of approximately 35 posts through suppression, redeployment or redundancy. Programmes delivered by the Department relate to equality and good relations, so any reduction to programme spend is likely to be in those areas.

Officials advised that reductions across most Departments means that there is likely to be less money available in monitoring rounds to deal with pressures. That may make it difficult for all Departments, including OFMDFM, to deliver on Together: Building a United Community, which is predicated on those in-year bids. In addition, while Delivering Social Change has a baseline, it previously also received funding in year and, therefore, could also be impacted should pressures arise. It will be important that the Committee receives timely information for future monitoring rounds, given the financial pressures being faced by the Department. On capital funding, officials confirmed that they expect that the allocation of £4.2 million will be sufficient for the further regeneration of Ebrington Barracks and Crumlin Road and the maintenance of the Maze/Long Kesh site.

I will now make some remarks in a personal capacity. I will pick up on some of the allocations for sites, beginning with Ballykelly. As the Finance Minister has told us repeatedly, we have to cut our cloth. While we continue to support the relocation of the headquarters of the Forest Service to Enniskillen, fisheries division to Downpatrick and the Rivers Agency to Cookstown, we are now withdrawing our support for the proposed relocation of DARD headquarters to Ballykelly at this time. The reason is that value for money has never been demonstrated, and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has ignored the repeated concerns of officials across many Departments, including DARD. Given the significant yet conservative costs of £40 million associated with the move and not least that the Minister's hopes to save £26 million by using existing buildings at Ballykelly have been dismissed as fanciful, we believe that the project should now be postponed and no further money spent until an independent investigation into the decision and its feasibility have been conducted. In the absence of demonstrating value for money, we cannot but believe that the move at present is being advanced exclusively for party political advantage.

Secondly, it is time to end the uncertainty about the size, scale and scope of the proposals for the community safety college at Desertcreat, not least in the context of current demand for those services, locally, nationally and internationally.

Despite the social investment fund having a budget of £80 million to be spent over four years, currently only £37.2 million, or 46.5%, of the spend has been allocated. That was for the pressing issues of tackling dereliction and

deprivation. It is time to cut our losses and reallocate the remaining budget under the social investment fund.

In my remaining 20 seconds I want to express concern about servicing debt. Currently, £63.4 million is set aside in the Budget. If we go ahead with the Stormont House Agreement we could borrow over £1 billion. We could soon be paying more than £100 million a year just servicing debt interest — more than the budget of most Executive Departments. That is a clear and present danger that I hope the Minister will address later in the debate.

Mr I McCrea: I will touch on something that the Member who previously spoke mentioned — the Desertcreat training college. It is important that, as things have progressed in respect of that, it has not been the easiest of journeys for anyone who has been involved in that process, certainly as a constituency matter, never mind for those who sit on the respective Committees that have to deal with that. The Minister will know that I have pressed the issue time and time again, not only with him but with the Justice Minister, as have other colleagues in the constituency.

The Member who previously spoke made an important point: the time has come. We are going to get something, whether that is on a smaller scale than what was initially programmed or is the same, which I doubt. The time has probably well and truly passed in respect of Desertcreat. Whilst the Justice Minister has commenced a process, he should come to the House as soon as possible to advise exactly what is proposed there, what services will be delivered there, who will use it and whether there is a national or international dimension to it.

Mr McGlone: Thank you for giving way, Mr McCrea. Could we also establish, either through the Department or through the Minister, what assurances or securities have been sought or given from Westminster that the moneys that were available for the project through Westminster will still be there?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member has an additional minute.

Mr I McCrea: Thank you. That is also a very important point. No doubt the Minister will have heard and will hopefully be able to answer that, because an important part of what happens for the future of Desertcreat is that that money is in place. We have been told in the past that it is ring-fenced. The Justice Minister was given money in the draft Budget. There are as many questions as answers in respect of it, but the time needs to come very quickly in respect of exactly what is going to happen there. I know from the communication that I get from the local community, and, indeed, the local council, that there is a big concern that it is going to fall flat. Let us hope that those who make the decisions make the right ones in a positive way for Desertcreat.

I must put on record — I can now see them as I stand — that I could see someone's tablet as I was sitting in the Officials' Box. It is important to put on record the —

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I think they look menacing.

Mr I McCrea: Unfortunately not. It is important to put on record my thanks to the Committee officials, because they had to go through a lot of evidence sessions, listening to the members and other things that were going on, and deal

with other Committees. They had an important job to do to try to bring it all together, so I thank them for that.

In respect of the education budget, it is important that the Minister look at his priorities.

He sent a communication from the Department to boards of governors and principals on the draft Budget and the aggregated schools budget planning figure for 2015-16. In any meetings that I have had over the past number of weeks with principals and members of boards of governors, there is deep concern, to say the least, about the ability of principals to run their schools properly if the Minister does not reprioritise his budget.

I appreciate that the draft Budget is just that. At the talks process for the Stormont House Agreement, which Mr Nesbitt and others referred to, a five-party financial package was agreed with the Prime Minister. Therefore, things will no doubt progress, but it is important that the Education Minister look again at the issue of the aggregated schools budget, because, as principals have said — it is not scaremongering — it is the case that schools will have to look again at whether they can afford to employ, and keep in employment, classroom assistants. I do not know what that will mean, under health and safety, for children's lunch breaks and breaks in the school yard, but it is certainly going to mean that there will be fewer teachers. With that comes larger class numbers. Therefore, there are a number of issues that need to be resolved in the wider education package.

My colleague the Chair of the Regional Development Committee mentioned street lighting. It is an issue that each and every one of us has had expressed to us. It is unfortunate that the Regional Development Minister picked a very emotive issue in street lighting. He has to provide more clarity on why he chose street lighting as the financial saviour, as it were, to try to balance his books. It has not gone down well in the community, and I feel that the matter needs to be addressed. Again, it is about the reprioritisation of budgets.

There are always plenty of constituency issues to raise. The events fund is something that cropped up time and time again. It is important that we look at that as well.

A number of Members have referred to corporation tax. The Minister has said that it is important that we have the skills in place. The Minister's words are "tax" and "talent". It is important that DEL ensure that the talent remains in place for when the tax rate is reduced. There are other things that —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr I McCrea: — I can say, but I see that my time is about to come to an end.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and thank the Finance Committee for bringing it forward. Although it is essential that we agree a Budget, we cannot ignore the devastating impact that Westminster-driven austerity has had on our local budgets, our public services and, indeed, our people. By removing more than £1 billion from the local Budget, Westminster's relentless attack on the block grant has ensured that collectively, as an Executive and an Assembly, we are unable to deliver the required level of public services that we desire.

Westminster promises nothing only more austerity. Our Budget has been stripped relentlessly, with no consideration given to our unique local challenges that are a direct result of our emerging from conflict. We have some of the highest levels of child poverty in the Western World. We have working families who are reliant on food banks, and, relative to earnings, our state pension is among the lowest in Europe.

Collectively, we must stand united to demand that we receive the necessary resources from the Westminster Government to ensure that we can meet and address the challenges facing our communities and our people. There is no greater risk to our local Budget than the continual cuts imposed on public spending by the Tory and Liberal coalition in London. For every £100 million that is cut by Westminster from spending on health and public services in Britain, £3-4 million is lost to our Budget for public spending on essential services in the North, including health and education.

5.15 pm

Our budgets, economy, welfare and public pensions are all controlled by an austerity-driven Administration in Westminster. There is a better, fairer way. If we are to build a stable and peaceful society, we must maintain public services, particularly the core services of health, education and welfare; address the needs and pressures of a society emerging from conflict; deal with the realities of higher levels of deprivation and higher costs; overcome division and duplication, and build an equitable and sustainable economy. There is an alternative to Westminster-driven austerity and we must find it. The Westminster Government must end their policy of raiding the block grant for 2014-15. We also have a responsibility locally to balance our books and, to achieve this, we must be proactive, creative and responsible.

Today, we have heard, for example, how we need to stop using monitoring rounds to fund necessary and vital services, such as is the case in health. For the record, Sinn Féin believes that all citizens are entitled to public services and employment. We believe, North and South, that growing the economy requires political power and progressive policies and investment. Sinn Féin wants to balance the books in the North and across the island through economic growth and employment, not by cutting services and taking money from the poor.

If we are to realise the economic potential, safeguard public services and create growth in jobs, we also need the power to do so. We must collectively place the economic needs of people front and centre. If left to those in London, economic growth will always be peripheral, ad hoc and inequitable. We must demand the maximum powers from Westminster to grow the economy ourselves. This is Sinn Féin's vision for a stronger, more equal economy in the North and indeed across the island.

I just want to finish by talking briefly about education. I know that it has been covered, perhaps at length, today by various speakers. Indeed, many have concentrated on the need to protect front-line educational services in the classroom, at the coalface in schools. I want to talk a little bit about how important the broader context of education is when we look at the draft Budget, especially the role of the community.

When we consider that only 9% of a child's educational life is spent in the classroom, we often get hoodwinked into thinking that the classroom is the be all and end all that will determine the outcome of a child's education. That simply is not the case. We need to ensure that there is proper investment in youth services and things like Sure Start and to tackle the wider societal effects of poverty. If opportunities do exist pursuant to the £30 million change fund and indeed the Barnett consequentials, we need to work together towards protecting education. I agree with Paul Girvan from the DUP, who said earlier that we need to ring-fence the education and health spend. I think that he is 100% right. I hope that we will work together in doing this going forward. In light of this, I am content that the draft education budget ring-fences £10 million for targeting social deprivation and further extends the free school meal entitlement by 12,000 pupils — that is an additional 12,000 pupils who will receive free school meals and uniform grants — and will inject an additional £10 million for special educational needs. I think these are all very important and valuable. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr McCausland (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): I rise today as the Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure to speak on the motion. I welcome the opportunity to do so.

I have to say at the start that the Committee has not really had the opportunity to discuss the draft budget for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure for 2015-16 in any great depth as members have, as yet, received very little detail. The information provided is very high level — I emphasise the word “very” in that sentence: it is extremely high level — and therefore the Committee has not been in a position to undertake its usual detailed scrutiny.

Under the proposal, DCAL's budget sees a baseline current expenditure cut of 10% overall. For a Department with such a small budget to begin with, this is a very significant cut and its impact will be felt across all DCAL's divisions and arm's-length bodies.

A key DCAL responsibility is the redevelopment of the stadia at Ravenhill Kingspan, Windsor Park and Casement Park. Issues, which we are all very much aware of, around this programme and the difficulties that there have been with regard to Casement Park have meant that the Department has often found itself in the position of surrendering this budget as it is specifically allocated. The Committee is concerned that the current CSR period will end before the money allocated for the stadia can be spent and that it will have to be returned to the Treasury.

Members also have concerns that non-completion of the agreed stadia redevelopment will have an impact on the subregional football stadium redevelopment plan scheduled for the next CSR, which was, however, linked to the redevelopment of the three main stadia as part of one complete package.

The DCAL draft budget highlights the fact that vacancies will remain unfilled, recruitment and pay will more than likely be frozen and the Department will make use of a voluntary exit scheme administered and funded at the centre. DCAL acknowledges that there will inevitably be an impact on front-line services as a result. The Committee appeals to the Finance Minister to ensure that the voluntary exit scheme is brought forward in

a timely fashion and designed in such a way as to allow the protection of posts in front-line services. The Department has indicated that it will seek to realise savings through the reconfiguration of back-room services. Committee members suggest that that is undertaken in full cooperation with the arm's-length bodies and other Departments. At the Committee's urging, DCAL officials undertook to examine options around utilising the change fund and financial transactions capital. However, the Committee again urges the Finance Minister to apply pressure to Departments to ensure that opportunities are identified and acted upon quickly.

The Committee is very supportive of DCAL's proposal that the reduction in Libraries NI's budget be limited to 7.5%. That should mean that no libraries will close, and the Committee welcomes this. There is, however, a downside to that level of protection for the Libraries NI budget, as it means that budget reduction across the rest of the DCAL family rises to 11.2%. The impact of cuts this size will be considerable and, in some areas, potentially irreversible.

As part of its draft Budget consultation, DCAL has proposed an arts and culture strategy. The Committee believes that that represents the best way forward to secure the long-term future of the arts and culture sectors. It should provide an opportunity to take a clearer cross-departmental approach to the arts and culture, including for funding.

It is proposed that the Arts Council's budget will fall from £12.3 million to £10.9 million. That cut of £1.4 million may seem small in relative terms. However, it could represent the end of a range of activities and organisations across the arts sector. Again, we need to think very carefully when assuming that cuts of relatively small amounts will not have disproportionate impacts and consequences.

The proposed reduction in National Museums NI's budget from £12.76 million to £11.33 million in 2015-16 will mean periodic closures across the museums estate and a reduction in events and special exhibitions. In many cases, National Museums Northern Ireland's activities have a cross-departmental emphasis, and therefore should be considered for co-funding with other Departments and included in the development of an arts and culture strategy.

Sport NI's budget is proposed to fall from £9.27 million to £8.23 million in 2015-16. Most savings will come from the grant programmes. However, it is likely that some of Sport NI's excellent work in the development of sporting bodies' governance and accountability structures will have to be curtailed. The Committee is concerned that the reduction of core funding provided by Sport NI to Disability Sport NI (DSNI), to £146,000 in 2015-16, jeopardises the “whole-of-Northern-Ireland” aspect of DSNI's work. The Committee believes that the work that DSNI undertakes epitomises the DCAL core objective of promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion. We believe that its funding should be protected.

Without detailed savings delivery plans, it is very difficult for the Committee to make definitive comments. Nevertheless, the Committee is very supportive of maximising the drawdown of EU funding to supplement budgets. We believe that more could be done in that area. Cooperation with the new super-councils would allow economies of scale etc to be utilised. Savings through intra- and interdepartmental cooperation need to be

examined. This is a Department with quite a range of arm's-length bodies.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr McCausland: DCAL's activities contribute significantly to our economy, health and well-being and they enrich us all.

Mr Weir: I rise at this late stage in the debate to draw out a couple of the themes that have emerged. As we look towards the draft Budget of 2015-16, there is no doubt that, in many ways, it is a very significant financial year in budgetary terms. It acts as a signpost to good and bad in the future.

There is no doubt that, as we progress, we are moving further into an age of austerity. As the Finance Minister and the Finance Committee have already indicated, had expenditure gone ahead at the levels operating in the last Parliament and continued on to this Parliament, we would probably be somewhere in the region of £1 billion better off. However, as we move ahead, despite the good work that was done on a cross-party basis at Stormont House prior to Christmas, where additional funding could be levered in, there is no doubt that the overall direction of travel in years to come is towards greater levels of austerity. That has been eased by what happened at Stormont House, but it has not been solved.

Faced with the challenge of austerity, we can take a number of actions or move forward on a number of routes. It is relatively easy and understandable that a wide range of interest groups will look at the Budget and simply say, "Give us more money" or "Restore such-and-such a budget". We have heard that from external organisations and also from representatives of a range of Departments across the Chamber. That is very understandable, but the idea of the Finance Minister simply signing additional cheques for worthy causes is not really something that is particularly doable.

The additional money that will potentially come from the Stormont House Agreement and the £70 million of extra revenue that will potentially flow towards the Executive as a result of Barnett consequentials from the December statement by the Chancellor, can be used to ease some of those pressures and burdens. However, it is not a solution simply to say that there can be a blank cheque.

Despite the good arguments that Northern Ireland is a special case — those were pushed very hard prior to Christmas — there is no situation in which any Government at Westminster are simply able to offer a blank cheque. So we have to deal with the austerity and the reality of the situation.

I believe that that offers at least two levels of challenge, a micro level and a macro level, for the Executive. As indicated, there is a major challenge to each of the Departments. We have heard that there is concern that, in some Departments, there is a tendency to salami-slice — to see what can simply be chipped off the edges — rather than look at a strategic way of moving forward. We have heard criticism in the Chamber of the way in which that has been done by a number of Departments. I suspect, for example, that my colleague the Chair of the Regional Development Committee may be off the Minister's Christmas card list, given some of his comments. That

is illustrative of an approach that does not look, from a ministerial point of view, at a particularly strategic direction.

Similarly, there has been criticism of the education budget. That is something that we will come to in much more detail tomorrow. The idea of saying, "Give more money to education", rather than looking at how the Department prioritises its money, is a fundamental flaw in that. So there is a challenge to all Departments to think much more long term and strategically.

Similarly, there is a challenge to the Executive as a whole. It cannot simply be a question of seeing what little bits can change here and there to make things work.

That is why the positive in this draft Budget is its forward-looking nature. We have seen a number of items that the Finance Minister has put in place which build towards the future. For example, with financial transactions capital, money is set aside for the creation of an investment fund and that is a very positive way forward. Similarly, the £30 million set aside for the change fund is something that will be an incentive towards reform. However, the biggest single challenge is the voluntary exit package, which looks to rebalance our economy, on an entirely voluntary basis, to see where people can be released from the public sector.

That will have a major impact on our Budget, but, almost as importantly, it will lead to a degree of rethinking over the way that we deliver public services. It will also provide a major challenge to Departments not to simply tinker round the edges but to look much more fundamentally.

5.30 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

It is also the case that there is an emphasis on support for the private sector, as we seek to rebalance the economy, going alongside some of the agreements that were reached prior to Christmas. We have seen the initial steps with corporation tax, for example, but there is no point in taking those steps if we do not look also at the levels of support that are available to businesses. Efforts have been made to hold down manufacturing rates, for example, which, at present, equate to around £60 million within the Executive's Budget. The continuation in 2015-16 of a range of benefits to small businesses equates to somewhere in the region of around about £20 million. That level of support has to be consistent across the board. It also belies the argument that was used by some that we should simply try to dig our way out of this problem by higher and higher rates rises. It should be noted that, for every additional percentage that we put on the regional rate at domestic or non-domestic level, for example, the combined total would be in and around £7 million. So, if we were to try to start to close some of the gaps in the changes, the level of increase that would need to be created in the regional rate would be exorbitant on our local businesses and households. Therefore we have got to think, and I think the Minister is providing solutions that are joined up.

There is no doubt that there are difficult and austere days ahead, and there is no doubt that, when the Minister comes back with the final Budget, he will have taken into account those changing financial circumstances through the Chancellor's announcement, for example, and some

of the agreements through Stormont House. However, despite the difficulties, I think we have a Budget that is looking to the future — a Budget that places reform and change at the heart of its agenda. As we progress in the next few years, that is what Northern Ireland needs.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and congratulations on your new role. I am here to speak on behalf of the Audit Committee. I want to set out our position on the provision in the draft Budget for the Northern Ireland Audit Office. I begin by reminding Members about the Audit Office's position. It is entirely independent of DFP, the Executive and their Ministers, and it serves the Assembly by providing us with an effective and truly independent audit assurance in relation to the use of public funds. In fact, last year alone, those Departments that followed its recommendations saved some £22 million.

Its independence means that it can ensure that the Executive and their Departments are held to account by the Assembly for their financial performance. Its independence means that it can, without fear or favour, examine the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which public funds have been used. Its independence also means that the Executive should neither control nor direct its access to resources.

The Committee, therefore, welcomes the recognition of its independence by the Finance Minister and the acknowledgement that it would be inappropriate for the Executive to seek to impose savings targets upon it. The Minister has pointed out, however, that many Departments, including his own, will have to make savings in the region of 11%. He has gone on to say that he would expect the Audit Office to seek out similar savings and efficiencies. That would mean the Audit Office saving up to £1.2 million in 2015-16.

Mr Speaker, the Audit Committee accepts that the Audit Office should continue, wherever possible, to build on the savings it has achieved over recent years, but, if we are going to be fair, we must acknowledge the extent of the savings that it has already achieved. Those savings are considerable, despite the fact that it has very little discretionary spend. In the last five years, the Audit Office has made efficiency savings of 14.5% in cash terms. That is almost 25% in real terms. We should not impose additional cuts on the Audit Office simply because it has been ahead of the game in making efficiencies.

Much more significant, however, would be the impact of further cuts. Given the statutory requirement for the office to carry out financial audit work, any such cuts would almost exclusively affect its value-for-money programme. A reduction of £1.2 million, as suggested by the Minister, would wipe out this work altogether. There is no conceivable reason for us to want to do this.

Let us just remind ourselves how important this work is and how much money is saved as a result of it. Let us recall the Audit Office's work on the management of substitute cover for teachers, which led to quantified financial savings of £10 million, or its work on the control of bovine TB, which led to quantified financial savings of £7 million. Then there is its work on the national fraud initiative. Since 2010, this initiative has identified outcomes of almost £30 million, £14.5 million of which relates to fraud and error in rates revenue, which, as the Minister knows, is

currently our only revenue-raising power and which is vital for us to maximise.

Last year alone, Departments acting, as I said at the beginning of my speech, on Audit Office recommendations saved the public purse £22.1 million. That sum would pay for an additional 1,500 nurses or 1,000 teachers per annum. If we were to cut the Audit Office's funding, we would limit our ability to make savings right across the public sector. We cannot afford to do this. Now more than ever, we need the Audit Office's expertise in identifying efficiencies.

There may be further savings achievable at the Audit Office, but, given the nature of its spend, these can only be achieved by a rationalisation of its management structures. This would require specific funding being made available as part of the wider public sector reform measures to be put in place. The Committee would, therefore, ask the Minister and his Department to work with the Audit Office on this issue.

The Audit Committee is committed to ensuring that the Audit Office has the resources it needs to support the Assembly in holding public bodies to account for their use of public money. This role is even more important in the current financial climate. The Audit Committee would not, therefore, agree to a reduction in the funding for the Audit Office, which would prevent it from carrying out this crucial role.

If I may, because I have a bit of time, I would like to touch on education. I know that we will have a debate tomorrow, but one of the major messages that we are getting on education from the schools themselves is that they will not be able to deliver the entitlement framework if the cuts go the way they are proposed and they will not be able to deliver the great education that we have at the moment. Many people have told me that it will do untold damage, not just to those who are at school at the moment, but to the whole of the next generation. The loss of teachers and others will mean that we could have a decade or two of damage to the skills that we start in our education system.

We, as a party, have called for a ring-fencing of the aggregate budgets to the schools themselves. I agree with the Chairperson of the Education Committee, who spoke earlier; we really do need to see all the information. We need total transparency and we need that detail so that we can look at the situation and come up with constructive suggestions as to how we do it.

When the Department came to the Committee, it became very clear that we are still planning on trying to do all the things that we are doing at the moment but with far less money. Such an approach seems to be completely daft. We need to look at what we do not need to do, what we can park and do later and what we can really work with. The absolute key to education is making sure that the schools can carry on educating to the best of their skills.

I also want to touch on the economy, very much in the same vein.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Kinahan: We have got corporation tax, so we are told, but we need the skills, and those skills start at school.

Mr Allister: I suppose it should be no great surprise that a Budget cobbled together at the last minute is such a deficient offering. I note that PwC had comments to make about the fact that this is a Budget that, as currently

constituted, probably does not balance. Of course, it made the same comment more recently about the overarching 2011-15 Budget, which, it said, did not really balance. So it seems that, even after those years, we are still back in the same territory. The matter is now compounded by the fact that this is a Budget that, I suspect, is now dated and has changed. We are told that, in consequence of the Stormont House Agreement, there is new money to be levered in. There are certainly opportunities, it seems, of new borrowings and new debts to be paid back. I suspect that this is a Budget that will be significantly, if not radically, altered by developments since it was published.

This would have been a far more fruitful and useful debate if the Minister, at the start of these proceedings, had taken a portion of his time to expound to the House the impact on the Budget of what has been agreed since the Budget itself was agreed in draft form. If that information had been laid before the House by the Minister at the start of the debate, this could have been a far more informed debate, because it is quite clear that there must and will be changes to it, but we deal with it as it is.

I will make some general observations. There seems to be a considerable disparity in the distribution of pain in this Budget. We have one of the most squandering Departments of all, that at the centre of government — OFMDFM — getting away very lightly indeed. We have bodies such as the SEUPB asked, it seems, for only a 4% efficiency cut. However, when we come to education, which is vital and a resource for the future, the cuts have all the appearance of being quite savage, and quite savage in a context of really failing to grasp a nettle in regard to the future.

This is an Executive —

Mr McElduff: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr McElduff: I welcome what the Member said about the education budget. I ask Mr Allister whether he would continue to approach positively the issue of more money for education, basically because of what we are hearing in our communities from principals, governors, classroom assistants, teachers and parents. I welcome the tone of Mr Allister's remarks in this matter.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Allister: I am quite clear, because the Department of Education sets out its aspirations in paragraph 5.15 of the draft Budget. When you measure those aspirations against how they will be impacted by the Minister's proposals, you discover just how aspirational they will be. It talks about "raising standards for all", but one of the consequences of the attack on the front-line delivery of education is fewer teachers. We will have a higher pupil:teacher ratio in our schools, so how are we going to raise standards for all in that context?

I do not think that this is schools crying wolf. Like other Members, I attended a briefing with between 40 and 50 principals from County Antrim last Thursday. The stories they were telling and the prospect they were painting were quite frightening. Far from this aspiration of raising standards, I think that we will see a diminution in standards.

We then have a promise and aspiration in the Budget about "closing the performance gap". I think that this

Budget will widen the performance gap, which is already skewed by the fact that there is not a fair distribution of funding across the education sector because of the overgenerous provision made if you have enough free schools meals in your school and the deficit to those schools that do not.

The draft Budget talks about "developing the education workforce". That has to be laughable, because the import of these cuts will be a reduction in the number of teachers in our schools.

5.45 pm

"Improving the learning environment" is one of the aspirations. This Budget will impoverish the learning environment for generations to come. Then, it talks about "transforming the governance". I wonder how many governors, who come with a civic responsibility, will, when faced with impossible cuts, simply say, "School governor board membership is not for me", and walk away from the contribution that they make in education because of the impossible demands. Yet, all the time, they look around and see the squander of this Executive on so many issues.

I said that the draft Budget is an attack on skills and the future. I was about to make the point that the Executive are besotted, to the point of being blinded, with the single goal of getting corporation tax transferred. They have lost the run of themselves so much that, at the weekend, the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister was proclaiming, Santa Claus-like, that there will be £3,000 extra in workers' pay packets. This Executive are so besotted with that, but what does the Budget do for the attraction of inward investment? It takes the skills that have to be in our workforce and slams cuts of momentous proportions on them through the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning. Those are the very people whom we need: they are the very people whom it is essential to train up, skill and equip in order to become the skilled workforce that will be the real attraction for inward investment. This is a Budget that savages that.

Along with what the Executive propose in education, that seems to me to be a double-whammy that will set the economy back very considerably. The reality needs to be much different.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Allister: If this Budget is truly interested in building the economic future, it needs to preserve rather than attack that which is essential to it.

Mr Agnew: It is hard to speak on a Budget that we know will be dramatically changed, but the debate is on the draft Budget that was proposed as opposed to what might change post the Stormont House Agreement.

What we have been presented with is a cuts Budget. People talk about the block grant, how limited our powers are and how much it is out of our control. The Executive that produced this Budget have made a choice: a ratio of cuts to revenue raising of 100% cuts to 0% revenue raising. Every party will say in every election campaign that it values and will protect public services and that it is the champion of health and education, but when tasked with finding the money for those services, the parties back away from that choice.

The rates cap remains in place; despite straitened times, we believe that those in million pound mansions should have their rates subsidised by those in modest homes. We refuse even to look at the rates system. Is it the right form of revenue raising? We have not even considered looking at a land value tax, which would be much more progressive and a much better way of ensuring that those with wealth contribute their fair share, which means contributing more, and that those on lower incomes can be protected and can access the public services that they need and deserve.

This is a cuts Budget when it comes to welfare. I welcome the top-up fund, for want of a better description. However, should welfare reform be implemented, that fund falls way short of the £250 million that needs to be provided to fill the gap. So, for parties who say, "We will not stand over welfare cuts", this draft Budget is an admission by them that they will, in fact, implement them. I stand to be corrected if that is changed in the final Budget proposals after the Stormont House Agreement, but, as things stand, this is a Budget that will cut welfare for some of the most vulnerable in Northern Ireland — those who need the support of their government most.

Where education is concerned, Mr Allister alluded to meeting schools in his constituency. I meet schools in my constituency, and I hear individual schools talking about losing five teachers. That is devastating to everything that we are trying to do in education to create a better workforce. I hate to bring things back to the economy, because education has value for our people, but the Executive have a stated Programme for Government commitment to increase and improve skills. We hear about corporation tax cuts, but you ask corporations what they want. The PwC report and a number of other reports have highlighted that, above corporation tax cuts, they want skilled workers. Yet, we are cutting our education budget. DEL, in particular, is seeing some of the severest cuts. I hope to come back to that if I have time.

I think that the most sinister cut in this Budget is that to Sure Start. That is absolutely the wrong way to go. Sure Start should and could be a universal service. At the minute, it is a targeted service. If we compare where we are with other places, we see that we spend more per head in Northern Ireland than our counterparts in England — so all the figures that I am given suggest. However, when it comes to Sure Start provision for the most vulnerable children and those who need it most — it is a targeted service in Northern Ireland — we spend £21 per head compared with £1,000 per head in England. Is it that our children need it less? Are children here in less dire straits than children in England? No.

Approximately one in four children in Northern Ireland is living in poverty. For all the great talk about improving employment to help families and children out of poverty, over 50% of those children have at least one parent who works. So, work does not pay. Indeed, until we introduce the living wage, work will continue not to pay for those on the lowest incomes. Of course, we must use the resources that we have better. That is why today I launched my private Member's Bill calling for a statutory duty to cooperate on the planning, commissioning and delivery of children's services. We must make sure that we genuinely take duplication out of our system and ensure that money goes to front-line services.

I would also criticise the Budget for continuing the Executive's record of forever chasing shiny new things. When we look at the choices that we make, we find that we must build a new road while our existing roads are crumbling. We must go after foreign direct investment at all costs while local businesses suffer. Indeed, we must promote big international tourist events and cut the lifeblood of the Northern Ireland events industry by scrapping the events fund. In the context of the whole Budget, the events fund is a small pool of money. It should be something that is there on an annual basis to grow a cultural sector in Northern Ireland that we can be proud of — indeed, that already exists — and that we can market to the world instead of chasing the next MTV awards or golfing event. They are great and send a great message to the world, but when our citizens produce something that we can be proud of —

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

Mr Agnew: — we should be marketing them. I hope to see great changes to this Budget and, indeed, to the attitudes that created it.

Mr Speaker: I call John McCallister. I am afraid, John, that you have an allocated time of two minutes.

Mr McCallister: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and congratulations to you. I will point out to the House that that means that 17 or 18 minutes of the time has been allocated to what might be described as "opposition parties". I will make few points in the brief chance that I have.

We have replaced our reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI) with RRI II, but this time, it will be the redundancy and retirement initiative. That is what we look as if we are going to do, and we are going to borrow huge sums of money with which to do it.

Right through the Stormont House Agreement, the theme of public-sector reform looms large. Ministers — right back to the time when the First Minister was Finance Minister and up to this Minister — have always talked about that, but the Executive have never been able to deliver it, and we now look set to borrow huge sums of money to do it. Other colleagues are now putting distance between themselves and the Stormont House Agreement. I have no idea what went on at Stormont House in the lead-up. I have no idea if the Secretary of State was serving far too much egg-nog or why people agreed to it and then suddenly do not think that they can agree to it or want more detail. That is not the way to deliver good governance for Northern Ireland; we will reap a whirlwind for that. If they are in the Executive, they should not be if they to be against what they agreed before Christmas. That needs to change. Mr Allister and Mr Agnew's points about corporation tax and cutting the life out of skills showed that that is the wrong way to go about it. The two are too closely linked.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much. I am sure that the Assembly is all the poorer for not having heard the rest of your contribution.

Before I call the Minister to respond, it is clear that the business on the Order Paper will not be disposed of by 6.00 pm. In accordance with Standing Order 10(3), I

will allow business to continue until 7.00 pm or until the business is completed.

Mr Hamilton: I am tempted to begin by saying that Mr McCallister made a better contribution in two minutes than most Members did in seven. Maybe there is a lesson for the Business Committee in future allocations of time.

Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment to the post of Speaker.

I welcome the opportunity to participate in today's debate on the Executive's proposals in respect of the 2015-16 draft Budget. I would like to express my appreciation to the Committee for Finance and Personnel for its efforts in drawing the main issues together in this important process. I am also grateful for the comments made by Members today on the Executive's proposals, and I will attempt to respond to as many of the points raised as possible. However, before I do that, I would like to make some comments on the strategic context underlying the development of the Executive's draft Budget proposals.

Members will be well aware of the financial environment confronting us in 2015-16 and, perhaps more importantly, the years thereafter. We are not simply facing a one-year budgetary problem. In developing a draft Budget, the Executive have had to grapple with a wide range of concerns, particularly on the resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) side. Those can only be addressed by taking very difficult decisions. In order to manage the pressures that we face, we must address fundamental questions about how we deliver public services in Northern Ireland and, indeed, what public services we should continue to deliver. I believe that addressing those fundamental issues will require the Executive to consider significant changes in the way things are done. I will say more about that shortly, but I first want to briefly explain how we constructed this draft Budget position.

The capital DEL side was relatively straightforward in that funding was allocated to the highest-priority projects after contractual and Executive commitments had been covered. Of course, it is now up to individual Ministers to determine what projects they fund within their Department's funding envelope. The overall outcome will see almost £1.2 billion allocated to projects in 2015-16.

The resource DEL position in 2015-16 is considerably more restrained. The starting position for allocating resources had to factor in a 1.6% real-terms reduction in funding from Her Majesty's Treasury. Added to that, there was a need to address a wide range of other commitments, such as repayment of the £100 million reserve claim in 2014-15; a number of unfunded Executive commitments, including the historical institutional abuse inquiry, local government reform, housing benefit rates rebate, Executive funds, etc; and a significant increase in pension scheme costs.

To cover those pressures and to provide the Executive with scope to prioritise funding to Departments, the Executive imposed a 15% baseline reduction on all Departments, excluding most of health. That realised funding of £872 million to cover central pressures and to provide funding for priority areas in Departments. Obviously, a key element of that prioritisation was the provision of an additional £200 million to alleviate pressures on the health service.

That prioritisation is why there is a wide variation in the departmental adjustments, ranging from an increase of 5.3% in the DETI budget to a reduction of 11.1% in DOE's.

6.00 pm

Potential changes to the draft Budget position will be influenced by a number of considerations. As Members will be well aware — indeed, many mentioned it — the Stormont House Agreement provides the Executive with a financial package of measures that will help place the public sector here on a sustainable footing for future years. The Executive parties have also, significantly, agreed a way forward on welfare reform. Although the agreement assists the Executive in addressing the pressures that they face, it does not mean that difficult decisions can be avoided. Rather, it is a deal that provides the building blocks for the reform and restructuring of our public services. To facilitate that public-sector restructuring and reform, the Executive set aside £100 million in the draft Budget to fund a voluntary exit scheme. The Stormont House Agreement has allowed an increase in that funding, and that will allow the scheme to cover adequately the wider public sector. Of course, reform of the public sector requires more than a voluntary exit scheme, and I have circulated a paper to the Executive to seek their support for a range of measures.

It was inevitable that requirements for the 2015-16 Budget will have changed since the publication of the draft Budget. We can see that, for example, with the developments in the Casement Park planning application, and I expect that the Executive will have some additional funding to allocate as a result of changes to budget assumptions, centrally and in individual Departments. Furthermore, the Chancellor's autumn statement provided the Executive with an additional £67 million of resource DEL and £7.1 million of capital DEL, of which £1.3 million relates to FTC funding. Those funds will be disbursed in the final Budget after other issues, such as the £114 million welfare penalty, are accounted for.

The ministerial bilaterals that I have conducted with other colleagues have proved a useful exercise for discussing Ministers' key issues and priorities and for seeking their views on funding and wider budgetary issues. Those discussions will help the Executive to refine their Budget priorities for 2015-16. Finally, consultation with the public, stakeholder groups and the Assembly, including today's debate, will help to shape the final Budget and the proposals that will be taken to the Executive, hopefully in the next number of days, and ultimately voted on by the House.

I now want to deal with issues that Members raised. The debate was so long and my time is so limited that I am certain that I will not get to them all. However, I will do my best to progress through most of the comments made by Members.

I begin by thanking the Chair, Mr McKay, for his contribution and for stewarding the Committee over the past number of weeks and months in the production of its work. He is right to identify that this is a tough year and that there are tougher times ahead. As some other Members mentioned, those issues are exacerbated by the fact that this is a one-year Budget, which makes it difficult to achieve everything that we want and need to achieve in the medium to long term. However, as Mr Weir said,

the 2015-16 Budget has to be the start of the reform and restructuring of our public sector that will get us on to an even keel as we move forward.

Like other Members, Mr McKay raised a specific issue about pensions and the £130-odd million that has been set aside for pension revaluation. I appreciate that there is not perhaps as much transparency on that issue as Members would like. Officials in my Department have continued to hallow that out with Treasury over the past number of weeks and months, and we will hopefully come to a firm position on what the liability will be for the various pension schemes in time for the final Budget.

The Chair also raised issues of revenue-raising and tax devolution. I will set those to one side just for a moment.

He was right to make the general criticism that many Committee Chairs and Members would make, and, in dealing with the difficulties that they face, we do not want Departments to salami-slice departmental budgets. Rather, we want them to become more strategic. I have said it before in the House that we continue to deliver many things through public services in Northern Ireland that have perhaps never achieved their objectives. Those have had to be re-evaluated critically by Departments, with the resources used elsewhere or in a different way.

The Chair also mentioned the need to focus more on preventative spending. Things such as preventative spending are perhaps seen as a bit of a luxury in the sort of Budget climate that we have in 2015-16 and beyond. As an Executive, we should continue to focus as much of our available resources as possible on it. That is why we developed a change fund of £30 million and set it aside in the draft Budget to be allocated in the final Budget. One of the criteria for that expenditure is that it should be spent on preventative measures and early interventions. I am glad to hear that the Chair welcomed that, or at least raised that point, because it underpins and underlines the need to have the change fund and allocations from it. He mentioned financial transactions capital, as did Mr Cree, and the need, to paraphrase, for a focus on how we can spend that particular type of capital money moving forward. As the Member and the House are well aware, we have had difficulty spending all of our FTC allocation in this financial year. Departments have come forward with a lot of schemes, but those have been very small in value and have not soaked up all the money that we have in FTC. This is one of the reasons why I proposed the establishment of an investment fund for Northern Ireland, which could take on considerable quantities of FTC not just in the next financial year but potentially in future years as well and allow that to lever in finance from elsewhere and outside Northern Ireland to invest in a range of different capital projects.

Mr McKay, in a party capacity, highlighted the fact that this is not a Sinn Féin Budget. I am glad that that is the case. I shudder to think of what one might actually look like. He talked about fiscal powers, revenue raising and tax devolution, as did his colleagues Michaela Boyle and Chris Hazzard.

During her comments, Michaela Boyle said that austerity is the price of economic governance from Westminster. I think that there would be a lot of agreement on both sides of the House that our spending power as an Executive has been severely diminished as a result of proactive

measures and steps taken by the current Conservative-led coalition Government in Westminster, to the extent that about 1.5% of our spending power, in real terms, has disappeared over the last four to five years, which is a considerable chunk to take out of our ability to spend as an Executive.

As Mr Hazzard pointed out, the Barnett formula and the various funding mechanisms do not take account of the fact that Northern Ireland has a particular set of circumstances, whether it is because we are coming out of the Troubles or the divisions in our society as a result of that. However, when Ms Boyle said that austerity is the price of economic governance from Westminster, it begs the question whether economic governance from Dublin would be any better. I seem to recall over the last number of years a much more severe package of austerity measures being implemented by the Dublin Government because of the difficulties they are in.

Members opposite continue to bang the drum for more fiscal devolution for Northern Ireland. Let me put on the record again, if it needs to be put on the record again, the fact that I am not opposed to more fiscal devolution. However, it has to be measured against the yardstick of whether it is affordable for the Executive and whether it produces defined economic and/or social benefits for Northern Ireland and its people. That is why we have pursued and secured the devolution of air passenger duty for long-haul flights, and why we have within our grasp the devolution of corporation tax and the ability to reduce the rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland.

Therefore, I think that I and my party have shown that there is a willingness to entertain, take forward and execute further fiscal devolution where it is right for the people of Northern Ireland. However, as we continue to examine other potential powers, we need to bear in mind the particular fact about affordability, and the fact that there is a near £10 billion fiscal deficit in Northern Ireland between what we raise and what we spend on an annual basis. I want to see that gap closed down, and it will take a long time to do it. I want to see Northern Ireland pay more of its own way, but we all have to be realistic that, in the short term, this is not a deficit that can be easily eradicated, no matter what measures or levers we pull.

Mr McKay: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: Yes, I will.

Mr McKay: I welcome some of the discussion that he has elaborated on in the transfer of powers. However, does the Minister agree that, in continuing the conversation about transferring more fiscal powers, we should look at establishing a proper baseline of information and statistics? He referred to the level of debt here. I feel that for too many years we have been too reliant on the Treasury and on others to put those figures forward. Should we take a leaf out of the Scottish book and try to ensure that we are 100% sure of the figures ourselves, rather than just swallowing whatever the Treasury says?

Mr Hamilton: This is a very inside baseball — to use the term — sort of discussion that the Member and I might be drawn into here. In the assessment used to estimate our fiscal deficit, and I accept it is an estimate, our net fiscal balance report, which is produced annually, is done on the basis of the same methodology as that used by Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland (GERS).

What is happening in Scotland is significant. If we were to take on all the powers, including fiscal devolution, being devolved to the Scottish Parliament after the Smith commission, the Northern Ireland Assembly would be accountable for 41.5% of its income. That excludes corporation tax, which would probably take that figure closer to, if not over, 50%. Our economy has not developed in the same way that Scotland's has. Scotland, as I have pointed out in this House before, is very much the UK average industrially and in its ability to live within its means and absorb some of the shocks that come with that degree of devolution. Northern Ireland, in my view, is simply not in that place. Seeking devolution of corporation tax, which is there and available to us, is enough for the Assembly to contend with at this time.

My party colleague Paul Girvan talked about the presentation of severe cuts by many Ministers as a negotiating tactic during the consultation, and, indeed, Trevor Clarke did the same from a DRD perspective. Of course, I would not be so indiscreet as to talk about Executive colleagues doing that, but there may be some merit in the point that Mr Girvan made. He also talked about, to use his terms, our "over-inflated" public sector. Down through the years there has been a consensus in this House that our public sector in Northern Ireland is much larger than we want it to be. It dominates our economy, accounting for roughly two thirds of our economic output. About 35% of our workforce is employed by the public sector. We have all wanted to see that reliance on and domination by the public sector diminished. That is why a package of various measures to restructure our economy has been agreed by the parties. It includes the voluntary exit scheme that has been mentioned by many Members, but also a recruitment and promotion freeze, which has already been instigated across many parts of the public sector. Our aim, as an Executive, is to reduce our public sector in Northern Ireland from roughly 215,000 individuals by about 10%. While that is quite significant and radical over a short period of time, it would still result in Northern Ireland having by far the biggest public sector of any of the regions of the UK.

Mr McCallister talked about borrowing to do that, as did Mr Nesbitt. I make the point that this borrowing will save us money on a recurrent basis. The investment of £700 million in a voluntary exit scheme will save the Executive around £0.5 billion, not just on a one-off basis, but on an annual and recurring basis. In that respect, it is an invest-to-save proposition. It is also — and this is to correct stuff that has been said, perhaps not today, but since the Stormont House Agreement — largely money that we would have borrowed anyway. We would have borrowed it for a different purpose — capital investment — but it is still, nonetheless, money that this Executive would have borrowed. There is additional borrowing power of around £350 million so that we can still invest in infrastructure, but it is that amount which is the additional borrowing, as opposed to the £700 million, which the Executive would have borrowed anyway.

Mr Joe Byrne —

Mr Agnew: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: Very briefly.

Mr Agnew: Is the Minister essentially saying that we have taken money that we would otherwise have invested in

infrastructure to invest in removing people from their jobs, albeit under the guise of voluntary redundancy?

Mr Hamilton: In essence, the Member is right. The Member should take a note of the time and date when I said that. To give a short history, the Executive have the ability to borrow up to £3 billion. The Executive have reached roughly £1.7 billion to £1.8 billion of that, not always for capital projects. Some of it was for the Presbyterian Mutual Society and, indeed, for a previous equal pay claim. Sometimes we have capitalised a current expenditure cost, and that is what we are doing. Thankfully, however, as a result of the Stormont House Agreement, we are investing that £700 million to save £0.5 billion of revenue expenditure on a recurring basis. It is very clear from listening to the discussion today that that is desperately needed, not just in the next year but, more to the point, in future years.

We will still have the ability to draw down borrowing of £350 million to continue to invest in infrastructure so that good infrastructure projects can be taken forward over that four-year period when we are using a significant proportion of our RRI borrowing for a voluntary exit scheme.

6.15 pm

Mr Byrne began by talking about the SDLP's opposition to the Budget. As I have said before, when you are in the luxurious position of being able to oppose it because your vote will not actually matter in the Executive in terms of the numbers, opposition is the easy option; it is the easy way out when you are faced with very difficult decisions and tough choices, as we were, in crafting a draft Budget. Following on from Mr Agnew's point about the voluntary exit scheme (VES), I noted that Mr Byrne condemned our public-sector restructuring plans, but the SDLP signed up to a very radical and ambitious five-party agreement before Christmas, on 19 December, to reduce our public sector in Northern Ireland by 10% over the next four years. I am not sure whether that has fully been communicated to the SDLP or whether it has changed its tune in the last number of weeks.

He made a legitimate point — we will have to be very careful of this as we take forward our voluntary exit scheme — about who leaves, what experience those individuals have, and what areas they are leaving from. Hopefully, the Executive will endorse the paper that I have put to them, which will establish a structure and process for the VES, and, as we get the nuts and bolts of the scheme in place, we will bear in mind those very points. We do not want to see particular key areas being hollowed out as key individuals leave them. That would put us in a difficult position.

Mr Cree is nothing if not consistent; he was critical of our budgetary process. He asked again where the reform of the Budget process paper was. Unfortunately, it is still stuck with the Executive, but perhaps as a result of some of the reforms coming from the Stormont House Agreement, we might be able to at least get that paper forward, and those opposed to it can reject it if they want. I am sure that the Member agrees that it is worth continuing to make an effort to try to ensure that reform of the budgetary process gets through. It is a common criticism that comes particularly from Committee Chairs, who talk about the limited time they have to deal with it. I have sympathy for Departments and Chairs, as they have

to very quickly deal with a draft Budget after it is agreed. They have to very quickly turn that into what it means for their Department, which limits further the time that Committees have to scrutinise it. There are issues around that. There are other parts of our Budget process that the Member and I, and, I am sure, many in the House, agree are in desperate need of reform.

He mentioned issues around the Northern Ireland investment fund. I hope that I addressed some of the substance of that when responding to Mr McKay. A steering group has been established, with several Departments represented, to take that forward. We are about to appoint consultants to take forward the various pieces of work, such as assessments of each individual strand as to where that fund may be spending its money. He also mentioned welfare penalties and asked whether we will get some of the money back. I hope that we will not incur a full £114 million penalty next year, but that will be very much dependent on the House and the passage of the various pieces of legislation through it and the other parts of the House that will give scrutiny to them. There is obviously an urgency and impetus for us to do that because the quicker we get them through, the less of a penalty we will incur and the more money we as an Executive will have to spend.

Anna Lo, speaking on behalf of the Committee for the Environment, swallowed hook, line and sinker the propaganda of the Environment Minister by talking in the House about 15·1% reductions to local government. The Environment Minister wrote to the presiding officers of the new councils not after the draft Budget was agreed but in advance of it being agreed. He outlined to the presiding officers in local government the reductions that his Department was facing at that stage, days in advance of when it was finally agreed. He told them that he was facing a 15% reduction, which is the reduction that every Department, with the exclusion of most of Health, took before other allocations were made. The Department of the Environment actually has an 11·1% reduction, so if there is the 15% reduction that Ms Lo talked being faced by local government, it is because of the prioritisation that is being laid out by the Minister of the Environment within his own budget.

Ms Lo asked why EU match funding had not been allocated. As was outlined in the draft Budget, it will be outlined at final Budget stage. She talked about an Arc21 bid and an FTC bid. That was a bid that was taken forward as a result of a proposal made by DOE and the Strategic Investment Board. Obviously, planning permission has not been received for that proposal. If the proposal for any reason does not go forward, we will have to use that money elsewhere in our Budget.

Michelle McIlveen, in her capacity as Education Committee Chair, concentrated, as you would expect, on education funding. I do not want to pre-empt a debate that will take place tomorrow on this very subject. I think that she is right to highlight issues around how the Minister has prioritised the allocation that he has got and whether as much as possible of that allocation is being focused and concentrated on what we would define as the front line. Maybe later I will come to the issue of what is and what is not front line. In this case, it is the schools. I do have some sympathy for the Minister about the difficult situation that he has. I think that there are savings and efficiencies

that could be made in the education budget, just as I think that there can be in any budget, but I appreciate that it is not just as easy, especially around headcount reductions in the education system. As Michelle pointed out in her contribution, the school timetable runs across two different financial years and it can be difficult sometimes to make those efficiencies, even if they are there to be made.

Maeve McLaughlin, in her capacity as Chair of the Health Committee raised several points. She asked about the oversight mechanism and what that would be. This is the oversight mechanism that was agreed at draft Budget to ensure that funding would go to, again, the front line. Again, I am satisfied that there is already improved control compared with last year in the NHS budget in Northern Ireland. The particulars of that oversight mechanism will, again, be elucidated on in the final Budget. She talked about ensuring that most of the money went to the front line, and I think that we would all agree that we want money spent on the front line, and we throw that view around. I think sometimes that that is an easy soundbite to make; it is harder to define. Ms McLaughlin was critical of the Health Department for not having a clear definition of what the front line in health was, but I think that sometimes it is difficult.

Whilst administrators are those who sometimes feel our wrath when we are giving off about performance in the NHS, we do need administration and management to ensure that resources are best used and best utilised. I agree with Ms McLaughlin that tough decisions are required in the health service, whether that is around individual decisions on services or on the broader concept of Transforming Your Care (TYC). However, when the Health Minister comes forward with tough decisions, be it on TYC or on some of the decisions taken by the trust, those who are in the front line are very often Ms McLaughlin and her party colleagues and, indeed, others who criticise the Minister for seeking to take tough decisions.

Speaking of which, Mr McKinney, who is not here, made a similar contribution around health. He argued that not enough money was being put into health. I, of course, would argue that significant increases have been put into health over the last number of years. Indeed, this draft Budget represents £200 million more of an allocation for the health budget. Over the last number of years, there has been funding for TYC, contrary to what was said. Indeed, close to half a billion pounds in savings have been made over the last four years by this Health Minister and his predecessor.

Mr McKinney gets up and argues for more money for health, saying that what has already been allocated is not enough, but, of course, makes no indication at all as to where that money should come from. Similar to the point that I made about Ms McLaughlin, whilst I agree with what he said today about TYC presenting an opportunity to transform the service and to make significant savings, which can be reinvested into services, again, my recollection, particularly when TYC was launched by Mr Poots when he was in post, is that there was little or no support from the SDLP for it. Indeed, I recall the previous spokesman on health from the SDLP, when he was in post, continuously assaulting the TYC document, yet now it is held forward by Mr McKinney as something that the Minister should proceed with. There does seem to be some contradiction in the SDLP's position.

Robin Swann spoke in his capacity as Chair of the Employment and Learning Committee. He pointed out how, I think within days of the draft Budget being published, the two vice chancellors from the University of Ulster and Queen's University were in the media talking about how the reductions would mean 1,100 fewer university places in Northern Ireland. Of course, that presumed that the entirety of the proposed Department for Employment and Learning reduction, which is 10·8%, would be applied to university places. It made a presumption, and it goes back to Mr Girvan's point about some cuts being put up as scares to try to adjust budget allocations between draft and final Budget.

I did have a very useful meeting with Minister Farry — probably one of the most useful that I had in my series of bilaterals — in which he said that his Department had already identified over £30 million worth of savings, which somewhat justifies having some reductions within that Department. I commend him for his positive approach to the issue. Rather than saying that all of his budget needs to be filled in, he has made an effort to make savings where they can be made.

I have said before, and I repeat, that the Department for Employment and Learning settlement in the draft Budget is the one that I am least satisfied with. I would not say that there are not savings that can be made, as I have already pointed out. I do not think that DEL bid particularly well before the draft Budget. I think there was an argument for many bids to come forward in a joint way between DETI and DEL because of that connection between job creation and the need for appropriate skills. That might be corrected by a diminution in the number of Government Departments. I can say that, because of my personal lack of satisfaction with the settlement that that Department has, it is something that I will seek to rectify at least in part through further allocations in the final Budget.

Mr Swann: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: Yes, I will.

Mr Swann: To clarify, Minister, one of the things that I also raised was that the last time you spoke in regard to the Budget you suggested that there may be Barnett consequential outcomes for the Department for Employment and Learning. Do you think that is still a possibility?

Mr Hamilton: I was going to say that there are no specific Barnett consequentials for higher or further education. I cannot remember. The bulk of them came as a result of significant allocations at a national level for health. Those Barnett consequentials coming from the autumn statement will have to be considered, and there will be other elements of money that become available between draft and final Budget. That will obviously have to be counterbalanced against, for example, the £114 million worth of welfare reform penalties. Out of that we will see exactly how much we have to play with at final Budget.

I do not think that I can put it any more strongly than to say that I have sympathy for the case that has been made and I am least satisfied with that settlement compared to any other. I would not guarantee that all of the pressures will evaporate, but, particularly because of the need to prepare for corporation tax and to continue to provide that pipeline of skills for employers in Northern Ireland, we will do our

very best to ensure that as much of the reductions are ameliorated as possibly can be.

I know that time is running out and, as predicted, I am not going to get anywhere near all of them, but I will try to cover as many as I can in the last few minutes. Mr William Irwin spoke in his capacity as Chair of the Agriculture Committee. I am sure that he, and, indeed, the Minister of Agriculture, would agree that, in these circumstances of cuts overall, it is a reasonable settlement for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, with reductions of 5·2%. I appreciate that there are some pressures, for example, around Going for Growth, and I will certainly look at those and many others at final Budget.

Mr Irwin made a very good point about how the Department had come forward with a proposal for drawing down more money from an EU veterinary programme. He asked, as the Committee had asked, why that had not been the case in previous years. I think it is a very interesting general point. Departments are now starting to save money. They are doing things differently and are making efficiencies, many of which should have been obvious and should have been done before.

If there is one benefit — I use that word advisedly — of the difficult situation that we are in, it is that it is forcing Departments to think creatively about drawing down funding, how that funding might be spent and where it might be spent. So, out of necessity, some invention is coming from Departments. Mr Irwin's point is a very good one.

6.30 pm

Alastair Ross, as Chair of the Justice Committee, raised issues about the policing budget. My problem with the Department of Justice budget has been that other pressures, particularly those for legal aid, are placing undue pressure on the PSNI element of that budget. There is a lot of work for the Minister of Justice to do to reduce our legal aid bill. He has my support in doing that, and I hope that he will also be able to have Executive support to do that. I have met the Chief Constable about the budgetary pressures that he has faced, and we particularly discussed the opportunity for better transparency for my Department on what is being spent within his budget.

Mike Nesbitt, as Chair of the OFMDFM Committee, welcomed the £3 million allocation to the Victims and Survivors Service and the £5 million allocation to the historical institutional abuse inquiry. He raised other issues that are consistent with what has been included in the Ulster Unionist Party's submission on the draft Budget. I have not had time to examine every aspect of the submission. I will do that in due course, but I have to say that I did not have to go too far to find a factual error; it has set out the asset management unit as having a target of £50 million. The target is not £50 million; it is £158 million. So I will be careful as I read the rest of the party's submission.

Danny Kinahan spoke in his capacity as Chair of the Audit Committee, which scrutinises the work of the Audit Office. I accept that it is not a huge budget. No reduction was made for the Audit Office's budget or, indeed, the Northern Ireland Assembly budget or the ombudsman's budget in the draft Budget. I thought that that was important because of various conventions that existed in the past.

No reduction was made despite significant pressure from other parties that we should have done that in the draft Budget. I resisted that, but what we did say was that we informed — we did so in writing to the Audit Office, the Assembly and the ombudsman — that, given the very severe constraints that Departments and services being delivered to our general public were facing over the next year and in future years, we would expect those smaller bodies to come forward with suggestions for savings. The fact that none has come forward — sorry, I cannot recall clearly whether the ombudsman's office has or not, but I know that the Assembly and the Audit Office have not come forward with any savings at all — is not in keeping with where we are and what those bodies should be reflecting on as we face very difficult times in the next financial year. In my view, that is not an acceptable position for either of those bodies to adopt, and I will also address that issue at the final Budget stage.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: No, my time is running out.

Finally, I will address some comments by Mr Allister. Again, taking note of the date and time, he is not wrong; there will be significant changes between draft and final Budget for a whole host of reasons, not least because of the Stormont House Agreement, which will produce beneficial changes. The Member, however, would not welcome those beneficial changes because of the political position that he adopts to any good news that emanates from the Executive. Mr Allister made the point that perhaps it would have been more useful if I had outlined those changes at the start of the debate. This debate is not my debate. It is a debate on the draft Budget; it is not a debate on the final Budget. The House will have a significant opportunity during later Budget debates, probably in February, to scrutinise those changes much further.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: Very quickly.

Mr Allister: The Minister had the option of coming to the House and making a statement on the alleged outcome of the Stormont House Agreement, which could have informed this debate. So he had that opportunity to lay things out before the debate.

Mr Hamilton: The Member, and indeed the whole House, will see the outworkings of the Stormont House Agreement, particularly how it positively affects our Budget, in the next number of days and weeks. You will have ample opportunity to debate and discuss it in the month ahead.

Mr Speaker, in closing, I thank Members for participating in what was a useful debate. I have tried to respond to as many of the useful and constructive issues that were raised by Members as possible. I accept and appreciate that I have not been able to reply to everybody.

The response of the Assembly to the draft Budget proposals will be an important input into the Executive's decision on the revised and final Budget. The take-note debate today has provided plenty of material for my ministerial colleagues and me to consider. I also look forward to hearing in more detail the views of the various Committees, including, of course, the Committee for Finance and Personnel. However, I caution, as I have done many times before, that all requests for more

funding should be accompanied with details of where that additional funding is to be found.

Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the Committee for Finance and Personnel for initiating the debate and the Members who have taken part.

Mr D Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ar an chéad dul síos, ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas a dhéanamh leat féin as do cheapachán mar Cheann Comhairle. First, Mr Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your election as Speaker. Chomh maith leis sin, ba mhaith liom an deis seo a ghlacadh le buíochas a ghabháil le chuide dhuine a ghlac páirt sa díospóireacht inniu ar an rún tábhachtach seo ón Choiste Airgeadais agus Pearsanra. I would also like to thank all those who took part in the debate on the Committee's motion. Rather than giving a blow-by-blow rehearsal of everything that was said by individual Members, I intend to try to draw out some of the themes and points that came out of the debate.

The Committee Chairperson pointed out, in his opening remarks, that the conclusions and recommendations in the Committee's coordinated report could be grouped under two broad themes. First, there is a need for greater transparency and more information on budgetary decisions. Secondly, specific measures need to be taken to provide assurance going forward. I think that many of the issues raised in the subsequent contributions from representatives of the other Committees and by individual Members could easily fall under these themes.

We have heard calls for improvements to budgetary information. This includes the rationale behind decisions to make or not make allocations to particular services or departmental functions and the impact of such decisions, including what specific safeguards will be put in place to prevent priority front-line services being affected. Indeed, some Members made the point that it was important that we have a definition of what front-line services actually are as they seem to vary from Department to Department. Other Members mentioned the importance of certain front-line services being protected and the danger of relegating the funding of such services to monitoring rounds. Concerns were also raised about the lack of proper and meaningful engagement with Committees, primarily as a result of a shorter consultation period and in the absence of detailed spending plans.

The Minister, when launching the draft Budget, defended the shorter eight-week consultation period by referring to the process in Westminster, where he explained the position for MPs. He said:

"the Chancellor introduces his Budget on one day, the next day the Finance Bill comes before them, and by the end of the next week it is law." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 99, p16, col 1].

However, this devolved Assembly, like the Scottish Parliament, for example, has different processes, which reflect local conditions. While acknowledging the rather exceptional circumstances surrounding the draft Budget 2015-16, the Committee nonetheless pointed to the Sedley, or Gunning, principles on fair consultation, which have been applied in local case law, and highlighted how

the time afforded for consultation and scrutiny falls far short of international good practice.

If the Executive and we as an Assembly are to make the right choices for the people who elect us, the timely provision of reliable information is also critical. That will need to be underpinned by a robust process that provides transparency and sufficient opportunities for scrutiny. The need for the timely provision of reliable information will become all the more important over the coming years.

In his opening comments, the Chairperson highlighted the Committee's recommendation on the need for an informed debate on all the options for raising revenue, including additional fiscal powers. More widely, the draft Budget has been subject to a level of criticism for not offsetting reductions in public services by introducing mechanisms to increase revenue. Not only would that debate engage the electorate in the difficult choices faced by the Assembly but it could be the catalyst for healthy debate on the areas that should be further prioritised or protected in future Budgets. Whilst I am in no doubt that we will have differing views on the measures that should be taken, that would present an opportunity for us to take stock of wider public views and opinions.

As we all heard last week, legislation is being brought forward at Westminster that will see the unprecedented move to devolve corporation tax, a tool that can assist us in our efforts to grow the economy. Relating back to the transparency theme that I mentioned, the Committee has expressed concerns that there has been no apparent agreement yet from the UK Government on some aspects of how the costs to the Executive of reducing the rate of corporation tax will be calculated, including whether the interpretation of the term "full fiscal consequences" includes any resulting additional income tax and reduced welfare payments. Reliable and timely information will be vital in enabling the Assembly to monitor projected tax receipts and scrutinise arrangements for managing volatility.

I think it is safe to say that many agree that devolving corporation tax will provide exciting opportunities for existing businesses to invest and grow and for attracting new foreign direct investment to the region. That said, we must not lose sight of the other key economic levers, including the necessary infrastructure and the supply of an appropriately educated and skilled workforce. Various Members, including the Minister, picked up on those issues. The Committee has called on the Executive, in finalising the Budget, to give priority to addressing the risk to university and FE places. I acknowledge that the Minister gave an undertaking today that he will do all within his powers to remedy that particular weakness in the Budget. Indeed, it could be argued that that is a key weakness in the draft Budget and that it stems from the lack of transparency on such things as the rationale for not making the necessary budgetary provision and the reasons why that risk was not identified and addressed at an earlier stage.

For too many years, we have heard the same issues highlighted in debates about the weaknesses in our budgetary system and processes. The time has come for those to be finally addressed, especially given the scale of the financial challenges that lie ahead of us. As the Chairperson highlighted, an important first step would be to agree the memorandum of understanding on the Budget process.

6.45 pm

That will help to ensure that the Assembly and its Committees can exercise their advisory and scrutiny functions effectively in relation to departmental budgets and expenditure.

There has never been a more important time for strong oversight by Assembly Statutory Committees. They need to be facilitated in ensuring that the Executive's strategic priorities are delivered effectively and efficiently and in assisting in identifying problems early enough to allow for corrective action. At a strategic level, more effective Assembly input to and scrutiny of the Executive's Budget and expenditure will help to further demonstrate that devolution is making a difference in delivering accountable, responsible and efficient governance in Northern Ireland. I therefore urge the Minister to take account of the contributions made during the debate on this point and to finalise the memorandum of understanding for approval by the Executive and the Assembly.

Also, in strengthening the existing oversight arrangements, we have heard that the Committee sees the need for the Executive to put in place a "panel of experts' or commission" to provide it with an independent critique of planned savings and efficiencies in the ongoing implementation. Rather than supplanting the role of Assembly Committees and other scrutineers, this body would address a key gap in the financial oversight and control arrangements. It could work across Departments, as well as within them; it could compensate for the fact that, since devolution — as the Department itself acknowledges — DFP's role has changed from:

"one of challenge to one of pure co-ordination"

and it could provide added assurance and serve to boost public confidence in the Executive's Budget plans and decisions going forward.

Developments subsequent to the publication of the draft Budget further highlight the need for such added assurance, not least some of the financial outworkings of the Stormont House Agreement, including a voluntary exit scheme that is unprecedented in its nature and scale, and, as yet, we have not seen the detail of that.

Clearly, in facing the difficult challenges ahead, there will be the inevitable resistance to change. As well as quoting Nelson Mandela when launching the draft Budget in November, the Minister reminded us of the words of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in his 1962 State of the Union address, when he reflected on difficult choices. In this regard, and in the actions being recommended by the Committee, some further words of President Kennedy's are apt, namely his observation:

"There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than the long range risks of comfortable inaction."

As I draw my remarks to a close, let me say that the draft Budget covers just one financial year, but now, more than ever, we need to put the necessary arrangements in place for future Budgets. The vital role that the Assembly will need to play over the coming years will be our test to demonstrate to those who elected us that devolution is working effectively and efficiently.

Before I close, I note that the Minister, during his comprehensive response to today's debate, omitted to

respond to the various specific recommendations outlined in the Committee's report on the draft Budget. I take this opportunity to request that the Minister respond in writing to the coordinated report in due course.

Ag an phointe seo, a Cheann Comhairle, tá mo sháith ráite agam, agus gabhaim buíochas leatsa agus leis na Comhaltaí uilig. On that note, Mr Speaker, I thank you and all those who contributed to today's debate. Molaim an tuairisc. I recommend the Committee's report to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly takes note of the draft Budget 2015-16 announced on Monday 3 November 2014 by the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Adjourned at 6.50 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 13 January 2015

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Post-primary Education: Fermanagh

Mr Speaker: I inform Members that I have received a valid petition to refer a ministerial decision to the Executive Committee under section 28B of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The petition relates to the decision by the Minister of Education to approve changes to post-primary education in Fermanagh, discontinuing the Collegiate Grammar School and Portora Royal School, as announced to the Assembly on 28 November 2014. In accordance with the Act and Standing Order 29, I have consulted with the political parties whose members hold seats in the Assembly. Having consulted the parties and given the matter full consideration, I have certified that the Minister's decision does not relate to a matter of public importance. I will not, therefore, refer the decision to the Executive Committee for consideration.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make the following statement on the seventeenth North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting in the health and food safety sectoral format, which was held in the NSMC joint secretariat offices in Armagh on Wednesday 12 November 2014. Minister O'Neill MLA and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at that meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Leo Varadkar TD, Minister for Health, and Dr James Reilly TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. Minister Varadkar chaired the meeting. This statement has been agreed with Minister O'Neill, and I am making it on behalf of both of us.

The Council noted that considerable EU funding opportunities are available in the health sector, and we have encouraged our respective officials to continue to identify joint projects that can attract European funding. We welcomed the collaboration that is taking place to draw down funding, in particular the Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT) project, which is delivering cross-border health services to improve patient care.

Ministers noted the progress on the alcohol-related harm prevention strategies in both jurisdictions. That included the work of the North/South alcohol policy advisory group and the establishment of a North/South hidden harm group, facilitated by Cooperation and Working Together.

The Council noted the ongoing work on minimum alcohol unit pricing. We discussed the jointly commissioned University of Sheffield study on the potential impact of minimum unit pricing in both jurisdictions. Minister Varadkar and I are committed to working towards the introduction of minimum unit pricing at the same time. That commitment from the Minister in the Republic that we will work together on this issue was a very welcome outcome of the meeting. We can all understand why that is important because if Northern Ireland was to go down the road of minimum unit pricing on its own and the Irish Republic did not, that would obviously lead to many smuggling opportunities.

The Council was informed that the tobacco products directive came into force in May 2014, following European Union member states' final approval. Ministers noted the ongoing work under the EU action plan on childhood obesity. Ministers welcomed the progress on the development of the two new suicide prevention strategies.

We also welcomed the commitment to share knowledge arising from media and public information campaigns on mental health.

It is unfortunate that the Chair of the Health Committee is unable to be with us this morning because I am sure that she would be very interested in the next section of my contribution, which deals with Altnagelvin Hospital. The Council noted that a memorandum of understanding and a service level agreement for the operation of the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin had been signed, that works had commenced at the site and that the project remained on target for completion with an operational date of autumn 2016. I am sure that everyone in the House will welcome the considerable progress that is being made in that much-needed and much-welcomed project. Ministers welcomed the continued progress of the Ireland-Northern Ireland-National Cancer Institute cancer consortium and the proposals for sharing information to support the work streams of the consortium.

The Council noted the report from the latest meeting of the tri-jurisdictional steering group for the US-Ireland R&D Partnership which took place on 29 September 2014. We noted that the meeting included discussion on the various application success rates in the different research priority areas, opportunities for promoting partnerships to increase visibility, particularly in the USA, and new funding mechanisms, including centre-to-centre cooperation.

Ministers also welcomed the update on the ongoing work of the All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care, including the recent launch of the children and young people's website.

The Council recalled the discussion at the NSMC plenary in Dublin on 3 October. Ministers noted that the child protection work programme continues to be progressed and that updates will be reported at future meetings. We also noted that a North/South child care in practice conference on authoritative early intervention was held on 22 October 2014 in Dundalk.

The Council noted a progress report provided by the recently appointed chief executive of safefood, Ray Dolan. Ministers were briefed on the continued development of the awareness campaign targeting childhood obesity and overweight. We also noted the success and development of the community food initiatives and a range of research projects and surveys completed in recent months.

The Council was advised that safefood had established a draft 2015 business plan and budget. These will be submitted to NSMC for approval once they have been approved by the sponsoring Departments and Finance Ministers. The Council noted that safefood has prepared its annual report and accounts for 2013, which have been certified by the Comptrollers and Auditors General. Once the annual report has been approved by both sponsor Departments, it will be laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Ministers noted the position with regard to Tourism Ireland's annual report and accounts 2013, which have been laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and will be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas. Finally, we agreed that the next NSMC health and public safety meeting will be held in spring 2015.

I should say to Members that I had formally invited Minister Varadkar to Londonderry to visit the new radiotherapy unit, which his Department is partially funding. I am glad to say that the revenue from the Republic continues to flow for that scheme and that there has been good cooperation on the funding of it. I understand that the visit will take place in May. At that time, I will also be keen that he visit the new South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen, where a significant number of patients from the Irish Republic are having various procedures.

I thought that it was a very good, positive meeting. I have had various contacts with the Minister since, and I think that we can establish a very good, cooperative relationship on issues of mutual concern.

Ms P Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank the Minister for his statement. It may have been brief but it was certainly packed with lots of positive information.

I wish to turn the Minister's attention back to the minimum unit pricing of alcohol. The Committee for Social Development has discussed the issue. As someone who worked in the health service and saw at first hand the effects that alcohol has on our hospital services, I ask how realistic it is that we work towards the introduction of minimum unit pricing at the same time as the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Wells: I was greatly heartened by Minister Varadkar's view on the matter. I also met the Health Ministers for Wales and Scotland, and we are all singing off the same hymn sheet.

I welcome comments from the parties in the Assembly on their views on minimum unit pricing. We announced it just before Christmas and have not had an opportunity to consult. It is important that we work together as an Assembly on that vital issue.

I got the clear impression from my counterpart in the Irish Republic that he is as committed to its introduction as I am. He can see clearly the logic of us working together. If we did not, and we were to introduce, say, a minimum price of 50p a unit in Northern Ireland, and the Irish Republic refused to do that or was a long way behind us, it is obvious what would happen. There would be the mass importation of cheaper alcohol from the Republic into Northern Ireland.

The island of Ireland has history when it comes to this issue. There has been a long tradition of alcohol moving from one side of the border to the other, depending on price. Therefore, because we are dealing with two currencies, it is vital that we work together. As such, we are going to have to pitch our minimum price at a level that means that people buying alcohol in the supermarket are paying basically the same, North or South.

My clear view from the meeting was that exactly the same problems that we have, and the £900 million that they are costing us, are evident in the Republic. It also accepts the University of Sheffield study. I think therefore that we are moving forward in tandem, and I really do welcome that cooperation.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire ar maidin. I welcome the Minister's statement. I agree that it is packed with a lot of issues.

The Minister said that there has been development with suicide prevention strategies. Suicide is a scourge on Irish society across the island, so to see progress is welcome. Can the Minister elaborate on that progress and is there a timeline for the strategies?

Mr Wells: As the Member knows, the issue has come up frequently at sectoral meetings. Indeed, there have been joint events between the two jurisdictions. We are hoping that our suicide prevention strategy will go out to consultation in early 2015, so that is only a few weeks away. I have not got a date from my colleagues in the Irish Republic, but there will be a read-across in the two strategies as to the most efficient way of dealing with the issue.

We have huge experience of dealing with this desperately difficult problem. Remember that, in 2013, we lost 303 lives to suicide in Northern Ireland. It is a growing and very difficult problem. Therefore, we will have to learn from each other. I suspect that the issue will be on the agenda for future sectoral meetings, and I want to work closely with our colleagues in the Irish Republic.

In Northern Ireland, however, different issues from those in the Irish Republic are causing the worrying trend. For instance, the Irish Republic does not have the legacy of the Troubles that we have or the sectarian interfaces. Therefore, it is important that we have our own distinct strategies but that they complement each other rather than conflict.

What slightly worries me about this statement is that, on every issue that we brought up, there seemed to be unanimity and agreement on the ways forward. There were no differences or difficulties expressed whatsoever. Again, they are very keen to let us have access to their research and study, and we are equally keen to make our research available to the authorities in the Republic in this instance.

10.45 am

Mr McKinney: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I congratulate you on your election.

I warmly welcome the Minister's positive comments in relation to the working relationship with the Minister in the Republic, Leo Varadkar, which I hope continues. The SDLP has always taken the view that North/South makes sense, so, as you can imagine, we are doubly excited when we hear talk of joint projects and considerable EU funding. Perhaps the Minister will take the opportunity to expand on the range of those projects available and the extent to which further funding might become available.

Mr Wells: The honourable Member, from his huge experiences, will know that, for health, EU funding is not the pot of gold that it is perhaps for other Departments. If only we could access additional funding from Europe to cover pressures on A&E and domiciliary care etc but we cannot. Therefore, we are really tied to INTERREG V and Horizon 2020.

In Northern Ireland, we have three health-care intervention networks established in cancer, public health and through the Northern Ireland Clinical Research Network, which cover 11 areas of health and social care. Within that existing portfolio, there are interventional trials running in Northern Ireland, of which 30% are commercial.

The overall goal of INTERREG V is to extend to those networks in Northern Ireland and build corresponding

linked infrastructure of that kind in the Republic of Ireland. That is important, but it is on a very small scale in the overall scheme of things. We have a £5 billion budget and, in the Republic, the budget is something like €9 billion. Therefore, whilst it is important in areas of mutual concern to encourage joint provision and cooperation, it does not come anywhere near what we need to fund our own health service, for which we are short by about £70 million this year. Therefore, I welcome it and think it has potential, but it will not, in my opinion, provide a significant input to our future funding in the hundreds of millions that we require.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his statement. It is proposed that the Food Standards Agency will have its budget reduced from £8.5 million to £7.4 million. Given that food hygiene official controls constitute over 60% of the entire FSA budget, how is the Minister sure that such a reduction will not impact on food safety standards, especially with regard to clamping down on the blight of cross-border smuggling and illegal slaughtering?

Mr Wells: I have had representations from the Food Standards Agency on that particular issue and I can understand its concerns about the reduction in funding. A very high proportion of its expenditure is on fees for vets to inspect meat plants. I am pleased to say that that work is generally showing that our standards are extremely high in Northern Ireland and, indeed, in the Irish Republic. Some of what is being undertaken at the moment is very routine and is not producing much in the way of new information.

The agency has asked us to have another look at the reduction in funding, and I have agreed to do that. It is like so many other issues in my budget and in the Northern Ireland block grant generally: we have to find savings somewhere. There is only a small area that we can target for budget reduction, and this is one of those bodies that is not seen as being front line. Therefore, we have asked all such groups to come up with options for a 5%, 10% and 15% reduction in funding. When all those come back, I will look very carefully at them and see what the impact will be.

I suspect that, with the FSA, we could reduce to some extent the amount of red tape and bureaucracy at meat plants to reduce the costs involved. Well done to the quality assurance scheme and our farmers for producing food to the highest standard. That is showing in the abattoirs, where it is quite unusual to find issues of concern, which means that all the tests that are being carried out are not producing much.

A range of different agencies have responsibility for food safety.

I would be surprised if it were not possible to continue to ensure, on a cross-border basis, the highest possible standards within a reduced budget, though it may not be as reduced as the early indications suggest.

Mr McCarthy: Mr Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on being elected Speaker and wish you every success in the future. I also take this opportunity to welcome our Health Minister back. He was lying very low over the last fortnight, so I am delighted to see that he is around and fighting well.

The report that we have has this morning is very comprehensive. It covers many important issues and the progress on them. I am delighted to hear and see the Minister's enthusiasm to see Ireland united on the

introduction of minimum unit pricing at the same time. As the Minister has said himself, most of what is contained in the statement is about everybody cooperating very well to the benefit of all our people on the island.

Childhood obesity is very important and something that we all know is going to have to be tackled in the future. Can the Minister advise if there is any possibility, under the EU action plan on childhood obesity, for funding to be directed to ensure that our young people, particularly our schoolchildren, continue to get the education that is needed and the wholesome food that has been provided but that is under threat because of serious budget constraints in Northern Ireland? Is there any chance that the Minister could chase that up to ensure that youngsters at our schools continue to get good wholesome food, fruit etc?

Mr Wells: First of all, I am glad that the honourable Member for Strangford missed me over Christmas. I cannot win. If I am constantly on the airwaves, he complains that he is fed up hearing my voice. Then, when I give him a bit of relief, he says that he has missed me greatly. However, I suspect that he will be pretty annoyed about the number of times that he will hear me in 2015.

As he knows, the overarching goal of the action plan on childhood obesity is to contribute to halting the rise in the number of overweight and obese children and young people, 0-18 years. We want to achieve that by 2020. To achieve this goal, the action plan specifies a set of operational objectives that have been designed to guide the actions of stakeholders across eight priority areas. Actions undertaken in these areas in Northern Ireland include supporting a healthy start to life and promoting healthier environments, especially in schools and preschools.

The former Minister wrote to the Secretary of State for Health at Westminster in support of a 9.00 pm watershed ban on the advertising of certain foods. However, this issue remains a reserved matter. Again, there might be a role for cooperation here between the two jurisdictions. I understand that some Members and some members of the public in Northern Ireland watch an overseas — sorry, another — TV station known as RTÉ. If RTÉ continues to advertise foods before the 9.00 pm watershed, it really would not make much sense for us to put a ban on that. However, that is not an issue that we, as an Assembly, can deal with.

Remember, of course, that this is much more than just a Department of Health issue. The Public Health Agency (PHA) jointly funds an active school travel programme for 180 schools. DCAL and Sport Northern Ireland continue to invest in the Active Communities programme, in which approximately 106,000 people participated approximately 1 million times in 2013-14.

He is absolutely right: if we do not solve this problem of childhood obesity, it will lead to a long-term rise in type 2 diabetes and other conditions that could swamp the health service in 20 or 30 years' time. Whilst we have concentrated today on many of the tangible issues such as the radiology centre in Altnagelvin and minimum unit prices, there is no doubt that this is one of the priorities that we have to tackle in the coming few years.

Mrs Cameron: Mr Speaker, I, too, welcome you to your new role, especially as a South Antrim constituency colleague. I welcome the Minister's statement and, indeed, the good working relationship that the two Governments are continuing, to the benefit of us all. On the back of my

colleague's initial question, can the Minister give us some more detail about the impact that alcohol has on hospital services?

Mr Wells: I am very keen to start a public debate on alcohol abuse in Northern Ireland. We know, for instance, that it costs the health service in Northern Ireland £240 million a year. If I had had that £240 million, my first three months in office would have been so much easier because we would not have had to have any contingency plans and cause the pain that occurred in various communities. We would have been able to roll out new and additional services. We would not have had, for instance, the 130 deaths that occurred in Northern Ireland as a result of alcohol abuse.

There are so many indicators that this is the right thing to do: alcohol is 60% cheaper than it was 30 years ago; we treat 3,100 individuals in hospitals as a result of alcohol abuse; and, at midnight on a Saturday or Sunday, the vast majority of those who report to A&E are under the influence of alcohol or are there because of alcohol. I am very keen that all the parties and all the elected representatives in the Chamber let me know what they feel about the concept of minimum unit pricing, because there is not much sense in all of us working hard on the issue to find that some parties have such huge difficulties with it that it gets no further.

We have found that 31% of our population are binge drinkers: 35% of males and 27% of females. This is a big problem, particularly when you remember that 27% of the population, including me, never touch it. Therefore, that indicates that the prevalence amongst the rest of the community is extremely high.

We will all be put under enormous pressure on this issue by the large drink companies. Be very aware that companies with a bigger budget than the Northern Ireland Executive will lobby you — be ready for that. It is important that, before that starts, we hear the initial views of all MLAs. If you have problems with it, let me know, because I am very keen to have that discussion. We have a hiatus caused by the fact that big distillers in Scotland have referred the Scottish Executive's decision to the European Court of Justice, and there can be no legislation until that case is reported upon. So, in the interim, let us have a debate and see what we think about making alcohol less readily available to all in our community.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Déanaim comhgairdeas leat ar do phost nua mar Cheann Comhairle ar an Tionól. I wish you every success in your new post, a Cheann Comhairle. It is a well-known fact that Derrymen, be they from the county or city, are even-minded and fair-handed, and it is on Derry, particularly the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin, that I want to make my remarks. It does my heart good, and that of many cancer sufferers and their families, to see the rapid progression on the unit and know that it will open in the autumn next year. We are very glad of that. Further to that, will the Minister qualify what exactly the proposals are for sharing, on an all-island basis, vital information from the National Cancer Institute cancer consortium?

Mr Wells: First, I welcome the progress of the new radiotherapy centre in Londonderry. I was up at it recently. I do not know not whether it was the topping-up or

what particular stage it was, but it was certainly making excellent progress.

It is unfortunate that the Chair is not here because I think that she would be very interested in my next point, which I think I should raise as a result of this question. There is considerable capacity in the cath lab in Altnagelvin, which is brand new state-of-the-art provision for those who have had heart attacks or have heart conditions. There is a proposal, which I hope to pursue, that we make available that cath lab to patients from Donegal, where between 130 and 150 people a year have cardiac arrests. It does not seem to make much sense that they almost drive past the front door of Altnagelvin on their way to Dublin. When I asked the authorities up there recently what happens to those patients, they told me that some of them die. It is very sad that people are forced to drive for two hours when there is a brand new state-of-the-art facility in Altnagelvin that they could use and that the clinicians there are very keen to make available because we have sufficient spare capacity. I hope to talk to the Minister in the Republic when he comes up to Altnagelvin about the potential to use that spare capacity.

We have all heard of a chap called Christie O'Donnell, the famous taxi driver in the Bogside who had a heart attack and drove himself to Altnagelvin. His condition was quickly spotted, he was in the cath lab within 55 minutes, totally conscious throughout his procedure and out within three days. I am glad to say that he told the entire city of his very pleasant experience. Why should that not be made available on a full-cost-recovery basis to the residents of Donegal? That makes common sense to me. Maybe some people can see a problem with it, but I cannot.

11.00 am

We are still working very closely together on the cancer strategy and hope to use the joint research between the two jurisdictions to improve cancer care. Again, I think that there is a lot to be said for joint cooperation and sharing of information. Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic are quite good at cancer care, and the stats show that we are making huge progress. Therefore, as with all jurisdictions, we are very keen to share the knowledge and experiences of the two jurisdictions to better the treatment of all our communities.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the Minister for his statement, and welcome that work has commenced at Altnagelvin Hospital on the much-needed radiotherapy unit for the north-west of the Province. Is all the funding now in place for that much-needed project?

Mr Wells: I suppose that I am going to disappoint some Members, because all the news from the meeting was very positive. You always look for the complexities, difficulties and problems, but we came out of that meeting feeling that it had gone very well.

I am glad to say that the authority in the Irish Republic — the HSE — has come up to the mark and has been paying the capital bills that we have sent for the work on the new radiotherapy unit. There have been no difficulties whatsoever with that, and that is commendable given the fact that the Republic is coming through very difficult financial times. No; there have been absolutely no problems.

I am told that the discussions on the agreement to reimburse patients when they eventually arrive from the Republic are also going very well. From my experience with Daisy Hill Hospital, where a high percentage of the users of the renal unit are from Louth and north Monaghan, I know that there have been no difficulties whatsoever with that arrangement. The bill is sent, it is paid and the unit is used to its maximum capacity. That has to be a good thing.

I know that the honourable Member for East Londonderry is very concerned about his constituents in places like Limavady and Ballykelly. They can be absolutely certain that, as things stand, that unit will open on time and will be used to alleviate the problems that so many cancer patients face in the north-west.

Four years ago, we were told that it would never happen and that the money was not there to build that new facility. Indeed, it was very controversial at the time. The first decision that Edwin Poots made as Health Minister was that the radiotherapy centre in Londonderry would go ahead, and we have delivered on that promise.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his statement. I want to ask him about the tri-jurisdictional collaboration with the US-Ireland R&D Partnership. What is expected to come out of that and what sort of resourcing implications are there likely to be for the centre-to-centre collaboration?

Mr Wells: As the Member knows, the US-Ireland R&D Partnership promotes innovative research projects to deliver major advances in healthcare and to the economy. The projects involve academic and clinical research collaborations from the USA, Ireland and Northern Ireland. Project proposals relevant to health care are submitted to the US National Institutes of Health, where they undergo rigorous evaluation. If they are deemed to be of sufficient scientific merit, they are recommended for funding. Funding is provided by each of the three jurisdictions to meet the research costs that they will incur.

I am very excited about that proposal, because the US is obviously a leading world authority on medical research. Not only does it provide opportunities for clients and patients in Northern Ireland to obtain better care, but Northern Ireland is quite good at taking those technologies and using them to promote employment. It has been quite remarkable that, during the last five years, all our major companies in that field have increased their employment and have not laid anybody off. Indeed, one of the major companies doubled its workforce between 2008 and 2014. So, that indicates that the outcomes of that tri-nation partnership could lead to significant employment opportunities throughout Northern Ireland, and not always in the greater Belfast area.

The concept that the world ends at Glengormley does not apply here, because the leading players are in places like Newry, Crumlin, Portadown and Craigavon. I was in Cuba two years ago with the then Health Committee Chair, Sue Ramsey, and it was very interesting to note that a lot of diagnostics in Cuba were being carried out by Radox in Crumlin. With great pleasure, I explained where Crumlin was. I remember that company starting with four men in a farm building at the lough shore near where my grandparents lived, and now it is a world leader. This has my full commitment, as well as that of the ETI Minister and the previous Minister, Edwin Poots, not only to benefit

our patients but to develop our economy. I am totally committed to pursuing every possible way of maximising the returns from this partnership.

Mr Allister: The Minister advises that the memorandum of understanding for the radiotherapy unit in Londonderry has now been signed. Will he tell us something about the charging regime that will apply? Is he satisfied that it will be foolproof, and how does that compare with the experience of foreign use of Newry and Enniskillen hospitals?

Mr Wells: It is quite a simple issue: the board and the trust decide what is full-cost recovery for each procedure carried out. The patient comes from the Irish Republic — from Donegal, Cavan or wherever — and the procedure is carried out. We are then very quick to send the bill to the Irish Republic, and my experience is that it pays quickly and does not haggle or negotiate. A reasonably solid income is produced for the Department. The Newry experience is that there have not been any difficulties. I am always very quick to check and double-check, because, if something is too good to be true, it sometimes is. However, I have spoken to the Southern Board about it and visited the renal unit to see how smoothly the system operates, and we do not seem to be experiencing any problems. I had suspected that, given the dreadful difficulties that the Health Department in the Irish Republic was under during the recession, there would have been problems getting the money out, but that has not occurred. I am confident that, if there are any problems with getting full-cost recovery, the problem is ours because we have not assessed the bill correctly; it is not that the Republic is not paying.

As to whether the Irish Republic has come up with the money for the capital aspect of the budget — absolutely, on the nail, no problem. Every time we asked for the money that was committed by the Irish Republic, we got it. I am confident that my officials will make certain that we will not be out of pocket for having treated patients not only from the Irish Republic but from anywhere else where we can have full-cost recovery, and that will add significantly to our income.

There is also another aspect. If you spend vast amounts of money, as we are doing in the Western Trust — woe betide anyone who comes to me in the next 18 months and says that Altnagelvin is being neglected, because that simply is not true — it is absolutely vital that you use those assets to the maximum. There really is no sense in spending millions of pounds on a new facility to have it lying empty for several hours a day or at weekends. It makes commercial sense to ensure that patients from Donegal — be it in the cath labs or the radiotherapy unit — are there, because they keep that capacity going more efficiently.

North/South Ministerial Council: Aquaculture and Marine

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also offer my comhghairdeas to you on your new appointment and wish you all the best for the future.

With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the 1998 Act regarding the twenty-sixth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in aquaculture and marine sectoral format. The meeting was held in Armagh on 5 December 2014. The Executive were represented by Minister Mervyn Storey and me. The Dublin Government were represented by the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Alex White TD, and Joe McHugh TD, Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. Minister White chaired the meeting. The statement has been agreed with Minister Storey, and I make it on behalf of us both.

Given that it was the first time that three of those Ministers had attended a meeting in aquaculture and marine sectoral format, the chief executive of the Loughs Agency outlined the key objectives for the agency in 2014-2016. The Council noted the key objectives and benefits of the agency's investment strategy for local and community initiatives in the Foyle and Carlingford areas. The Council received a progress report on the work of the Loughs Agency from the chief executive. Ministers welcomed progress on the activities of the Loughs Agency, including an update on the management agreement, the progress on the Loughs Agency's financial statements for 2012 and the Foyle Ambassador Programme.

In relation to the management agreement, we were told that the interdepartmental group on jurisdictional issues met on 29 October 2014, with a further recent exchange of views between the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In parallel, the Loughs Agency continues to engage with other relevant agencies in developing a management agreement. The agreement will address the practical and operational issues that will arise from the transfer of aquaculture licensing and development functions to the agency. As previously noted, any such operational agreement could not be implemented prior to the resolution of the jurisdictional issue. I have asked that Minister White works with Minister Coveney to progress the management agreement. I stressed that the agreement has been under discussion for quite a number of years and that it is important that it is advanced.

The Council noted the latest position on the survival of Atlantic salmon in the Foyle and Carlingford catchments and the ongoing conservation and protection efforts. It also noted the position on the survival of the native Lough Foyle flat oyster and the need to balance the conservation imperative with sufficient economic opportunity for stakeholders in the industry. During the NSMC meeting, Ministers called on the Loughs Agency to review its decision to close the six main oyster beds. I am pleased to say that on 11 December, the chief executive took the decision to reopen two of the six main oyster beds. Whilst I appreciate the importance of management interventions to conserve and maintain oyster stocks, I was mindful of the impact that closure of the oyster beds was having on

the livelihood of local oystermen, particularly in the run-up to Christmas. The decision struck a balance between the socio-economic benefits for the Lough Foyle fishermen and the scientific evidence supporting the long-term sustainability of the native oyster fishery in Lough Foyle.

The Council received an update on the agency's ongoing work commitments, such as its responsibilities under the water framework directive and the habitats directive. Water quality and biological monitoring programmes continue to provide valuable information for the management of the systems. A small streams survey of Carlingford to determine the potential for rehabilitation of trout-spawning areas and a survey of urban streams were undertaken. The agency has also developed a fisheries' habitat improvement assessment template for 2015. We heard about the upward trend in conservation limits. In 2005, the main rivers, on average, were only meeting 50% of their conservation limits, and in 2014 the average was approximately 97%. Ministers also noted the progress on the IBIS project and the ongoing partnership with the Queen's University Belfast and Glasgow University.

The Council noted that the Loughs Agency has applied the required efficiency savings to the 2015 budget in accordance with agreed guidance issued by the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and that sponsor Department Ministers and Finance Ministers have approved the business plan and budget. I am pleased to report that the NSMC approved the Loughs Agency 2015 business plan and recommended the 2015 budget provision of just under £4 million. I want to pay tribute to the chief executive and his staff for delivering the draft business plan within very tight time constraints.

Ministers welcomed the report on the activities of the Loughs Agency in promoting and marketing Foyle and Carlingford loughs, in particular marine leisure infrastructure developments, outreach and community activities and promotion of local seafood products. The Council noted the report on the funding opportunities available to the Loughs Agency and future plans for funding applications that would benefit the Foyle and Carlingford catchments.

The Council considered and approved the Foyle area regulations 2014. These were scrutinised by the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee earlier last year.

Ministers approved the determinations made by the Loughs Agency and the parallel determinations of other North/South bodies that the North/South pension scheme should apply to all North/South bodies, including the Loughs Agency. The NSMC also approved the determination made by the Loughs Agency that the Foyle Fisheries Commission pension scheme 1979 be closed and that, simultaneously, its members transfer to the North/South pension scheme.

The Council agreed to meet again in aquaculture and marine sectoral format in March.

Mr Irwin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Minister for her statement. I refer her to paragraphs 8 and 9, regarding the management agreement. As the Minister knows, this has been a recurring theme over many years, and it seems we are no nearer to getting it resolved. Reference was made to a

recent exchange of views between the two Departments on this. Will the Minister indicate whether the views were favourably inclined to a management agreement?

11.15 am

Mrs O'Neill: Aquaculture licensing is one of the functions of the Loughs Agency. To date, as you have rightly said, the agency has not been able to assume that function due to jurisdictional, legal and policy issues. At its meeting on 29 October 2014, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade reported that the jurisdictional issue had recently been discussed. Remember that those negotiations are with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Those discussions were quite positive, and there were moves to progress things, but all issues have not been resolved. I understand that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is currently awaiting further communication from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office arising from that dialogue.

In parallel with ongoing discussions on the jurisdictional issue, the Loughs Agency continues to engage with other relevant agencies in developing a management agreement that will address the practical and operational issues that may arise. So, it is working to make sure that it has things in place that are ready to go as soon as we have the agreement. I confirm to the Member that I stressed at the meeting the need for this to be resolved. It has been going on for far too long; it has been going on for quite a number of years, certainly for the time that I have been attending NSMC meetings. I have asked Minister White to raise the issue again with Minister Coveney. I have also raised the issue with Minister Coveney, and I will continue to push for it to be resolved.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I congratulate you on your historic elevation.

Minister, I thank you for your presentation. Will the Minister tell us the current status of the proposed fisheries Bill?

Mrs O'Neill: Formal consultation on policy proposals for the new fisheries Bill, which, among other things, include proposals to amend the Foyle Fisheries Act, closed on 10 November 2014. Officials are analysing the outcome of the recent consultation on proposals for the new Bill. The final policy that will underpin the draft fisheries Bill will be finalised once a full analysis of the outcome of the consultation has been completed. My aim is to introduce the Bill to the Assembly before the 2015 summer recess. In order to make arrangements in relation to the Loughs Agency, parallel changes are required in the Twenty-six Counties, and discussions are under way with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources as the co-sponsor.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her statement. In relation to the management agreement, might opportunities arise to increase the potential for funding to make sure that we have further development in the Foyle and Carlingford catchment areas?

Mrs O'Neill: The management agreement is a practical issue that we need to resolve, but there absolutely are other opportunities for funding. The Loughs Agency is working, particularly at European level, to see what funding it is able to draw down. Quite significant funding has been invested in aquaculture. We want to see that continuing. Given the financial climate that we are in, it is so important

that the agency looks towards other funders. It is actively involved in quite a number of projects that it is chasing at a European level and even more internationally than that. To date, it has secured in excess of €15 million. That shows the potential of the Loughs Agency to seek additional funding. I know that it will continue to do that over the next wee while as part of its plans moving forward as it looks towards other partners that it can work with, particularly in research.

Mrs Dobson: I also thank the Minister for her statement. Will she detail how the recommended 2015 budget grant provision of under £4 million compares with previous years? Is she absolutely confident that, as the crisis in public spending in key services such as health and education looks set to continue, no further savings can be made from the Loughs Agency?

Mrs O'Neill: NSMC Ministers approved the Loughs Agency's business plan and recommended that it receive budget provision of £3.95 million. In accordance with the agreed guidance, the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission is required to make efficiency savings of 4% for every year between 2014 and 2016. It has lived up to that. It is a plan that will culminate in overall savings of 12% up to 2016. I am pleased that the Loughs Agency has been very proactive and has applied all the required efficiency savings in the 2015 budget in accordance with what was agreed with the sponsor Finance Departments. I appreciate the challenges that lie ahead for the Loughs Agency. They are as relevant to it as they are to other bodies. I am grateful to the chief executive for being proactive and looking for other sources of funding, which I referred to earlier. It has a very ambitious programme in terms of the research it wishes to do and the opportunities for funding that are there. I am happy to work with it in its pursuit of that.

Mr McCarthy: Following on from that question, I am concerned about paragraphs 19 and 20. Paragraph 19 states that there have been:

"the required efficiency savings to the 2015 budget in accordance with agreed guidance".

Can the Minister tell the Assembly what, if any, work will fall by the wayside as a result of the savings that are spoken about in paragraph 19?

Mrs O'Neill: The Loughs Agency has been aware of the requirement that was set to find 4% year on year, so, in setting out its programme for the year ahead, it has built in to its corporate plan and business plan the fact that it needs to find that 4% saving. It is not a matter of reducing; it knew that it had to find it. As I said, although I appreciate the work that it has done in finding the savings, I also appreciate the work that it has done in attracting additional EU funding to help it to deliver the fantastic service that it does.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for her statement. I, too, wish to follow on with paragraph 19 and the budgets. Minister, that paragraph refers to "efficiency savings", as you mentioned. Can you elaborate on that? Are you satisfied that the agency represents value for money?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I am. I read its business plan and its budget proposals, and I look through all its plans. I said in the previous answers that I commend the Loughs Agency for the work that it has been doing. When you see for yourself the projects that it does on the ground to promote

tourism and the fact that it has been able to bring part of the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race to Derry, you see that fantastic tourism potential has been opened up. It is showcasing fishing in Ireland right across the world and is attending a lot of events. I think that its track record speaks for itself, and the value for money speaks for itself through what it does. All that, as well as the fact that it is so proactive in finding other EU funding, is to be commended.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, congratulate you on your position. Can the Minister please elaborate on why the decision was taken to reopen the oyster beds in the run-up to Christmas 2014?

Mrs O'Neill: During the NSMC meeting in December, we asked Loughs Agency to review its original decision to close the main six oyster beds in Lough Foyle. The main reason for that was that, following a meeting of the Lough Foyle fishermen in Redcastle on Friday 28 November, which my officials attended with their counterparts from the 26 counties, along with Minister McHugh, we were made aware that the vast majority of the fishermen were calling for the beds to be opened in the run-up to Christmas. The fishermen made the point that they saw themselves very much as the custodians of Lough Foyle and would do all in their power to protect the stocks. However, they made a plea to be allowed to fish in the run-up to Christmas. It was therefore incumbent on Ministers to ask the agency to look at that decision again. One of the things that I highlighted to the Loughs Agency was that there was perhaps a need for improved communication with the fishermen to communicate the message on why beds need to be closed. Also, in this instance, the decision was purely down to the Loughs Agency. We asked it to take a look at it again, and I was delighted that it made a decision that I believe was balanced on the socioeconomic needs of the fishermen and with the conservation imperative in mind. I know that it is something that the fishermen welcome, and I look forward to improved communication with the Loughs Agency and fishermen.

Mr Dallat: Mr Speaker, in keeping with the other Members who already congratulated you, in case someone might make mischief, I need to put it on record that, earlier today, I too offered my warmest congratulations and full cooperation in ensuring that this place remains a model of democracy.

I am delighted — almost ecstatic — to see that paragraph 21 mentions the idea of promoting and marketing Foyle and Carlingford loughs and that that is now on the discussion sheet. Can I trawl that idea to new depths and propose that, at a future meeting, the Minister will perhaps suggest that we develop a comprehensive strategy involving not just Carlingford and Lough Foyle but maybe the River Bann, which, although flowing out into the same sea a few metres away, is controlled by Waterways Ireland? In other words, in a nutshell, can we at least have a discussion on a comprehensive plan for all the waterways that are under different controls at the moment?

Mrs O'Neill: Like you, I am also delighted that the Loughs Agency continues to be very proactive in the promotion of tourism, and the events that I referred to earlier are testimony to the work that it has done. Through engagement with stakeholders and other statutory organisations, working with councils and other bodies, the agency is always striving to find new ways to accelerate

growth and potential. Your point about a comprehensive strategy is well made. I am happy to explore the remit for the River Bann and whether it comes under the NSMC or Waterways Ireland and to pass that on to the relevant body for discussion.

Mr Allister: In paragraph 9 the Minister referred to the “jurisdictional issue”. What is that jurisdictional issue and what is the view of the Northern Ireland Executive on it?

Mrs O’Neill: In paragraph 9 I did refer to the jurisdictional issue, and the Member is very aware of what that is; we have discussed it, and he asks me questions on it every time I make a statement on the NSMC. Given that the issue has been discussed for quite some time, I am acutely aware that he is aware of the issues. My core concern is that we get the issue resolved to allow the Loughs Agency to do its job and to make sure that it provides regulations where regulations are necessary. That is the priority for the Loughs Agency and for me. I have asked Minister White to raise the issue with Minister Simon Coveney and for him to chase the issue up again with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Mr Allister: What are the Executive doing?

Mrs O’Neill: I will let you know what the Executive are doing. Minister Storey and I attended on behalf of the Executive, and I make this statement on behalf of the Executive, so the Executive are very aware of the jurisdictional issues in Lough Foyle that need to be resolved.

Executive Committee Business

Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, to move the Consideration stage of the Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development).]

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to the Bill. I will now proceed to put the question on the clause, the schedule and the long title.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Pension Schemes Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):
I beg to move

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Pension Schemes Bill dealing with restrictions on transfers out of public-service defined benefits schemes and reduction of cash equivalents in relation to funded public-service defined benefits schemes, as contained in clauses 69, 70 and 71 of the Bill, as brought from the House of Commons to the Lords.

As part of his Budget statement 2014, the Chancellor announced that, from April 2015, there is to be greater flexibility in the way that members of defined contribution pension schemes can access their pension pot. In essence, members of such schemes will be less constrained to purchase an annuity than is currently the case and will have more freedom to choose, in light of their personal circumstances, whether to purchase an annuity, draw down their savings as a lump sum or keep their pension invested.

Under the current rules, it is already possible for a member of a public-service defined benefit scheme to transfer their pension rights to a defined contribution scheme. However, after the introduction of the flexibilities in April, members exercising that choice would then be in a position to access their pension pots as a lump sum under the new rules. Whilst those new flexibilities are progressive and increase individual choice in how members of schemes control their own pension arrangements, they must also be proportionate and managed effectively, especially where there may be impacts for public-service pension schemes, their members and the taxpayer.

11.30 am

As Members will be aware, funded public-service pension schemes have a fund of assets that can support the payment of transfer values out of the scheme. However, unfunded public-service pension schemes have no such fund of assets set aside, and the transfer values payable for members in those schemes represent an up-front, direct cost to the Exchequer. The main unfunded schemes in Northern Ireland include those for the Civil Service, police, the Fire and Rescue Service, teachers and health workers. The local government pension scheme is the main funded scheme in Northern Ireland.

Permitting such transfers from unfunded public-service schemes from April would risk destabilising those schemes and put pressure on public finances if significant numbers of members were to avail themselves of the new flexibility to transfer to one of the defined contribution arrangements in order to draw down as a lump sum the pension benefits attributable to their career in public service.

It could also be to the detriment of members who remain in the scheme by causing an extraordinary pressure on the scheme's employer cost cap mechanism, which is a requirement for public-service pensions established under the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. As a consequence, a significant volume of transfers out of the schemes from April could ultimately mean employee contributions being increased and/or benefits reduced for

those members who choose to retain their public-service pension rights in the schemes.

I will now deal with the provisions covered by the motion. Clause 69 of the Bill will have the effect of amending relevant primary legislation — namely, the Pension Schemes (Northern Ireland) Act 1993 — to prevent transfers from unfunded schemes. However, clause 69 also provides scope for regulations to be made by my Department to disapply the restriction in the case of any of the unfunded schemes, should that be a consideration in future.

The outright restriction of transfers will protect the unfunded schemes in Northern Ireland. As I pointed out, the assets held by funded schemes mean that the costs to the public purse of transfers to one of the defined contribution arrangements are less direct than from unfunded schemes. However, in some circumstances, where a significant number of withdrawals from the scheme impact on the short-term cash flow, and therefore the stability of the fund, there could still be implications for members of funded schemes and the taxpayer. As I already advised, that risk affects the local government pension scheme in Northern Ireland.

Although the scheme has a fund of assets that can sustain the payment of transfer values from the scheme under normal conditions, the potential for a significant increase in transfer traffic associated with the introduction of the flexibilities represents a potential risk to the integrity of the scheme and its remaining members, should sufficient members elect to apply to transfer their accrued benefits out of the scheme and into a defined contribution arrangement after April. I firmly believe that there should be a backstop protection to manage that risk.

Clause 70 provides for, in specified circumstances, powers to switch on reduced cash-equivalent transfer values if, as a direct result of increased transfer volumes, there is an increased risk of taxpayer intervention to support the scheme or a risk that the necessary intervention is significantly greater than it would otherwise have been.

The provisions for funded schemes operate as a safeguard rather than as an outright ban. The policy to allow the transfers to continue, subject to the safeguards in clause 70, reflects the inherent capacity of the funded scheme design to absorb an increase in transfer traffic under normal conditions.

The funded defined benefit scheme design is also operated in the private sector. Transfers from funded schemes will continue to be allowed in that sector also. The concern over scheme stability also arises for private sector defined benefit schemes, where it is already addressed by existing powers allowing for the reduction of transfer values to reflect scheme funding. Clause 70 extends an equivalent safeguard for a funded scheme in the public sector.

Minister Durkan is the Minister responsible for the local government unfunded pension scheme. In his response on 23 October 2014 to the Executive paper, which I circulated and which proposed the use of a legislative consent motion (LCM), he confirmed that he was content with the proposed approach.

Clause 71 makes consequential amendments to the Pension Schemes (Northern Ireland) Act 1993 and the Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. Those areas of

pension policy are devolved to Northern Ireland. However, given that the flexibilities are scheduled to be introduced in April, securing Assembly agreement to legislate for the policy via an LCM is the most prudent and timely approach to secure the financial safeguarding of unfunded and funded public-service pension schemes in Northern Ireland.

The policy rationale for introducing a restriction on transfers out of unfunded public-service defined benefit pension schemes and a power to switch on reduced cash-equivalent transfer values for the funded public-service scheme in Northern Ireland is a legitimate one that the Assembly must today endorse.

The measures will avoid contributing to an already very difficult and challenging financial year for public-service spending. As Members will all be too well aware, the Executive have had, and continue, to address significant financial pressures.

The reality is that we cannot afford not to regulate transfers out of public-service pension schemes in prescribed circumstances where there would be risks for scheme members and taxpayers. The scope of this legislation is very limited. It targets a specific risk. It would be simply negligent on our part if Members did not agree to the LCM for the purposes which I have outlined.

Having explained the rationale for bringing the motion to the Assembly, I commend the Committee for Finance and Personnel for the timely manner in which it considered and reported on the motion. I thank the Committee for its general support for the motion. I hope that I have addressed any outstanding concerns that the Committee has raised in its report on this issue, particularly in the area of the rationale for the safeguards that are applied for the funded local government scheme rather than an outright ban.

Mr D Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá áthas orm labhairt ar an rún seo ar son an Choiste Airgeadais agus Pearsanra. I am pleased to speak on the motion on behalf of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

The Minister wrote to the Committee on 21 October 2014 to advise it that he had sought approval from the Executive to have the applicable provisions of the Westminster Pension Schemes Bill extended to Northern Ireland.

As the Minister indicated, as part of the Budget 2014, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the introduction of flexibility in the way that members of defined contribution pension schemes can access their pension pot, which essentially will permit members to draw down their savings as a lump sum as opposed to the current practice, which requires the purchase of an annuity.

Under current rules, it is possible for a member of a public-service defined benefit scheme to transfer their rights to a defined contribution scheme. After the introduction of the flexibilities in April 2015, members exercising this choice would then be permitted to access their pension pots flexibly under the new rules.

Unfunded public-service pension schemes, which include the Civil Service, police officers, firefighters, teachers and health workers, have no such fund of assets.

At its meeting of 5 November 2014, the Committee was briefed by DFP on the proposed legislative consent motion. Given that the LCM will restrict the flexibilities being extended to affected scheme members, the Committee questioned DFP officials to establish the implications of not progressing the LCM, the level of engagement with trade unions and any potential equality implications. In response, DFP advised that, in overall terms across the jurisdictions, there would be a cost to the public purse of some £200 million in the event that 1% of those who are reaching the retirement age in the public-service pension schemes elected to transfer their rights in order to take advantage of the new flexibilities. Also, whilst forecasting of costs had yet to be undertaken at a local level, the Department's understanding was that the trade unions agreed in principle to safeguard the existing schemes, since without these safeguards the cost-control mechanisms could be impacted, which could thereby have a detrimental impact on members in the event of a run on these schemes.

Departmental officials also advised that DFP had been liaising with Treasury on its findings on the equality implications, which will supplement the equality considerations that will be undertaken by the Department. On this point, I would be grateful if the Minister could, upon the completion of this work, provide the findings for the Committee's consideration.

To further inform its consideration of the issues, the Committee wrote to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) for its views on the proposals. In response, ICTU confirmed that it was supportive of the provisions and the use of the LCM mechanism in this instance, explaining that the:

"most important reason to support the legislative consent proposal is to protect the individual scheme member".

A further point highlighted by the Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions was that the Westminster legislation should cover all public-service pension schemes, including funded schemes such as the local government pension schemes. At its meeting on 19 November 2014, the Committee sought clarification from the Department on this issue. In response, the officials advised that whilst the legislative provisions apply to all unfunded schemes, they do not extend to funded schemes, since those operate on a separate basis. The Committee did not have the opportunity to explore the rationale for the provisions not covering all public-service pension schemes here, including the LGPS, so it would be helpful if the Minister could further clarify that point today. Aside from such points of clarification, and after considering the evidence, the Committee for Finance and Personnel agreed its report supporting the proposal for the legislative consent motion. This was circulated to all MLAs in advance of the debate.

Ar an ábhar sin, ar son an Choiste Airgeadais agus Pearsanra, tacaím leis an rún seo. On behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

Mr Cree: The difficulty in following the Deputy Chair is that he does not really leave much to go on. However, the changes in the pension schemes that have been made recently mean that, from April next year, members of defined contribution schemes will be allowed to access their pensions and exercise choice in how they wish to

handle their investment. Public-service defined benefit schemes can also be transferred to defined contribution schemes under current rules, but again, as the Minister said, most of the public-service schemes are unfunded and therefore have no fund of assets.

The Pension Schemes Bill currently going through Westminster seeks to prevent transfers from unfunded public-service pension schemes to defined contribution schemes. The legislative consent motion before the House, if approved, will extend those provisions to Northern Ireland. The Department of Finance and Personnel considers this legislation necessary to protect both the integrity of the unfunded schemes and the interests of scheme members here. As the Deputy Chair said, the unions have indicated their support. Indeed, the Committee for Finance and Personnel has agreed that the motion should be agreed today.

On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I support the motion.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):

I am pleased that we have had a brief but useful debate on the provisions in the Pension Schemes Bill dealing with the restrictions on transfers out of public-service defined benefit schemes and the reduction of cash equivalents in relation to funded public-service defined benefit schemes. I thank the Deputy Chair of the Committee for his contribution on behalf of the Committee. I thank not just him but the other members of the Committee for their support for the provisions covered by the LCM.

The Deputy Chair himself said that this is about protecting public-sector pension scheme members, whether they be in funded or unfunded schemes. I hope that I have clarified some of the points for him in my opening remarks. This is particularly about those in unfunded schemes, which the majority of schemes operating in Northern Ireland are. It is about protecting those members should significant numbers seek to avail themselves of this flexibility, and I think that it is right and sensible and prudent that we close that down so that pension scheme members left behind in the scheme are not put in a very difficult position. The changes that we put through in our own recent Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 mean that, if that was the case and the scheme did not have sufficient funds in it, we could have the perverse situation where members would have to pay more in contributions or take less in their benefits, which, I am sure the House would agree, is not something that we want to see happen.

In respect of funded pension schemes, there is a risk. Whilst it is not an outright ban, a safety valve of sorts is being put in place in the event of, as the Deputy Chair said, a run — that is a very good term to use in the circumstances, if maybe not one that we are used to applying to pension schemes.

11.45 am

I hope that what has been said, certainly in my opening remarks, and the support that has been offered today by the Committee via the Deputy Chair's contribution is enough to secure support across the House for the legislative consent motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Pension Schemes Bill dealing with restrictions on transfers out of public-service defined benefits schemes and reduction of cash equivalents in relation to funded public-service defined benefits schemes, as contained in clauses 69, 70 and 71 of the Bill, as brought from the House of Commons to the Lords.

Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):
I beg to move

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions dealing with public-sector exit payments contained in clauses 149 to 151 of the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill, as brought from the House of Commons to the Lords on 20 November 2014.

The Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill was introduced to the House of Commons in June 2014. The Bill contains provisions on a wide range of policies aimed at improving access to finance for businesses and helping them to innovate and compete. Specifically, it contains measures that will facilitate a requirement for the repayment of some or all qualifying public-sector exit payments from individuals in prescribed circumstances. The policy intent is that this will apply to individuals earning more than £100,000 who exit a role in the public sector and then return to the same part of the public sector within 12 months.

Clauses 149 and 150 contain the provision by which HM Treasury may make regulations dealing with the repayment of specified types of exit payments. Clause 151 contains a power for the Department of Finance and Personnel to make a waiver for any particular type of exit payee where this is considered appropriate.

It is proposed that the exit payments will include voluntary and compulsory redundancy, voluntary exit payments and discretionary payments made by employers to buy out actuarial reductions for early pensions.

The amount that individuals will be required to repay will decrease gradually over time, proportional to the time between an individual leaving and returning to work. Those who rejoin within a month will have to repay the whole of the payment. Those who rejoin after a month but less than a year will be required to repay less, proportionate to the time they have spent outside public-sector employment.

Where the minority of these staff leave and shortly rejoin, these measures will ensure greater fairness for other public-sector workers and the taxpayer, and flexibility regarding re-employment that avoids an unnecessary discouragement to return to work.

Redundancy pay has played a vital role in supporting the reform of public administration here in Northern Ireland. For employees who have voluntarily or otherwise left public service, it has helped to support them while they find new work. In that context, however, it is entirely unacceptable that highly paid public-sector workers receive a generous redundancy package and then, within 12 months, return to work in the same part of the public sector. In such circumstances, the justification of financial support to bridge the gap to new employment is undermined. This represents poor value for money.

Of course, it would be within the scope of the Assembly to legislate for this provision through its own Bill. However, there would not be sufficient time to enable such legislation to receive Royal Assent by April 2015. Therefore, to guarantee consistency of approach, avoid barriers to labour mobility and ensure that high-earning

public servants in the devolved Administration are not treated more favourably than their counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom, I consider that securing the Assembly's agreement to legislate for this policy via a legislative consent motion (LCM) is the most effective approach by which to secure the timely protection of public funding.

The clauses are scheduled to take effect from April 2015. The regulations will merely set the baseline requirement and will not impinge on existing provisions for the recovery of redundancy payment operated by some employers. These proposals seek not to replace but, rather, to underpin current exit payment arrangements. Indeed, in some areas of the public sector, employers will choose to go further in recovery. These measures will not affect an individual's entitlement to statutory redundancy.

Legislative consent for these provisions will also ensure that the same protections for public finances are applied consistently in Northern Ireland at a time when finances are already stretched.

The principal intent of the Bill is to safeguard public finances. The Bill will ensure that public-service funds are not diverted to compensate high-earning individuals for loss of office in cases where that loss is transitory due to the individual re-entering paid employment in the sector.

I acknowledge and thank the Committee for Finance and Personnel for its timely consideration of the memorandum. Furthermore, I welcome the support of the Committee for the legislative consent motion.

I note that the Committee has drawn attention to the threshold of earnings being set at £100,000. Specifically, the Committee's report states that the provisions

"may not go far enough and that arrangements may need to be tailored to the Northern Ireland context."

I acknowledge and accept that that is a valid point. Certainly, the LCM does not preclude the adoption of a more radical approach in the future; indeed, it will be for my Department to evaluate and review the impact of this legislation to determine whether, going forward, a more targeted, Northern Ireland approach should be adopted. For example, should the threshold be reduced to more accurately reflect public sector salaries here in Northern Ireland, or should the legislation come into effect for re-employment to any of the public sector, rather than just to those who return to the same part of the public sector? Those are valid points and, whilst I believe that consideration should be given to those issues, I am mindful that, for the present, we should seek to implement what we can now, in order to establish a baseline to safeguard public finances.

The detail of the earnings thresholds, employees and bodies that will fall within the remit of the legislation and the mechanism for how it will work in practice will be specified in secondary legislation. Employers, of course, seek to offer alternative employment before making an individual redundant. For example, the Northern Ireland Civil Service has a clear policy of using redeployment to avoid having to reduce staff through such measures as exit or redundancy schemes. As Members know all too well, given the financial pressures that we face, it is only when measures such as redeployment fail to deliver the required

reduction in the pay bill and staffing levels that such schemes are implemented.

In its report, the Committee also requested clarification of the rationale for the inclusion of compulsory redundancy payments within the scope of this recovery policy. The purpose of exit payments made for loss of employment is to provide adequate financial support to bridge the gap to new employment. In terms of the overall rationale, to ensure fairness and value for money, it is entirely appropriate that compulsory redundancy payments made to compensate those who meet the high-earner threshold of £100,000 for loss of expected earnings should be within the scope of the policy where earnings are restored within a short period. I also point out that the policy will apply in the case of voluntary exit payments, where a high earner decides to apply for a voluntary exit scheme offered by a public service employer. In the case of those voluntary exits, there is absolutely no compulsion to apply. In those circumstances, it is wholly reasonable to expect that entitlement to retain a cash payment for giving up a high-earning position should be wholly or partially forfeited if they return to a similar position within a 12-month period. It is already a feature of the Civil Service compensation arrangements that payments for each of the categories "voluntary exit", "voluntary redundancy" and "compulsory redundancy" must be returned in full, where an individual returns within 28 days, and repaid pro rata, where an individual chooses to return to the Civil Service within six months.

In short, the motion is a measured and a crucial vehicle that will prevent the wasteful use of vital public funds in lining the pockets of high-earning public servants who, as a consequence of re-employment to the sector following receipt of an exit payment, will, of course, no longer require that financial support.

Mr D Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh míle maith agat arís, a Cheann Comhairle. Ar son an Choiste Airgeadais agus Pearsanra, ba mhaith liom tacaíocht ghinearálta a thabhairt don rún seo atá faoinár mbráid anois.

On behalf of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I express general support for the motion. The details of the Committee's deliberations on the legislative consent motion were set out in a short report that was circulated to all MLAs and published online on 18 December 2014. I shall, however, summarise the key points now for Members' convenience and for the record.

As has been outlined, the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill contains measures primarily aimed at supporting small businesses by improving access to finance. However, the Bill also contains measures to recover redundancy and compensation payments from individuals who exit a role in the public service and then return to the same part of the public service in a short space of time. The Minister advised the Committee that he intended to extend those measures to Northern Ireland to safeguard public finances through the use of the legislative consent motion that is before us today.

After being first informed of the potential need for such an LCM on 12 November 2014, the Committee sought an urgent briefing from departmental officials as soon as possible thereafter. That took place on 19 November 2014. During the session, members heard that the proposed provisions would allow for the recovery of redundancy

and compensation payments made to those earning £100,000 or more in certain circumstances; the amount requiring payback would be on a graduated basis; and the provisions would not apply to redundancy payments where individuals have a right to full, unreduced, employer-funded early retirement pension.

In addition, members raised issues and queries with officials. They asked why the threshold of earnings was set at £100,000 and not at a lower sum; why the provisions were being limited to those being re-employed in the same part of the public sector as opposed to all parts of the public sector; and how the condition of not being re-employed within a short space of time will be defined. I note that, during the debate, the Minister has referred to 12 months. Perhaps he will clarify whether that is the short space of time that he has in mind. Finally, members also asked for the basis for the exclusion relating to a person's contractual entitlement. In responding to the Committee's queries, DFP officials assured members that guidance would be provided on how a "short space of time" will be defined. However, the session raised other issues that I will elaborate on in a moment.

Legislative consent motions, by their nature, are time-limited, so the opportunity for the Committee to engage meaningfully with interested stakeholders has been restricted. Nonetheless, the Committee obtained an informal response from representatives of the Northern Ireland Public Sector Alliance (NIPSA) and correspondence from the First Division Association (FDA). NIPSA highlighted the fact that the proposed legislation would most likely impact most on the health and social care sector, which has more employees earning over the £100,000 threshold. Furthermore, the Committee understands that exit payments for voluntary and compulsory redundancies are included in the scope of the legislation and that NIPSA has raised concerns with the inclusion of compulsory redundancy situations. Perhaps the Minister will wish to place on record during today's debate the rationale for the inclusion of compulsory redundancy payments in the provisions. The Minister could also take the opportunity to address points raised by the FDA, which provided the Committee with a copy of its previous submission on the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill, specifically the section relating to the recovery of public sector exit payments.

As will be evident from a reading of the Committee's report on the LCM, members acknowledge the need for legislative reform in this area during a time of constraint on the public purse. However, the Committee has also highlighted other pertinent issues. It stated that the LCM might be only a necessary first step and that the arrangements being put in place might not go far enough in this regard. DFP officials assured the Committee that, by agreeing to the LCM, the Assembly would not constrain itself and could tailor arrangements to local circumstances and, indeed, take a more radical approach in the future, if necessary. The Minister referred to that in his initial remarks. I regard this as an important and necessary assurance in informing today's decisions.

12.00 noon

Members were also concerned about the implementation of the legislative provisions and what compliance monitoring, if any, would take place. Departmental

officials assured members that there would be a post-implementation review examining the impact of the legislation. However, as part of this exercise, the Committee urges the Department to also examine the appropriateness of the £100,000 salary level in the local context; in particular, whether a lower threshold would be more applicable here and as regards how the legislation impacts on different parts of the public sector here.

Clearly, the Committee was able to undertake only a cursory consideration of the issues given the time constraints associated with legislative consent motions and that process. Nonetheless, the Committee identified several pertinent issues such as the need for local guidance, the need for a thorough post-implementation review and what that review should examine, as well as the case for tailoring future arrangements to the particular public sector context in Northern Ireland. As on previous occasions, the Committee has endeavoured to complete its scrutiny of the LCM within an extremely tight time frame. That time frame is inadequate, and, once again, there is a need to highlight the case for a refinement of the LCM process, with early warning of possible LCMs and more time built into the process of legislating for devolved matters.

As the Committee has pointed out previously, earlier notification of the potential need for LCMs is required on two fronts: firstly, from the responsible Whitehall Department to the responsible devolved Department and, secondly, from the Department here to the respective Assembly Committee. This is especially necessary when the legislative provisions covered by the LCM are significant or substantive in nature. When such early notification has been provided by DFP on previous occasions — the LCM on the devolution of long-haul air passenger duty (APD) being a case in point — it has enabled the Committee to begin gathering comprehensive evidence and undertaking the necessary engagement with relevant stakeholders at an early stage and prior to the commencement of the very limited 15-day timetable provided for in Standing Orders.

This concern with how the LCM process can constrain scrutiny is all the more pertinent in the wider context of moves to strengthen the devolved arrangements. I consider that, if sufficient notification is not provided in cases involving substantive legislative provisions, closer consideration will need to be given to whether an Assembly Bill would be the more appropriate vehicle for legislating in the devolved context. I therefore ask the Minister to ensure that all the relevant senior officials in his Department remain mindful of this requirement and endeavour to keep the Committee abreast of developments in respect of any further potential LCMs as they emerge in future. That said, the motion before us today, notwithstanding the issues I have raised, including those to be addressed by the Minister and Department, the Committee agrees that the LCM is a necessary first step to address a legal loophole, especially in the current financial climate.

Ar an ábhar sin, a Cheann Comhairle, ar son an Choiste Airgeadais agus Pearsanra, tacaím leis an Aire Airgeadais agus Pearsanra agus é ar lorg tacaíocht an Tionóil don rún áirithe seo atá os ár gcomhair inniu. On behalf of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I support the Minister of Finance and Personnel in seeking the Assembly's agreement to the LCM that is before us today. Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

Mr Girvan: I wish to speak on the legislative consent motion on the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill. I appreciate that, when you see small business mentioned in the Bill, you think it is something to do with the private sector, but there is very little reference to it. It is necessary to close what has been an opportunity for many people in the wider public sector. We have a very narrow view of what the public sector is, and public employees seem to filter right down to arm's-length bodies that are still being funded totally from the public purse.

There needs to be more of a workforce planning approach, not just in Departments but throughout the Civil Service and the public sector as a whole, to reduce the opportunity for people to take up voluntary redundancy payments and then re-emerge in the public sector. An earnings limit of £100,000 has been set, although I appreciate that might only reflect on a very small number of people in Northern Ireland. That has to be looked at. It may be that some change will need to be made at a later date, but in order to close the loophole we need to go down this route.

One area that I had concerns about is to do with a culture that has existed and probably relates to pension schemes as well. Some of this will relate to buying pension annuities for individuals who are, maybe, coming close to pension age and, as a consequence, might be buying added years. That will be included as part of the clawback if they return within 12 months. I am somewhat sceptical about the clause specifying that it must be in the same area because we should look at it overall. After all, many people who have been trained in the Civil Service believe, for example, that they are quite capable of working in the Department of Agriculture and, once they find that they might have to move position or move to Ballykelly and decide that that is not necessarily where they want to be, they will quickly develop the skills to re-emerge in another Department. That is an area that we need to look at.

There is an opportunity coming forward for many people to avail themselves of the exit scheme in the Civil Service, and there might well be opportunities for some people, with the skills that they have acquired in whatever area they are involved, to say that they can work, for example, in the Court Service. They may have worked in a local government department and been made redundant, but they have many skills as a chief executive, for argument's sake, in local government and feel that they could do something else in the courts end. As a consequence, they will not have to hand back any of the very large payout that they might have received as well as the contribution that has been made to a pension pot for them. There are areas that need to be looked at later. However, to allow us to move ahead with this opportunity to close a loophole and safeguard the public purse and public finances, it is vital that we deal with the issue.

Where compulsory redundancy has been dealt with, it is vital that some consideration is made in cases where people have had no alternative but to be made redundant. One area that I was quite interested in is to do with payments made to facilitate dismissal on the grounds of efficiency. In the private sector, that might be called the sack; the public sector has other ways of dealing with it. That, seemingly, does not preclude people from getting payments, and that is something that I would like further investigation of. As it stands, we support moving ahead

with the legislative consent motion, which will allow us to close what has been a loophole.

Mr Cree: I have little to say, apart from adding some points. I acknowledge that the Bill was introduced in the House of Commons last June. It contains provisions on a range of initiatives intended to support small businesses by improving access to finance. I notice that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has tabled a motion for debate on it for 20 January.

The Bill also contains measures to facilitate the effective recovery of redundancy and compensation payments from individuals who exit a role in the public sector and then return to the same part of the public sector in a short space of time. In that regard, there is concern that compulsory redundancy situations could fall under the legislation, and clarification has been requested.

The Deputy Chair of the Committee said virtually everything that needs to be said. He highlighted that, because of the time constraints on the Committee, it was able to undertake only cursory consideration of the proposed LCM. However, he identified issues for careful consideration by the Department, and I acknowledge that the Minister addressed some of those points this morning.

The provisions of the LCM are a necessary first step in addressing a loophole in the law, and they deserve the support of the House.

Mr Hamilton: I am very pleased to note various Members' contributions to this debate on the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill, which deals with public-sector exit payments.

The Deputy Chair was very clear, and whilst I understand and accept his point about whether the Committee had sufficient time to consider this in appropriate depth, I think there is no disagreement across the House that the principle behind this LCM is right and that this is the right thing to do. As Mr Girvan pointed out, whilst it is the right thing to do, it is for a small number of people in the Northern Ireland context.

As I outlined in my opening contribution, and to respond to several points that the Deputy Chair made, there may be an argument to amend these provisions in the future to suit the Northern Ireland set of circumstances, especially in the light of our upcoming voluntary exit scheme and the experience that that will provide.

There were three broad areas not of concern — that may be too strong a word — but of interest. One was on the £100,000 threshold. I will point out that this is an LCM that will be attached to the Bill going through Westminster, and £100,000 is a salary level that is probably more appropriate over there and that probably covers a lot more people than those in the Northern Ireland public sector. However, I still think that it is right thing for us to do this now. We would not have had the time to do and get our own piece of primary legislation through. As I said, we can, of course, amend it to suit Northern Ireland's circumstances if that becomes an issue.

The issue of whether it should be restricted to the same sector and not cover a range of sectors or all sectors was also raised. That is a relevant point that is worth examining on the basis of experience. The origins of this at Westminster are more to do with people leapfrogging and jumping from part of one sector, where they take a

payment to get out of that sector, and moving to another high-paying job elsewhere within that sector. I think that that problem manifested itself most primarily within the health sector in GB, and that is perhaps why it is restricted to the one sector.

The Deputy Chair raised the specific issue of what a short period of time will be. That will be set out in regulations. I anticipate that that will be 12 months. There is a more general point about whether it should be restricted to a period of time or should be almost for ever and a day.

Whilst that is worth considering, as is the point about the same sector, I think that it has to be borne in mind whether we want to have a disincentive for people to come back in to the public sector at a particular time. There may be individuals who exit for whatever reason, and it might be useful to bring them back because of the skills and experience that they have and could bring to an area of the public sector in the future.

12.15 pm

So, if we are looking to go beyond what is in the Bill and restrict it a little bit more, we need to bear in mind that we do not want to restrict it so much that we cannot bring talented or useful individuals back into the public sector at a later date into a different type of post or even into a post in the same sector, where they may be very useful to the public.

I thank all Members for their comments. On balance, despite the issues raised, I remain of the view that the Assembly should support these measures now for the reasons that I have set out. Over time, as I have already made clear, the efficacy of those measures can be evaluated and further changes considered.

In conclusion, the motion addresses a targeted provision in the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill. Legislative consent on this matter will ensure uniformity in the application of the baseline requirement for the recovery of exit payments to those in the high-earning category and provide an assurance to the taxpayer that exit payment arrangements across the sector must be fair and demonstrate value for money.

I invite Members to support the motion, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions dealing with public-sector exit payments contained in clauses 149 to 151 of the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill, as brought from the House of Commons to the Lords on 20 November 2014.

Private Members' Business

Education Funding

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. As two amendments have been selected and published on the Marshalled List, an additional 15 minutes has been added to the total time. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to wind. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to wind. All other Members who speak will have five minutes. Before we begin, the House should note that the amendments are mutually exclusive. So, if amendment No 1 is made, the Question will not be put on amendment No 2.

Miss M McIlveen: I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges the challenging financial environment in which education will operate in 2015-16 and the widespread concern amongst schools regarding the implications for the classroom of the Department of Education's draft budget; recognises that, from 1 April 2015, there will be a single Education Authority in place of the five education and library boards to oversee the allocation of the majority of the education budget; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that protecting the classroom is his first priority, that he uses the new administrative arrangements to achieve greater efficiencies within support services and, in so doing, devolves the maximum amount of the available budget to school level.

There has been widespread concern and dismay felt by many in the education community, particularly our schools, at the Minister's draft budget. We face a challenging financial environment, and that will continue over the next few years. That was clearly articulated by my party colleague the Finance Minister on 3 November 2014, when he presented the Executive's draft Budget to the Assembly.

I do not propose to rehearse that debate, but, suffice it to say, the Assembly faces significant financial challenges. This debate is about asking the Education Minister to think innovatively about his budget to ensure that the classroom is the primary beneficiary of those moneys.

Of course, parties were involved in detailed discussions prior to Christmas, and, as the Finance Minister said in the take-note debate yesterday, the Stormont House Agreement, together with additional moneys from the Chancellor's autumn statement and whatever other flexibilities can be found, will create some flexibility in funding available to the Executive in the discussions about the final Budget.

As Chair of the Education Committee, of course I would like to see more money going towards the education budget, but I am also mindful of the competing interests from other Departments, particularly DEL. It is important to acknowledge today that, irrespective of the shape of the final settlement that education receives, responsibility for the allocation of that budget remains with the Minister. The Sinn Féin amendment appears to abrogate that responsibility and place it within the remit of the Executive. That does not appear to be a ringing endorsement of its Minister, but perhaps it has a point. The draft budget for education has demonstrated that the Minister has failed

to discharge his responsibilities, because he has broken a number of fundamental rules in its construction. He has produced a draft budget that has caused maximum concern in the school system.

Like most Members, over the last month I have been inundated with letters from schools regarding the implications for them of the current proposals. Over the past number of weeks, I have met principals throughout Northern Ireland. The group of 50 principals that I met in Ballymena last week and principals in my own constituency of Strangford and right across the Province are all saying the same thing. Many schools have contacted me to express their concern about the chaos that would result for them if the draft budget were implemented in its current form. The draft budget is an attack on the education service because it is an attack on the classroom.

Some have suggested to me that this is the Minister simply playing politics and creating mayhem and uproar in the system so that he has the possibility of getting more money in the final settlement. It is only the draft budget, and if other Members and Ministers are playing politics with street lighting and other public services, he would perhaps be doing a disservice to his Department if he did not play the game. If that is the case — and I am not saying that it is — it is a damning indictment of our departmental system that, in a time of austerity, we are playing on the vulnerabilities and fears of the population to score points against one another. Perhaps that is just politics, but surely there is a better way to manage difficult financial settlements than by playing on people's fears.

My major problem with the current draft budget and its proposals is that it has broken two golden rules that have always governed the budgetary process in education. First, it has departed from the basic rule of education budgets of protecting the classroom at all costs. The draft budget proposes to remove £78 million from the aggregated schools budget, which all departmental officials know will create chaos in the system. Furthermore, for the director of finance to come to the Education Committee and talk in a cavalier fashion about 2,500 redundancies — 1,500 non-teaching and 1,000 teaching — thereby ignoring collective agreements, periods of redundancy notices and the reality of the school year, which crosses two financial years, is theatrics of the worst type, and it really was not an Oscar-winning performance.

Let us stop this play-acting and agree that, whatever happens, we will protect the classroom as our first priority. That should be the Minister's first priority, and it is clearly something that he has failed to do in this draft budget. The basic building block for any school to function is that there are a sufficient number of teachers available to teach our children. If you produce a budget that will result in primary schools whose numbers are static losing five teachers, thereby destroying the ability of the school to function, that is incompetence of the worst kind. It is not the amount of money that is the problem but the manner in which the Budget allocation is being managed.

That brings me to the second golden rule and the final part of the motion. A well-planned education budget needs to not only protect the classroom but drive efficiencies in the system. Most of the concern being expressed by schools about the current draft budget has been generated by the impact on teaching staff. When you talk to governors and principals — and, as I said, I have already done that

over the last few weeks — they can give examples of efficiencies in the current system. There are always ways in which you can drive efficiencies within any bureaucratic system. I know that no one in the Assembly is suggesting otherwise, and that is why we should be cautious about ring-fencing any service in its totality.

Over the last number of years, Sinn Féin Ministers have been guilty of wasting lots of money on ill-thought-out, half-baked schemes such as the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), computer-based assessments, levels of progression, and taking various decisions that could be seen as pet projects across the Department and, of course, the school estate and that have not brought about an efficient use of public funds. However, I do not want to dwell too much on the Minister's past misdemeanours, as they have been well documented.

As Chair of the Committee, I have sought to encourage the current Minister onto paths of righteousness to put the service on a more positive and cost-effective footing. That is why I and my party worked with the Minister to smooth the passage of the new Education Authority through the Assembly.

We know that, from 1 April, it will be important to streamline the current administration of education if we are to achieve efficiencies that will help protect the classroom. One body, instead of five, will allocate the vast majority of the education budget resources, and that provides the Minister with a tremendous opportunity to reap efficiencies. Think of the cuts that he can now make in his Department: four fewer bodies for his officials to micromanage; only one letter to send instead of five; and no need to play divide-and-rule games between boards. Think of the reduction in the number of meetings with board officials. As Chair, I expect to see the plans to reduce staffing numbers in the Department in the coming months.

There is also an opportunity to streamline support services in the reorganisation of the new authority, and all that will ensure that the classroom can be protected. There is much talk about the new authority needing to appoint lots of staff because of the wind down of the boards over the past number of years. That is not my party's view, and I hope that the assurances that a previous deputy secretary gave to the Education Committee, that the current level of staffing of the five boards would be a ceiling for the new authority and not a baseline, will be honoured and improved upon. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape the support structures in favour of schools and pupils, and we must not waste that opportunity.

At present, only 59% of the budget finds its way to schools. In England, it is over 80%, and surely we have an opportunity to seriously review that situation. Principals with whom I have discussed the draft budget wish to have greater delegation to school level of services provided by the boards, and they continually mention to me aspects of the work of the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service and CCEA. The recent report by the Education Committee on the Education and Training Inspectorate and its role in school improvement has received widespread support in the system, yet the Minister and the Department appear unwilling to countenance any meaningful change. The new administrative arrangements provide us with an opportunity to develop a more cost-effective service in the interests of children, and we must grasp it.

My party wishes to see the freedom of management enjoyed by some schools rolled out to all schools. Most research on education budgets shows that the more that decision-making on funding is placed in the hands of schools, the more effective and efficient the spend. Our goal should be a system whereby local communities, groups and schools are charged with the responsibility of managing the majority of the education budget in the interests of children. Let us acknowledge that we live in challenging financial times, but let us agree to protect our classrooms and use the opportunity of the new authority to shape a service that supports and protects the classroom. Finally, let us empower schools, individually or through sharing, with the responsibility of managing that expenditure in the interests of our children and young people.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension, and 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. When we resume the debate after Question Time, the first Member to speak will be Mr Seán Rogers.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.28 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 (Mr Dallat): We will start with listed questions.

Visual Arts

1. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures she will take to protect the visual arts given the current context of financial austerity. (AQO 7304/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for her question. Before I begin, I want to wish everybody a happy new year.

I have consistently recognised the value of the arts, including the visual arts, and their role as a driver for the achievement of broader social and economic goals, such as social inclusion and cohesion, as well as urban regeneration, tourism, inward investment and employment, and the impact that the development of high added-value creative industries has on education and health. Therefore, I am deeply aware of the impact of the financial constraints that are being felt by the entire sector. However, I will continue to work closely with all our arm's-length bodies (ALBs) to seek to reduce the impact of the budget reductions as far as possible. Throughout the process, I will also continue to ensure that the available funding remains aligned to the Department's priorities of promoting equality, tackling poverty and enhancing social inclusion.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given the constraints, what proactive measures has her Department taken to assist the visual arts organisations with developing resilient business models so that they can demonstrate civic value and ensure future sustainability?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I understand that there is a debate under way in the sector, particularly on the issue of sustainable business models. However, I also accept the premise that it is all very well and good arguing about sustainable business models when you start with an even playing field; but not everyone in the arts is starting from that position. In fairness to the Arts Council, it has employed a dedicated member of staff to look at the available opportunities in Europe through the Creative Europe programme. Arts and Business has also been very proactive in terms of businesses.

Notwithstanding all that, we deeply appreciate the situation that some, if not most, of the groups in the arts sector face, and, when the discussions on budgets have concluded, we hope to minimise the worst impacts. I am happy enough that, even at this stage, some of the arts groups are looking at ways of providing their programmes and services collectively.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas fosta leis an Aire as ucht

a freagra agus as ucht a beannachta, agus, mar an gcéadna, guím athbhliain faoi mhaise uirthi agus tá súil agam go n-éiríonn go geal léi sa bhliain atá romhainn. I thank the Minister for her good wishes and wish her a happy new year and all the best for the year that lies ahead.

Tá ceist agam a ba mhaith liom a chur ar an Aire faoi thionchar na ngearrthacha ar na grúpaí éagsúla ealaíne anseo sa Tuaisceart. What assessment has the Minister made of the impact of the cuts to the arts sector on the various groupings within that sector? Does she feel that it is necessary to use an equality impact assessment (EQIA)?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Gabhaim buíochas leis as na beannachtaí. I also thank him for his good wishes. We conducted a high-level screening exercise and, on the basis of that, I have asked my senior officials — I am meeting them again tomorrow — to look at an equality impact assessment as well. I am sure that all the groups would argue that they will be impacted in some way or another, but some will be more marginalised than others as the result of any potential reductions in their budgets. I am taking that work forward and, hopefully, will have it concluded.

As the Member will be aware, the consultation on the draft Budget ended on 29 December. After going through those findings, using the screening exercise and conducting the full EQIA, I hope to be in a position to have a final budget settlement. We will then need to look at where we invest the money, which will also be a political decision.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Members, please note that questions 3 and 14 have been withdrawn.

Windsor Park/Olympia Leisure Centre

2. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the total investment by her Department and Belfast City Council in the redevelopment of Windsor Park and the adjacent Olympia leisure centre site. (AQO 7305/11-15)

11. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the redevelopment of Windsor Park. (AQO 7314/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: With the Deputy Speaker's permission, I will take questions 2 and 11 together. I thank the Member for his question.

The Windsor Park project is under construction, and work is progressing very well. Reconstruction of the pitch, which commenced in May 2014, was completed in August 2014. The demolition of the south stand is now complete, and construction of the new stand has started. Construction of the east stand started in September last year, and it is also progressing well. Provided significant delays with any unforeseen circumstances are avoided, the Windsor Park development can remain on programme, with completion of construction works planned for November this year.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the Minister for that answer. What progress has been made on the adjacent development on the Olympia leisure centre? I realise that that is in partnership with Belfast City Council, but does she have any indication now of a start date, a timeline and a

completion date, and what sort of project costs we are looking at?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The construction notice for the Olympia leisure centre programme has been secured, so that project will be launched in partnership with Belfast City Council later this month. I anticipate that the Member will receive an invitation to that, if he has not already had one.

As he knows, the project is a very exciting partnership between DCAL and Belfast City Council, in partnership with the IFA. The Olympia leisure centre project includes an investment of £2,750,000 — hundreds of thousands of pounds — from the IFA budget to this partnership with Belfast City Council. It should be completed around autumn 2016, but I do not yet have a definitive date.

This is the first of the partnerships that I anticipate with Belfast City Council on the stadia to be brought forward. When Belfast City Council is developing its leisure facilities, we are using the opportunity of capital development in my Department to make sure that not only are there seamless links but there is minimal disruption to local residents and enhanced opportunities for people living around the environment of the stadia.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I welcome this project and the collaboration and joined-up approach between Belfast City Council and DCAL in terms of economies of scale. Indeed, I welcome the approach that Linfield and the Irish Football Association have taken in the development of Windsor Park as a national stadium. In welcoming those announcements, what progress has been made with Linfield Football Club and Midgley Park in the overall context of the development of Windsor Park?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not have any details on Linfield Football Club. I anticipate that not only Linfield but many other clubs in the Irish League will present facilities strategies to the IFA for subregional development. However, the development of Windsor Park is in relation to Olympia. I do not have any details on any other developments, but I am happy to write to the Member about those.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister for her answers, and I look forward to seeing the completion of the project. Will she clarify the circumstances around stadia money and whether any of it gets handed back for distribution in the monitoring rounds?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Unfortunately, due to the fact that we could not secure permission to build and develop Casement Park as a result of the judicial review in December, we have had to return some money in the monitoring rounds. I anticipate that the Ulster Council of the GAA will submit a new planning application, and, if it is successful, the remainder of the money will be spent on developing Casement Park.

Fishing Licences

4. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the progress made on all-Ireland fishing licences. (AQO 7307/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. A scoping study funded by the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) was commissioned by the Loughs Agency, Inland Fisheries Ireland and DCAL to explore the possibility of implementing an e-licensing

project to meet the needs of anglers. The scoping study made recommendations for an all-Ireland e-licensing system and an online marketing platform to increase the efficiency of current sales, the efficiency of management and the processing of licensing.

A potential product arising from this work could be an all-Ireland e-licence for salmon and sea trout angling. The report provides a detailed analysis of the issues in setting out proposals for an all-Ireland licensing regime with the potential to purchase licences online. A business case has been commissioned to assess the most appropriate business and technical solution that is viable and aims to address issues of cost, benefits, risks, funding, affordability and other factors. It will also take into account the opportunity to integrate the inland fisheries group's current NI Direct IT project with a proposed all-Ireland solution.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. Perhaps she would keep us updated on any progress. Given the cross-border nature of the issue, could the Minister advise us of the current position on the investigation of the death of several hundred thousand eelers at the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) dam near Ballyshannon in the Erne system?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The fish kill in the ESB dam at Cathleen's Falls and Cliff in Ballyshannon last April was substantial. DCAL officials have been liaising with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) on the fish kill in view of its magnitude and in line with existing IFI policies. The IFI has referred the matter to its legal advisers. I am sure that the Member will appreciate that, in light of that, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on the ongoing investigation other than to state the facts of the fish kill. I would be happy to keep the Member updated on that.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister outline how costs and income from any such scheme would be divided between the two jurisdictions?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I certainly will. At the minute, there are three bodies involved in the commissioning exercise. My Department will be one of the bodies responsible, and, although it has yet to be fully tested and depends on the final outcome, I think it is the case that the three Departments and their associated bodies and agencies will have to work out a regime that makes it easier for people. The difficulty here is that we have 17 regimes for applying for a fishing licence, as opposed to one or two in the South. That is not fair on anglers, who want to fish in the waters and do not want to be caught out. We want to make sure that it is as simple and cheap as possible to get a licence.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister in her original answer talked about this as a marketing programme. Does she anticipate increasing the income from licences to make the fishing industry more sustainable? In other words, we would take the marketing income so that we could spread it more widely.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I know in my Department and from colleagues in other Departments that money accrued from angling is reinvested in stock, in the habitat for fishing and in fishing methods and conditions. That helps not only to sustain the environment but to provide a better outcome for anglers.

We have been working with colleagues in DETI, Tourism Ireland, DARD and the inland fisheries group in Ireland to ensure not only that we have a good, sustainable product for anglers but that money accrued is put back not only to help our fishing product but to sustain the environment, particularly for anglers.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I call Mr Jim Allister.

Mr Allister: On this question? My apologies. Does the Minister accept that any proposal to introduce an all-Ireland licence would require Executive approval?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Thus far, that has not been the case, as far as the findings in the business case are concerned. As with the many other pieces of work we conduct on an all-Ireland basis, all parties have agreed to look at ways to provide our goods and services in a much more efficient way. Since we are all bought into the all-Ireland institutions, this would be a matter, in the first instance, for an all-Ireland institution. I am surprised that the Member has asked the question, given that he has absolutely no interest.

Mr Swann: The Minister, in her previous answer, referred to a kill of elvers.

The Minister will know that I have written to her in regard to a fish kill in Portna. She promised me that the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute report would be published in December, but it still has not been issued. Will she give me an update as to when I can expect it?

2.15 pm

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not received the findings of that report, either. I reiterate the commitment: as soon as I receive those findings, I am happy to forward that correspondence to the Member. When I receive that, it will be forwarded to him soon after.

Strangford Lough: Leisure Access

5. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department is increasing access to Strangford lough for leisure activities. (AQO 7308/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Access to Strangford lough, including for leisure activities, is primarily the responsibility, as the Member will know, of DOE. That said, however, Sport NI has actively engaged with the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership, the local councils and sporting organisations that make use of the lough and its beautiful coastline. I am pleased that the coastline and marine environment around Strangford is being used extensively for a range of sporting and leisure activities, including sailing, fishing and canoeing. DCAL and Sport NI will continue to develop sport and leisure activity, including access around the lough, in a sustainable and responsible manner. My Department and Sport NI are working closely with the Department of the Environment and the NIEA, which are key partners in the implementation of the Sport Matters strategy for the Department.

Mr McCarthy: I am very grateful to the Minister for her response. I noted that she described the coastline as "beautiful". I hope that, in that regard, she thinks about the residents who live along the coastline. Will she put out any initiative to ensure that our precious asset of Strangford

lough can be used by all sporting organisations so that we can carry on with a good, healthy, outdoor lifestyle?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. He is right to make sure that we are all responsible. That is why I made use of the word "responsibility". The responsible use of the lough must be built in, because there are residents around our coastlines. The Member will be aware that, even through the work of the Lecale partnership and others, residents are heavily involved in that. That is the way it should be. DOE, NIEA and I have to ensure that, where local partnerships exist, they are part of any product in terms of services or goods in Strangford lough. It is important to be respectful of not only the environment but the residents who live around it.

Mr Nesbitt: I am sure that the Minister is aware of an entrepreneurial proposal for a trout fishery in Strangford lough, with Lough Cowey as a feeder site. Has the Minister formed an opinion of that? Is she in discussion with other Departments with regard to the feasibility of that project?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member needs to be aware that that is a question for his colleague Minister Kennedy, who has responsibility for reservoirs. We lease the fishing and angling rights from there, but reservoirs are within the gift of DRD —

Mr Nesbitt: It is not a reservoir.

Ms Ní Chuilín: It absolutely is. It is not within the remit of DCAL. If the Member did a bit more research, perhaps he would find that out.

Mr Humphrey: At the risk of being scolded, I return to sea trout. The CAL Committee visited Strangford lough a number of months ago, and it met groups lobbying for the development of sea trout fishing in the area for leisure pursuits. Will the Minister advise the House whether she has been in liaison with DETI, DARD and DRD about the development of sea trout fishing in Strangford lough to market Northern Ireland internationally and attract tourists to Northern Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member, as a member of the CAL Committee, will be aware that angling on the sea is the responsibility of DARD. It is not the responsibility of DCAL. He is also aware that salmon are described in legislation as sea trout and that, at the minute, there is a mandatory catch-and-release policy in relation to salmon and sea trout. I have not had any detailed discussions with my colleagues Arlene Foster or Michelle O'Neill on this, but I am happy to do so. Mr Nesbitt and you both asked about an update. I will furnish both Members with any details.

Arts Organisations: Financial Assistance

6. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any plans she has to assist arts organisations in being more financially sustainable. (AQO 7309/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist. I thank the Member very much for the question. I have consistently highlighted the benefits that arts bring to individuals, communities, society and the economy, and I have continually made the case in funding rounds that arts should be properly supported and funded. I recognise that the current financial climate presents significant difficulties for organisations across my Department and I am aware of the potential impact of budget reductions on the future

sustainability of arts organisations in the context of their ability to generate additional income. Decisions on how budget reductions are managed is a matter for the relevant board and its senior management. However, following the draft Budget consultation, which closed at the end of December, DCAL will work closely with, in this case the Arts Council, to minimise the impacts on jobs and front-line services where possible.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she examine how three-year budgeting and, perhaps, endowment programmes could be used to make the funding regime more sustainable in the longer term?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will, absolutely. The Arts Council did this with the annually funded programmes. Each year, the programmes had to apply and go through the different sets, which really meant that they had nine months of the year to get on with the work that they wanted to do. When the three-year budgeting process happened, it came with a lot of difficulties, but, now that it has been instituted and established, it makes it easier, particularly for the Arts Council. Where there are gaps in the budget that it receives from DCAL, it can, if it is minded and in a position to make bids, apply to me as a result of any monitoring rounds. So, I am looking at the way in which the Arts Council has organised the annually funded programmes, but this really affects only arts and sports councils that are grant-giving bodies. I am happy to look at it to see whether there is something else that we can do. At the end of the day, this is about making it easier for people to access funds in order to make it easier for them to deliver goods and services on our behalf.

Mr McCausland: Will the Minister ensure, then, that the issue of financial sustainability is incorporated into the new arts and culture strategy that her Department is about to develop? Since the issue affects those across the arts and cultural sector, will she ensure that the process of developing that strategy is inclusive of all cultural traditions in Northern Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: That is one of the key factors that we need to look at because we do not want a situation in which groups that are encouraged to apply for funding on the basis of need do not have the wherewithal or the technical support to comply with very strict guidelines and, sometimes, a very technical process. Some arts groups, for example, just want to get on with delivering arts. They are not accountants but they do their best in difficult circumstances. It certainly will be key to that. Arts funding for arts groups and cultural awareness groups is open to everyone, regardless of how they identify themselves. That will always be the case when we are running this Department.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Will she expand on what help is in place to assist arts organisations in the current financial climate?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I think that, in answer to an earlier question, I mentioned to Judith Cochrane that the Arts Council, in fairness to it, secured an additional dedicated member of staff in November last year, purely to manage the Creative Europe funding stream, and this is really helpful for groups that, in the past, in very difficult circumstances, have not had a great experience even

when trying to access information on support from Europe. This member of staff will work on a one-to-one basis with some of the arts and cultural awareness groups, helping them to complete applications and giving advice and guidance on procedures and eligibility. I think that this is really important. The groups have been asking for this for years, and the Arts Council delivered on that promise in November. Hopefully, not only this dedicated member of staff but other members of staff in different councils will help to give groups a better opportunity to apply for much-needed funds.

Mr Kinahan: I am really touching on a similar subject. As the cuts come through in the future, is the Minister putting in place training for those arm's-length bodies, including how to do better fiscal management, how to better business plan, how to fundraise and how to make the whole thing more efficient from a financial point of view?

Ms Ní Chuilín: We have asked the ALBs, and we will continue to scrutinise the way in which they help groups to do that. In fairness to the ALBs, over a period of years now, not only do they review the groups and look at their accountability and governance, but they have been very proactive in trying to help groups not only to do their returns in a better way but to do them in such a way that, at the same time, they gather up information that will help them with future funding applications. That is where you see the real tangible outcome. It is not all a process of putting in your forms and getting your returns done; there is actually an outcome that will help the groups in the long term.

Libraries NI: Job Losses

7. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many temporary staff in Libraries NI will lose their jobs as a result of budget cuts. (AQO 7310/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries employs nine temporary members of staff, all of whom are expected to remain in post for the duration of their contract. Libraries NI does not, therefore, anticipate that any will lose their job as a result of budget reductions. Indeed, Libraries will continue to work proactively and seek additional funding to extend the term of employment for some of those posts. That would allow work, for example, on the delivery of important health and well-being initiatives in the community to continue.

Despite the challenging financial environment, I remain committed to protecting the public library service as far as possible from the impact of budget reductions. I regard public libraries as a key front-line community service that needs to be maintained and sustained. I am delighted that the responses that my Department received on the draft Budget were strongly supportive and endorsed that position.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for that detailed answer and welcome what she has said. Is there any change in staffing planned in the libraries that got the self-service kiosks?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely not, as far as I am aware. Any additional services and support that went into libraries are about helping the customers, the clients, the people who use the libraries to access a better service. Those facilities have not been brought in to reduce staff. I know that there was some cynicism about it, but that has not been the case. If anything, it frees staff to do better one-to-one work

with groups and people who come in for health and well-being, education and support. My colleague John O'Dowd and I visited a library in Lurgan where we saw some of the after-school work that is done with schools, library staff, parents and community groups. That is a good result.

Mr I McCrea: When the draft Budget process was announced, Libraries NI started a process of reducing the opening hours of libraries. As part of the bilaterals that the Minister has had with the Finance Minister, has she bid for additional funding for libraries to try to give them additional money to at least re-look at opening hours and try to sustain the libraries, especially in rural areas?

Ms Ní Chuilín: It will come as no surprise to the Member that I am not going to give him details of the discussions that I have had with my ministerial colleague, particularly when I am asking for money for a lot of services across the DCAL family. However — as an example, because he raised it — I pointed out the good work that libraries have done and explained why I protected Libraries more than the other ALBs in the draft Budget because of the service that they provide.

It is important that we try to ensure that opening hours are not reduced, particularly in rural areas. I am acutely aware that, in many rural communities, libraries are probably the only community service that they have. We need to make sure that those libraries are used not just for borrowing books and accessing the internet but, like the example I gave Seán Rogers, for after-school and community use and for health, well-being and education initiatives. It is important that we keep them open as long as possible.

Mr Cree: The Minister will remember that she initiated a review of the permanent staff timetables in September in order to minimise any adverse service impact from the Budget cuts. Minister, have you completed that work yet, and will it be brought to the Committee for consideration?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have completed the majority of the work; there are still bits and pieces left to do. The work on the libraries is really about making sure that the staff we have, we can hold. In answer to Seán Rogers, that even includes temporary staff because they have already proved their worth and they are needed. When the draft Budget discussions have been concluded, we will focus on minimising any potential reduction in opening hours as much as possible to ensure that we have a full service and access to our libraries across the board.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to topical questions.

2.30 pm

Irish Language/Ulster-Scots Strategies

T1. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what the next steps are for the Irish language and Ulster-Scots strategies. (AQT 1921/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I aim to publish the strategies for the Irish language and Ulster Scots on the website by 30 January.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for her response. Can the Minister further advise what her plans are for bringing forward an Irish language Act?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. He will know that I have stated on previous occasions that I intend to bring forward a draft Irish language Act for consultation at the beginning of February, so people can see for themselves exactly what is involved in an Acht na Gaeilge — an Irish language Act. They can feed into the consultation and make their own mind up.

Eoghan Ruadh Hurling Club, Dungannon

T2. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on developments from Sport NI on facilities for the Eoghan Ruadh hurling club, Dungannon. (AQT 1922/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. I am aware of the Member's continued support for Eoghan Ruadh hurling club. She was there at at least one of the meetings that I had with the club, and I have responded to substantial correspondence from her on its behalf. Sport NI's small grants programme will close at the end of this month. I am not sure if Eoghan Ruadh has applied to that. At this stage, I can only ask if it has or not. The Member will appreciate that we need to wait until the conclusion of that grants process.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her response and for all the assistance that she has provided. Will the Minister agree to a meeting between the hurling club and Sport NI?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly. I have met many MLAs across all the parties on a range of issues, along with representatives of DCAL's ALBs, and I am happy to facilitate that meeting when it is appropriate.

Sign Language: Automatic Referral Programmes

T3. **Mr McKinney** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will agree to meet the Health Minister to discuss setting up automatic referral programmes for parents, carers and family members to learn sign language and other methods to improve engagement and interaction, given that it is to be welcomed that she has agreed to meet the Rogers family from Newtownabbey who, while noting their child's specific difficulties, have highlighted the lack of governmental services for the parents of children who are deaf. (AQT 1923/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I met the Rogers family yesterday. I just learnt of their situation on Friday when I watched the news at supper time, and I made contact with my officials and organised a meeting as quickly as possible. I was delighted to meet Emma Rogers and her baby son yesterday as a result of that. While I have a responsibility for providing money for sign language development, there is no framework or protocol for families. So I am happy to meet the Minister of Health, but rather than pass it from one Department to another, I will step up and take responsibility for it. I will pass it on to Health when appropriate and pass it on to Education thereafter.

Mr McKinney: In that context, can the Minister address how her Department is addressing inequality of arts provision for children who are deaf or have severe hearing difficulties?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not received any representation from anyone regarding the fact that children who are deaf or have hearing impairments have not accessed arts because of their disability. I am happy to try and get the Member details, but he will be aware that providing support for the arts, libraries and sports for people with disabilities has been one of my key priorities, and it will continue to be. If the Member has any specific details that he wants to bring to my attention, I will be happy to receive those.

Arts and Creativity: Funding Stream Priority

T4. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any funding stream priorities for arts and creativity, given the new financial regime under which she will have to manage her Department. (AQT 1924/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. He will know from his experience in this Department and certainly in the Health Department that, after each Budget and consultation process, you have decisions to make. Some are based on, for example, a technical process such as an equality impact assessment; others are based on where the gaps are. That is what I intend to do, and I have done that since coming into the Department. Most Members can see the direction of travel, but not everybody agrees with it. We will certainly prioritise those who have been furthest removed from services and people who have not had or enjoyed as much access to the Department's support as they should have.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the Minister for that answer. Does she agree that it is also important to attach priority to creative projects of major significance, such as film, the Lyric Theatre and the Ulster Orchestra?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely. Certainly, the arts, culture and the digital creative industries have helped to contribute to the economy and to regeneration. There have been opportunities from the very big to the very small. It is really important that we harness those opportunities, not only to sustain what we have but to try to get them additional money to ensure that they are economically viable for the future.

Foyle Valley Gateway Master Plan

T5. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the funding stream for the Foyle Valley gateway master plan in Derry, given that she will be well aware that it is one of the catalyst projects under the One Plan. (AQT 1925/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of the Member's ongoing interest in the project — in fact, he comes up with it up every time that I am on my feet. I anticipate discussions being progressed with Derry City Council. As the Member will be aware, the council has indicated that it intends to put in an application for the Brandywell stadium to the subregional stadium programme when it commences. I expect that as soon as the subregional money has been secured, which I anticipate will happen very soon, the Member will, along with members from Brandywell, Derry City Football Club and Derry City Council, be part of that delegation

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her answer and her ongoing

interest in the project. She mentioned the Brandywell football stadium. Has she had any indication of when that application process will commence?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member will be aware that there was an agreement in March 2011 to provide the three stadia, notwithstanding the fact that we are not there yet with Casement Park. Bear it in mind that the mandate was not extended, and it was anticipated that the money for the subregional stadia would become available in the next mandate. I have started the process by bringing together a team of experts in my Department to look at the subregional stadia. That will take place over the next couple of months. The process for application and how that can be accessed will be revealed soon after that. I will keep the Member updated.

Casement Park: Planning Application

T6. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she agrees that the management of the planning application for the redevelopment of Casement Park was handled in an incompetent manner. (AQT 1926/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: No, I do not agree.

Mr Dunne: That was a rather brief answer. I wonder whether you will treat the constituents of West Belfast in the same manner. Does the Minister agree that the GAA was just too demanding in trying to cram such a high-volume stadium into a high-density residential area?

Ms Ní Chuilín: No, I do not agree.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I remind Members to confine themselves to asking questions rather than offering opinions, please. I call Mr Pat Sheehan.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat. Ceist uimhir a naoi. *[Interruption.]* Is it the supplementary? Gabh mo leithscéal. I beg your pardon, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was not prepared for the question, so I think it better that I just sit down again.

Stadia Development: Community Buy-in

T8. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the buy-in from community groups to the three stadia. (AQT 1928/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member will be aware that there has been good engagement, albeit at different levels and at different stages, with residents and community groups on the development of facilities on the Cregagh estate and at Windsor Park for rugby and soccer respectively. I hope that that will continue. The redevelopment of Casement Park has gone beyond the current residents group. I have received a substantial number of requests to meet a number of residents and community groups in the vicinity in west Belfast and, indeed, the greater west Belfast area. I will be doing that in the near future. However, notwithstanding that, I appreciate that big developments cannot happen without the inclusion and the support of the local communities that they surround.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for her answer. She mentioned the Cregagh area, particularly the Ravenhill Kingspan stadium. I promised the residents that I would do this, so let me say to her that they have had considerable cooperation from officials of her Department, and they

appreciate that. However, can she give me an assurance that any final matters that need to be tied up will be tied up as soon as possible?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely, and I will continue to give the commitment to Mr Spratt that not only will that relationship, with accountability and transparency, continue, but I hope that, even well after the completion of the education centre at Ravenhill/Kingspan, the relationship will not end there and that it will be a long-term relationship. They are neighbours, and they need to be good neighbours, and I will ensure that that happens well after I leave this Department and with anyone else who comes into it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Mr David McIlveen is not in his place.

Film Industry: Budget Cuts

T10. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what communication she has had with those people heading up the campaign against the budget cuts to the film industry and what her views are of the cuts and their impact on the Northern Ireland economy. (AQT 1930/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member will be aware that the response time for the draft Budget closed on 29 December. It should be no surprise to her to learn that, of the almost 10,000 responses that I got, almost 3,000 were about arts, and the majority of those were on NI Screen and any potential cuts to or impacts on delivery for those groups. I am looking at those, but just to give the Member some reassurance, I appreciate the work that groups like Cinemagic and many others do. I want to try to ensure that the worst impacts of the Budget are reduced for groups like that.

Mrs D Kelly: I appreciate the Minister's concerns. Have you had any communication with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on the economic boost that the creative industries bring to Northern Ireland? Is there a recognition of that in the Programme for Government commitment for the year ahead?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have ongoing discussions with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and we have a very good relationship, particularly when it comes to looking at NI Screen and the whole creative industries sector. We are all waiting to see what the outcome of the draft Budget and the settlement will be, and as soon as that Budget settlement has occurred, I anticipate further discussions about the impacts not only with Minister Foster but other Ministers.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): As the next period for Question Time does not begin until 2.45 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. In a moment of reflection, could I appeal to those Members who are talking from a sedentary position to stop doing so?

2.45 pm

Education

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): We now move to questions to the Minister of Education. I inform Members that questions 4 and 11 have been withdrawn.

Education Budget

1. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact of the reductions to the aggregated schools budget on schools in mid-Ulster. (AQO 7319/11-15)

2. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Education to outline the impact the draft education budget will have on the ability of schools to continue to deliver high-quality education. (AQO 7320/11-15)

3. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Education how he proposes to protect the quality of educational provision in the classroom while making cuts to the aggregated schools budget. (AQO 7321/11-15)

6. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Education to outline the efforts he has made to defend front-line services in light of the proposed budget cuts. (AQO 7324/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 1, 2, 3 and 6 together.

My Department's draft 2015-16 resource budget outcome has resulted in a funding gap of £162.5 million, which represents an 8.4% reduction from the 2014-15 baseline. Clearly, achieving reductions of that scale within one year is extremely challenging, and maintaining all core services at current levels is simply not deliverable.

In reaching my decisions on the proposed budget reductions and the inescapable pressures to be funded, I have focused on protecting front-line services as far as possible. Hence, the reduction to the aggregated schools budget (ASB) is 7%, not 8.4%, and that reduces further to 6% when the additional £10 million of funding for targeting social need, which I propose to allocate next year, is included. Unfortunately, as the aggregated schools budget represents 59% of the total education budget, it has simply not been possible to protect it fully from reductions. I recognised that early communication was vital, which is why letters were issued to all schools on 2 December providing the indicative aggregated schools budget and illustrative per pupil funding values for next year.

Our focus — my focus — remains on raising standards and improving outcomes. However, the situation is clearly very difficult. That is why I will endeavour to do all that I can to make the case for increased investment in education as part of the final 2015-16 Budget negotiations.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for that response. Since the proposals were announced, I have been inundated with contact from schools in mid-Ulster, explaining how these cuts will have such a dramatic effect on education in the area. The Minister needs to recognise that this cut means mass redundancies, larger class numbers, less special needs provision and a poorer quality environment for education. As he said, the ASB amounts to 59% of the Department's budget. Does he not recognise that he must look for efficiencies in the other 41% of his budget?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for that supplementary question. However, if I were to look for £162 million in the remaining 41% of the budget, the Member would be asking me questions about why the boards were facing such a dramatic reduction in their services. Those services include transport, special educational needs provision, free school meals entitlement, school meals, youth

services, Sure Start, which would face a greater reduction than it currently does — the list goes on.

There is no easy answer to the difficulties facing the education budget. I have endeavoured to maintain the schools budget to the best level that I can. I am working and engaging with the Finance Minister on the final Budget outcome. I hope to be able to secure additional funds for education, and, if I do, the majority of that will go into schools.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat. Does the Minister agree that, for education to succeed in the classroom, it is also important to invest outside the classroom in areas such as extended schools and youth services?

Mr O'Dowd: Without a doubt. Before the lunch break and after Question Time, we began and will continue the debate supported by some Members on education funding. I think that the mistake and the flaw in the motion is that it simply concentrates on schools. Eighty per cent of a child's learning takes place outside school. The socio-economic background of a child impacts on educational outcomes in school, so we have to deal with all aspects of a child's life and all aspects of how a child or young person engages in education. Simply focusing on funding for schools will not make for a successful education system, and we are an education system rather than simply a schools-based education system.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his detailed reply. I hear what he says, but, if he looks at the situation in most schools, he will see that 90% of their money goes on staffing, and 10% is left for other things. Given the severity of the cuts, how can schools reasonably avoid cuts in their staffing levels? It is absolutely impossible, Minister. I ask you to respond to that.

Mr O'Dowd: I have never suggested that schools will not face reductions in numbers of staff, whether teachers or support staff. My officials have been open and frank about that from day one, and one of them was referred to at the Education Committee as being cavalier, which I think was unfair. My officials and I have been up front from day one, saying that the education budget will result in a significant number of losses of teachers, support staff and other staff from the boards and other support organisations as well.

As I said, the only solution — or rather, the long-term solution to our problem — is a change of Government in Westminster to one that has an economic policy that meets the needs of all citizens rather than those of the corporate businesses that operate out of the south of England. However, the short-term solution to our problem in education is that it receives an uplift as a result of the final Budget outcome. I can assure Members that the majority of any uplift that I receive will go into schools.

Mr McGlone: Further to that, can we have some detail on the projects that the Minister intends to deliver in the constituency, particularly the capital projects?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not sure how that relates to this question. Mr McGlone may be referring to a later question and I will be happy to respond at that stage.

Mr McGlone: Right, OK.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Minister confirm that he is proposing a 100% reduction to the budget for community relations, equality and diversity (CRED) in education for 2015? What impact does he think that will have on schools' ability to

contribute to improved community relations in Northern Ireland?

Mr O'Dowd: As the result of an extremely difficult Budget, I am having to look at alternative ways in which services might be delivered. We are looking at a significant investment in shared education programmes over the next number of years. Up to £25 million will be delivered across shared education programmes. I hope that the CRED policy could be delivered through the shared education programme. However, as a result of the equality screening of the Budget, one of the areas that has been flagged up for full equality screening has been my proposal to fully remove the CRED funding. I am taking a particularly detailed look at that proposal and will make a final judgement on it, based on all the evidence, including the equality screening, when I announce the Department's final budget.

Anti-bullying Legislation

5. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Education when he plans to introduce anti-bullying legislation. (AQO 7323/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In 2013, at my request, the NI Anti-Bullying Forum undertook a review of anti-bullying legislation, guidance and practice. The review made a number of recommendations that are being taken forward as part of an agreed joint work programme for DE and the forum. It highlighted the need for greater consistency in how all schools are tackling the issue. We know that some schools are making considerable efforts in that regard, but the review noted wide variations in the anti-bullying policies and procedures of individual schools and a lack of detailed information on the true scale and nature of the problem across all schools.

A key recommendation was, therefore, to bring forward legislation to address those weaknesses and help ensure that all schools understand and are using best practice to tackle bullying and support pupils. For that reason, on 23 June 2014, I announced my intention to introduce new anti-bullying legislation in the current Assembly mandate. A public consultation was launched on 5 January 2015 and will run until 27 February. Following that, it is my intention to introduce a Bill to the Assembly in May 2015.

This is a challenging timescale but one that I and my officials are working hard to meet.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he please outline the scope of the proposed legislation in schools? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr O'Dowd: The proposed legislation will provide a common definition of bullying; require all schools to centrally record incidents of bullying, their motivation and their outcome; and require boards of governors to identify and designate one or more members to be responsible for anti-bullying policies and processes in the school.

Mrs D Kelly: How can the Minister ensure consistency of application across different schools? I am sure that you are aware that, in your constituency, different boards of governors apply the current policies and procedures on a much different basis than you and I would understand. Will there be supplementary guidance notes to the legislation to explain how it should be applied?

Mr O'Dowd: One of the reasons why I asked for the review of our current policies was that, as a constituency MLA and, indeed, as a Minister, I have regular reports of concerns by parents and pupils about how bullying cases are dealt with in schools. We hear some harrowing stories. There are also many, many fine examples of where schools have acted appropriately and in the best interests of all involved in the bullying cases, sought resolution and helped all the young people involved. However, I think it is important that we bring forward the legislation. The legislation will define what incidents should be recorded, how they should be recorded and how policies should be outlined. Supplementary guidance etc will be provided to schools to ensure that everyone is familiar with and trained in how anti-bullying legislation should be implemented in schools.

Mr Beggs: I welcome the consultation on anti-bullying legislation to protect our children and young people. However, does the Minister not find it rather ironic that he as Sinn Féin Minister is leading this, given that, of recent times, his party supporters and, indeed, some of its elected representatives have been involved in the cyberbullying of Ann Travers and Máiría Cahill, not to mention his party's history of actual physical violence?

Mr O'Dowd: I think the Member belittles himself by making that comment. The Member is steeped in education; he knows education as well as I or many other Members in the Chamber do. He could come forward in this debate with a much more informed question or intervention than he just has. I do not know if it was your party management or who it was who put that question in front of you, but you should have had more sense than to read it out.

Mr McCausland: Cyberbullying has been highlighted quite a lot in the press in recent days. Will the Minister tell us what ideas are being considered in order to give schools some guidance in dealing with that?

Mr O'Dowd: The definition of bullying will include reference to cyberbullying. However, we also work with the Health Department, which is preparing more detailed information on it. The Department has also endorsed proposals by the Health Department for the Safeguarding Board here to develop an e-safety strategy. We expect that work to include consideration of cyberbullying in all forms and settings. We will want to work with it to ensure that our work and that of the forum is informed by and aligned with the safety board. So, we are working with other Departments in relation to the matter. The definition, which I hope to bring forward in legislation, will also cover the use of cyberbullying.

Schools: Mid Ulster

7. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the capital projects being considered for schools in Mid Ulster. (AQO 7325/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my January 2013 capital programme, three schools in Mid Ulster were announced to advance in planning. They are Holy Trinity College, Cookstown; Gaelscoil Ui Neill, Coalisland; and Edendork Primary School, Dungannon.

A development proposal (DP) to increase the approved enrolment at Holy Trinity College, Cookstown has been submitted to my Department for consideration. The economic appraisal (EA) for the new school cannot be

completed until a decision on the DP has been made. Work on that project is progressing in parallel with the DP process, with regular project meetings taking place to ensure momentum is maintained.

The EA for Gaelscoil Ui Neill has recently been submitted to my Department for consideration. The project will progress to the design stage when the EA has been approved.

Work is ongoing to appoint a design team to Edendork Primary School. When that has been completed, work will commence on the feasibility study and the business case for the new school build.

In February 2014, four schools in Mid Ulster were included in the school enhancement programme. They were Rainey Endowed, Magherafelt; Anahorish Primary School, Toomebridge; St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt; and St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore. Site work on the Rainey project commenced in September 2014, with the project estimated to be completed in January 2016. Design work for the other three projects is at an advanced stage.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister will not be surprised to hear that I will ask him a question in respect of the Rainey Endowed. As the Minister will know, not only from his visit but, no doubt, from discussions in his Department, the Rainey Endowed has been in the system for quite some time. I accept that the schools enhancement programme funding will help the school at least to address some of the difficulties, but will the Minister give an assurance that he will do what he can to find the funding to try to ensure that a new build is given to the school?

3.00 pm

Mr O'Dowd: All applications for new builds will be considered and the merits of each measured against the process at that time. Rainey Endowed has been successful in the schools enhancement programme. Work has commenced. I had a brief conversation about the works on the fringes of another meeting with the principal. He has invited me to the school to take a look at how work has advanced and, no doubt, to lobby me about other investment as well, as is his right. I look forward to undertaking that visit. I will listen to your concerns and those of the school about the fabric of the school, and we will do everything in our power to advance capital builds in that school and many others across the North that are deserving of new builds.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra chuimsitheach sin. Thanks very much to the Minister for his comprehensive statement. I also place on record my thanks to his officials for their help, particularly with St Joseph's in Donaghmore and the Rainey Endowed in Magherafelt. I have to put on record that they have been very efficient.

He mentioned Edendork earlier, but can the Minister give us some indication as to progress being made with Holy Family Primary School in Magherafelt?

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware that Holy Family Primary School has been seeking a new build for a considerable number of years. However, I cannot match the number of schools that are deserving of a new build with the capital project

that I have. I have had to bring in a scoring matrix to try to provide fairness throughout the system. I have put all the proposals for new builds through that scoring matrix, and I have provided for new builds for those that score highest and against which I can match money. That does not mean that other schools are not deserving of a new build. It simply means that I do not have the required capital at this stage to build them, but I continue to seek further funds from all quarters for building programmes for our schools. Hopefully, through time, that school will be successful as well.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for the detail. He mentioned the capital project for Holy Trinity in Cookstown. Can he provide updates on the development plan in the area and on how the growth of that school might impact on other schools in the area? Will the Minister acknowledge any area-planning difficulties there as a result of the changes to the area covered by the board?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for her question. As with any development proposal, particularly one involving a significant change in school character or enrolment numbers, there will be different views among key stakeholders in the area. I have received representations from both sides of the argument about the DP. I will make my decision in due course, taking on board all the relevant information that has been provided to me in the meetings in which I have engaged on the matter. I assure the Member that, when I reach a decision, it will be based on all information that has been brought to my attention.

Education: Funding Cuts

8. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Education for an update on funding cuts within education. (AQO 7326/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Following an intensive process, I published a detailed draft budget for 2015-16 consultation document on Wednesday 26 November 2014. In reaching my decisions on the inescapable pressures to be funded and my proposed reductions, I focused on protecting front-line services as far as possible, promoting equality and raising education standards. I secured the contribution of specific programmes that reflect the Department's statutory responsibilities. I continue to tackle social disadvantage and ensured that support for children with special educational needs is prioritised as much as possible. I have no further update to give other than to say that I will endeavour to do all that I can to make the case for increased investment in education as part of the 2015-16 final Budget negotiations.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his answer. Clearly, and as other MLAs have said, there have been strong representations from local schools about concerns and fears. How is the situation being communicated to educationalists, unions etc?

Mr O'Dowd: I met the unions early in the process and outlined to them in stark terms the possible implications of the education budget. They responded in a very robust manner in defence of education and their members. As you will be aware, they have been holding a number of well-attended public meetings across the North, outlining to teachers, parents, politicians and communities what the implications of the draft budget will be if there is no significant change to it.

As I said in an earlier answer, we have corresponded with all schools and set out indicative budgets for them. Schools have been responding, as have the education and library boards in relation to how they feel the budget will impact upon them. To date, the education budget consultation has received 21,000 responses, so there has been quite a healthy and robust exchange of views in relation to the draft education budget.

Mr Rogers: Previously, Minister, small schools had some budgetary protection, but, in this draft budget, smaller rural schools will be adversely affected. How do you intend to address this issue?

Mr O'Dowd: The draft budget I have published has not made any comment in relation to the small schools element of the aggregated schools budget. That small schools budget continues into the future unless there is a consultation to change it.

Mr Allister: In pursuit of his austerity cuts, has the Minister given any thought to the dramatic impact on a school that has made a two-year commitment to deliver a course to parents and pupils but is suddenly told that, on foot of cuts as savage as this, it has to make huge savings that could result in the withdrawal of that course offer or the withdrawal of the staff to teach it? Has he thought through the long-term consequences of these severe cuts that he is proposing?

Mr O'Dowd: I am glad that comrade Jim has now joined the fight against austerity measures.

Mr Allister: You are the Minister of austerity.

Mr O'Dowd: You are very welcome, if not very, very, very, very late to the cause. *[Interruption.]* It is always good to have a new comrade on board. *[Laughter.]* In relation to your question, I am acutely aware of the pressures being placed on our education system by the Budget we now face. Our education system in its totality, whether it be schools, youth services, extended schools, breakfast clubs, free school meals entitlement — all those things that go to make an education system — is under pressure.

I am engaging with my Executive colleagues and the Finance Minister on a way forward. No doubt, like every other Minister, I have scrutinised all the changes that have happened since the draft Budget was announced, including the autumn statement, which was made by the Westminster Government and which saw around £70 million in Barnett consequentials come this way. We are looking at other areas, including the £30 million change fund which was in the draft Budget; I made applications to that as well. We are also looking at other areas as a consequence of the Stormont House Agreement, which the Member was opposed to before the ink dried on the page. I am looking at all areas for additional funding for education, and I hope that the Member, comrade Jim, supports me in that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. I caution Members to address people by their proper names. I would also suggest that the Minister should make his remarks through the Chair. Finally, I ask Mr Allister not to make remarks from a sedentary position.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. He has said that there have been tens of thousands of responses to the consultation. Perhaps he would outline what types of responses these were.

Mr O'Dowd: Many have been reflected in the Chamber this afternoon, during Question Time and in the ongoing debate on education funding. Members of the public, teachers, parents and pupils are significantly concerned about the impact on schools. I have had representations from Youth Service, youth workers and people who use youth services. I have had contacts and representations from Sure Start projects that are concerned, and I have had representations in relation to the CRED policy, which was mentioned earlier. Across the whole gamut of educational services, members of the public and users of those services have responded, and we are now going through those in detail.

As I said, I will take into account the comments of MLAs in today's debate before I make any final decision in relation to my budget. I hope that, with fingers crossed, there is an uplift for the education budget. I recognise the pressure on schools; a significant amount of money will go to schools but there are other services that require an uplift as well.

Mr Cree: The Minister will know that special needs are a non-core issue. Despite that, Minister, have you any plans to protect special needs children in schools despite the budget cuts?

Mr O'Dowd: In relation to my budget, I have recognised at least £10 million of pressures from our education boards in 2014-15, which we managed to cover. I have included that in my estimates for 2015-16, so there is a reflection of that in the budget. One of the pressures on my budget has been the diversion of £10 million towards the boards for special educational needs. However, that may not be enough. There are rising special educational needs requirements, applications for special educational needs and identification of special educational needs that bring with them additional costs. We may have to identify further funds in the 2015-16 financial year for special educational needs as well.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Mr Steven Agnew is not in his place.

Irish Language: Development

10. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Education, with the granting of the development proposal for the Irish-medium post-primary school in Dungiven, what benefits does the Minister believe this will have for the development of the Irish language. (AQO 7328/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not have responsibility for the development of the Irish language. That is the responsibility of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. However, in my statement to the Assembly on 4 November, I outlined a vision for the strategic development of Irish-medium education based on creating educationally sound post-primary provision that enhances the significant benefit provided through the medium of the Irish language. The granting of the development proposal for a school in Dungiven will assist in filling a gap in the strategic development of Irish-medium post-primary provision. In particular, the pupils will benefit from a total immersion experience in the Irish language through formal instruction in all curricular areas and socially in corridors, dining halls, libraries etc. The development of the Irish language in the area will also benefit from the fact that there will be a shared, whole-school community identity, ethos and

culture and a shared understanding of the philosophy of Irish-medium education.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I welcome the decision. Now that the development proposals have been passed, what are the next steps?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. I thank the Member for the question. Officials from my Department met school representatives on 18 December 2014 to discuss the infrastructure needs of the schools. There are steps that need to be taken in relation to the business case process to procure the site and accommodation. In relation to the site, the next step is to complete a feasibility study. In relation to procurement of accommodation, a schedule of accommodation needs to be finalised prior to the completion and approval of the business case. It is anticipated that a further meeting will take place towards the end of this month to discuss progress on all these matters.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire fosta as ucht a fhreagra. Is í an cheist a ba mhaith liomsa a chur air ná an bhfeictear don Aire go bhfuil féidearthachtaí eile ann maidir le forbairt na gaelscolaíochta iar-bhunoideachais. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he see any further potential for the development of Irish-medium education at post-primary level?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. As I outlined in my statement in November when I was launching the report by the advisory group, we are seeing a growth in bunscoileanna and pupils attending primary schools in the Irish-medium sector. That is a matter of fact, and as a result of that we will see an increase in demand for post-primary provision.

I am expecting development proposals to come in from other areas, and they will be treated as any other development proposals. As I mentioned in response to a previous question, there are always those who are for or against in any debate around a development proposal, its impact on an area and its possibility for success, but I will make decisions based on the evidence before me and in the best interests of all the pupils involved.

Mr G Robinson: What additional capital investment is going into other post-primary schools in the Limavady and Dungiven area?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Minister, can you be brief?

Mr O'Dowd: I will be very brief. I do not have the information in front of me, but I am happy to supply it to the Member.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): That ends the period for listed questions, so we now move on to topical questions.

3.15 pm

Education Opportunities: Stormont House Agreement

T1. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Education what opportunities the recent Stormont House Agreement will create for his Department. (AQT 1931/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The political stability provided by the Stormont House Agreement is an advantage to our entire society and allows politicians to concentrate on the delivery of public services in a very difficult financial climate. As a result of the Stormont House Agreement and a united approach by the political parties in the Stormont House discussions, we have managed to secure additional funding for use by the Executive. In particular, I highlight again the £500 million that has been set aside over 10 years for capital investment in shared education and integrated education projects.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Minister for his reply. How can the shared education process benefit from the recent agreement? Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr O'Dowd: The Member will be aware from previous answers during this session that I have launched a shared education policy and shared education legislation, which I have put out for consultation and which I propose to bring before the House. That will put in legislation the definition of shared education, which will allow the Education Authority, which already has a duty in relation to the facilitation and promotion of shared education, to carry out its work. We have funds to literally build on that work and build facilities in relation to shared education campuses and shared education facilities for schools. We have significant investment here for both integrated and shared education going into the future.

School Curriculum

T2. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Education what steps he has taken to adjust the school curriculum to prepare pupils for the pattern of employment likely to exist in 10 years' time. (AQT 1932/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Flexibility is built into our curriculum to allow schools to adapt and respond to the varying challenges in society and in the economy. I accept that it is difficult to forecast what jobs are likely to be available in 10 years' time. Ten years ago, many of the jobs that are now available were unheard of in terms of the skills and the background required. However, we can make a reasonably firm prediction — I said this at the recent BT Young Scientist competition in Dublin — that, if you have a firm bedding of STEM subjects, you have an opportunity to adapt in the future in whatever career pathways you choose or whatever career pathways may open up.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister thus far. Recent Oxford University research shows that half of all occupations existing today will be redundant by 2025. What advice has the Minister sought on that matter, and what action does he propose to take?

Mr O'Dowd: As I have said, our revised curriculum allows for adaptation, both on a skills and an academic base, to prepare young people for the future. The emphasis of the Executive and the collaborative work between me and the Minister for Employment and Learning have raised the profile of the STEM subjects as never before. I encourage any young person who is looking at educational pathways to embed themselves in the STEM subjects. If you embed yourself in the STEM subjects, you are adaptable and have the skills base that current employers are looking for and which future employers will look for.

I was recently asked when I would review the curriculum. I do not believe that the time is right to review the curriculum, but one of the early tasks in the portfolio of the next Education Minister, whoever it may be, will be to review the curriculum to ensure that it is still flexible and adaptable to changes in the economy.

Literacy Interventions: Support

T3. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Education what support he is giving to early literacy interventions. (AQT 1933/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The best support that we can give is through our investment in early years and in preschool places for all pupils and parents who want them and embed literacy in the pupils there. I have also launched an advertising campaign. The first two years of that concentrated on the home and the simple practice of parents, grandparents and guardians reading stories to their children at bedtime, counting with them in different scenarios and making that aspect of learning fun and enjoyable. I would like to have further funds to invest in projects, but, as has been debated widely here in the last 45 minutes, the education budget is restricted. However, there are ways in which parents and guardians can encourage their children to read and count from a very early age.

Mrs Cameron: Thank you for that response, Minister. I have to say that I was very disappointed to discover that Booktrust is having 100% of its funding removed in the draft budget, given the excellent work that it does and, as you outlined, the importance of parents and grandparents reading to their children. There is research to show that all children do better at school if their parents read to them. Given the tremendous work that Booktrust does, will the Minister reconsider the removal of 100% of its funding?

Mr O'Dowd: It is difficult to make decisions in relation to aspects of the budget. These are not significantly large budget lines, so I ask myself this question: if I cut it by 10% or 15%, will that have an impact that will make it undeliverable, so should I just cut the whole budget and go down that road? I am going to reconsider Bookstart. I cannot make any promises at this time. It will depend on the final budget settlement. I am aware, as I was when I signed off on it, that there will be concern about that matter; I had concerns about it myself. I will revisit it.

Education Budget: Breakdown and Priorities

T4. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Education who sets the priorities in the breakdown of the Education budget and decides where money will be spent and what input he has in that. (AQT 1934/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have full input and take full responsibility for it. At the end of the day, it is the Minister's responsibility to set the priorities in his Department and then match his budget against those priorities as best he can.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. In a previous answer, he alluded to the fact that 80% of education time is not necessarily in the classroom. I appreciate that other areas were identified where spend is made. When did it become a statutory duty of the Department of Education to provide breakfast? That should be the parents' responsibility.

Mr O'Dowd: I suspect that the majority if not all of the parents in this room are responsible enough and have the wherewithal and finances to do that and have had the experience in their own life to know to do that. However, unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world. It is not a statutory obligation of the Department of Education to carry out a significant number of functions that we carry out, but, when the evidence shows that funding initiatives outside the classroom benefits teaching inside the classroom, it is only right and proper that we do that. The 80% of learning outside the classroom may not be in a formal setting. It may be through the experiences of the child in the family home, which can be positive or negative. It may also be their experiences in the local sports club, youth centre, church group, Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade, scouts or whatever. All those things play a part in enabling a young person or a child to fulfil their potential.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I inform Members that questions 5 and 8 have been withdrawn.

Primary-school Places: South Belfast/ Carryduff

T6. **Mr Ó Muilleoir** asked the Minister of Education what steps, in conjunction with CCMS, his Department can take to ease the considerable pressures on primary-school places in South Belfast and Carryduff. (AQT 1936/11-15)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur ar an Aire maidir le cúrsaí oideachais i nDeisceart Bhéal Feirste.

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. I thank the Member for the question. The Member will be aware that I approved for September 2013 an increase in the number of pupils attending St Ita's primary school in Carryduff. That was as the result of a development proposal that came forward from CCMS. I am aware that there is concern, particularly in that area of the South Belfast constituency, that numbers are growing and need will not be met. If CCMS believes that to be the case, it has a statutory responsibility to bring forward proposals that will ensure that, moving forward, there will be education places for all children who require them.

I think that you are on the border of the Belfast Education and Library Board and the SEELB, so the two boards, working together, will have to put forward proposals if they believe that there is a requirement for an increase in numbers. The Education Authority will also have to do that in the future. Most likely, the Member is aware that I have improved the enrolment of Millennium Integrated Primary School, Carryduff and that there is also a development proposal with my Department to increase the enrolment at Forge Integrated Primary School in south Belfast. I have not yet made a decision on that.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas fosta leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Will the Minister continue to monitor that? There are really positive things happening. I suppose that we would call that outer south Belfast or Carryduff. It is a beacon, I think, for the way in which we would like communities to develop, and it is really important that there are enough primary-school places to let that community prosper.

Mr O'Dowd: I will continue to monitor the situation, and, through area planning, there is an ideal opportunity for all

the sectors to work together to plan a sustainable schools estate in Carryduff, south Belfast or, indeed, across the entire North. I am aware of the concerns. They have been raised previously by members of the public and elected representatives, and I will again raise the matter with the authorities responsible — the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and, in this case, the two boards — to ensure that they have plans afoot to deal with those matters.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Mr Gerry Kelly is not in his place.

Youth Service

T9. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Education, following his references throughout Question Time to the impact of budget cuts on schools, for his assessment of the Youth Service, which makes an important contribution to assistance with social and post-educational problems in the inner-city areas of the North Belfast constituency. (AQT 1939/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My assessment of the Youth Service is that it is an integral part of our education system. It is succeeding in creating and delivering opportunities for young people to improve and change their lives dramatically, particularly in areas of high social deprivation. During my time as Minister, I have increased funding to youth services. It was, however, with a heavy heart that I was in a position to reduce funding as part of the draft budget. It is one of the areas that I am monitoring in relation to any uplift in budgets for the education system. If I receive that uplift, I will endeavour to give Youth Service some of the money back because, as I said earlier, it is an integral part of our education system.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his response. Can he assure the Assembly that, when it comes to the reallocation of funding for the Youth Service, he will pay particular attention to inner city areas where its beneficial effect is most felt?

Mr O'Dowd: In the past, I have delegated funding to boards for youth services on the basis that they are used in areas of social deprivation. I keep that situation under review, and, regardless of the outcome of the final budget, I will still insist that any uplift that was given previously is used in areas of social deprivation. In the final budget, I want to be in a position to correct some of the £3 million that has been lost to various youth organisations and youth services as a result of the draft budget, and I will expect that money to be directed to where it is most needed.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Time is up.

Mr Craig: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, I owe you an apology because I did not realise that questions 1 and 6 on the list were grouped. It is entirely my fault for not reading the email. I therefore apologise to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Your apology is accepted.

Private Members' Business

Education Funding

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly acknowledges the challenging financial environment in which education will operate in 2015-16 and the widespread concern amongst schools regarding the implications for the classroom of the Department of Education's draft budget; recognises that, from 1 April 2015, there will be a single Education Authority in place of the five education and library boards to oversee the allocation of the majority of the education budget; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that protecting the classroom is his first priority, that he uses the new administrative arrangements to achieve greater efficiencies within support services and, in so doing, devolves the maximum amount of the available budget to school level.

Mr Rogers: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after "operate" and insert

"from 1 April 2015 and the widespread concern amongst schools regarding the implications for the classroom of the Department of Education's draft budget; recognises that from 1 April 2015 there will be a single Education Authority in place of the five education and library boards to oversee the allocation of the majority of the education budget; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that protecting classroom practice is his first priority and to use the new administrative arrangements to devolve maximum budget autonomy to schools that have demonstrated sound financial management skills in order to achieve the best possible educational outcomes whilst ensuring value for money."

I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate that was tabled by the Members opposite. I particularly welcome the opportunity to speak on amendment No 1, which has been tabled by the SDLP.

3.30 pm

Our schools have been subject to increasing budgetary pressures and substantial reductions in grant aid over the past number of years. First, I wish to commend the staff and parents who have supported our young people at a time when schools have been pushed to the limits. I have seen their tireless support first-hand, and it really is invaluable. Unfortunately, that support has not been reflected in the Department of Education's funding to schools, which has fallen by 4.2% in real terms between 2010-11 and 2014-15, while there has been a 3.6% rise in the departmental administration budget during the same period.

Education forms the building blocks of our society and economy, and our schools simply cannot withstand any more cuts. As Mr Maginness said during Question Time, the education budget also funds our Youth Service. Youth work makes a significant contribution to the development of our young people, not least by keeping them engaged in the learning process. The disproportionate cut to the Youth Service's budget will drastically reduce the capacity of the youth sector to tackle underachievement.

In agriculture, we talk about the route from field to fork. In education, the fertile field is the classroom experience, where our teachers and other professionals create a stimulating learning environment. Surely, in times of austerity, and like in other jurisdictions, that must be protected.

The Minister's priorities must be questioned, given that he has proposed to cut the aggregated schools budget by £87 million, while taking just £3 million away from departmental administration. That amounts to 9%, but a reduction of about 29% to the entitlement framework budget.

I was shocked to learn in an answer to a recent question for written answer that, on average, departmental administration has cost £18.4 million per year over the last five years. The SDLP tabled an amendment to the motion to reflect the views of our schools. The extremely challenging financial environment that schools face is not exclusive to 2015-16. As Mr Allister said during Question Time, when a child starts their study at GCSE or A level, it is a two-year commitment. Schools are also expected to have a three-year budget plan. When a child begins P1, there is a seven-year commitment.

Unless the Department urgently re-evaluates its priorities and strategies, schools in Northern Ireland face a bleak and volatile future for a number of years. That will be to the detriment of society, with a generation of young people not receiving the highest quality education that our teachers can provide.

The concern and apprehension that was triggered by the draft budget was well publicised in the run-up to Christmas. No one can plead ignorance of the consequences that the cuts will have. The implications are clear: job losses; increased pupil:teacher ratios; less support for children with special education needs; and a substantial reduction in the resources that our children and young people need to thrive personally and academically.

I have spoken to many principals, teachers and parents in the past number of weeks, and their anxiety is palpable. They simply cannot understand how schools can cut back any more without sacrificing the quality of education that they deliver. Schools face the prospect of redundancies, which threatens the quality and range of subjects that our children can be taught.

A guarantee from the Minister that he will protect the classroom is not sufficient. Staff, parents and young people need an assurance that best classroom practice will be protected. That means acceptable class sizes with suitable pupil:teacher ratios, the right level of support for children with special educational needs and a good pool of well-trained and adequately supported teachers and support staff. Those are the real front-line services that Ministers should focus on.

Education is the chief opponent of poverty. The children's charity Barnardo's indicated that approximately 100,000 children in the North were living in poverty in 2012, and that figure is expected to increase in the coming years. Another report, by Save the Children, predicts that 38% of children in Northern Ireland will be living in relative poverty by 2020. Neglecting our education sector will exacerbate that and make the fight against poverty all the more difficult. A failure to invest in education is a failure to invest in the future of our young people.

The cuts to education are all the more insulting after seven years and almost £17 million wasted on the defunct ESA Bill. It is thus imperative that the new Education Authority prioritises an efficient and cost-effective strategy and eliminates duplication.

The draft Budget proposes that only 58.1% of the total education funding goes directly to schools, while the figure is nearly 80% in England. How is that protecting classroom practice? One key way in which the Department could reduce waste and achieve the best value for money would be to review the process in place for the procurement of goods and services in the sector, which is financially and temporally inefficient at present. In the current system, school principals have to go through the education and library board to procure suppliers, regardless of whether they can procure them locally, more cheaply and more quickly themselves. Where is the economics of a school in my area having a plumbing problem, and the plumber eventually came from Castlebar?

Principals who have demonstrated sound financial management skills could play a key role in achieving the highest quality education outcomes whilst opting for the most cost- and time-effective options. If schools had the option of buying in professional development for their staff, they would ensure that it was value for money and would meet the needs of all their staff. Devolving maximum budget autonomy to schools with proven records of sound financial management allows principals to draw on local knowledge and experience to make the best decision for each and every one of their children. When I asked a large group of principals in Ballymena last Thursday whether they wanted greater budget autonomy, the answer was a resounding yes.

The Minister of Education must take heed of the warnings issued so well by the sector, by schools and by parents. Any budget that does not prioritise classroom practice does not have our society or our economy as its priority. I urge the House to support the SDLP amendment to ensure maximum autonomy for the delegation of the education budget. Minister, as we were told last Thursday in Ballymena, we need to focus, and our education budget has to target educational need.

Mr Sheehan: I beg to move amendment No 2:

Leave out all after "schools" and insert

" , youth services, early years providers and the broader community regarding the implications for education if the Department of Education's draft budget does not receive a significant uplift in the final budget settlement; recognises that from 1 April 2015 there will be a single Education Authority in place of the five education and library boards to oversee the allocation of the majority of the education budget; and therefore calls on the Executive to ensure that protecting education is a priority; and further calls on the Minister of Education to use the new administrative arrangements to achieve greater efficiencies within administration and, in so doing, devolves the maximum amount of the available budget to front-line education services."

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I was struck by something that the Minister said during Question Time: we have an education system, not just a school

system. That, in essence, is what our amendment is about. Everyone is rightly concerned about what might happen in the classroom. As recently as lunchtime today, I spoke to teachers who are obviously concerned about what will happen in the classroom in the face of these budget cuts.

In the Committee Chair's opening remarks, she said that the Minister had broken two golden rules. She actually broke the primary golden rule, insofar as when she spoke about the cuts, she did not put the blame where it firmly lies: with the Tory Government in Westminster. They have cut the budget and the block grant, and we have to deal with the consequences of that. However, it is always important that the people whom we represent understand that it is not us who are making the cuts. We are just dealing with the consequences of cuts that have been made by the Tory Government in London. We all know that, as a result of that, the education sector is facing a very challenging financial situation. Of course, given the extent of the cuts to the block grant, the challenges faced by the education sector will continue well beyond this Budget period of 2015-16. It is important, therefore, that, in that context, the Minister should protect front-line services as much as is humanly possible. However, we all know, given the breadth and depth of the cuts to the Budget and the scale of the Budget reductions, that it will simply be impossible to maintain all core services at their current levels. That is unfortunate, but it is a fact of life that we have to deal with.

Savings and efficiencies can be made. The establishment of the new single Education Authority in place of the five education and library boards is a welcome development. There will be savings, although some have already been made through cutbacks in staff and what have you. Other savings and efficiencies will be made, but they will not be short term, unfortunately. Even though most of us are confident that there will be savings, it is difficult to estimate how much.

All of us in the Chamber understand how important education is. For many, it is a route out of poverty and deprivation. I note that there was a letter in this morning's 'The Irish News' from you, Mr Deputy Speaker, saying that education is the greatest weapon against inequality. I would not disagree with that sentiment. However, we will not support the motion or the SDLP's amendment because we believe that they are much too narrow. They do not focus on the whole education system.

I said at the outset that the education system is much more broadly based than a school system. Take some examples of what is involved in the rest of the education system, where some of the resources go. Those of us who are on the Education Committee know how important leadership is in schools. Some funding from the Department goes towards governor training. Do we cut back on that? I see that Jonathan is laughing. If you ask educationalists, they would say that leadership is one of the most important factors in raising education outcomes in schools. Do we cut back on that? Do we cut back on free school meals entitlement? Do we send children into the classrooms hungry, where they will not be able to concentrate on their lessons because they are concentrating more on their empty stomachs?

Important resources go into youth services. Many young people who have fallen through the cracks in the ordinary school system benefit from youth services. They have not

been able to fit in, for whatever reason, have fallen through the cracks and have come under the auspices of youth services, where they have been helped immensely.

There are other areas, like SureStart in early years. We also know from research that early intervention is crucial for a child's education. I listened to Paul Girvan's question to the Minister of Education earlier about breakfast clubs. Some parents send their children to school without breakfast. Children should not be held responsible for that. If schools are providing breakfast clubs, particularly in areas of high deprivation, it is something we should welcome. It is for the benefit of the children and their overall educational outcomes.

School transport is another area that receives a lot of funding.

We witnessed a terrible tragedy not long before Christmas in Cloughmills. Are we going to cut back on transport for children to schools? Those are the questions that we need to ask.

3.45 pm

I was talking to some of the teachers at the lunch break, and I pointed out that we do not want to cut back in the classrooms but that there are other areas in the education system that are equally important. They said, "Well, you need to prioritise", but when you ask, "Well, where would you take the money from?", it is much more difficult for them to give you an answer. The answer to the question, and what is at the heart of this debate, is that the education budget needs to be ring-fenced. That is not within my gift, but it is within the gift of all the parties represented on the Executive.

I will finish at this point. We will not be supporting the motion or the SDLP amendment. I ask others to support the amendment that we have brought forward, which is in the interests, we believe, of doing the best that we possibly can in difficult circumstances for the whole education system.

Mr Kinahan: I am glad that we are debating this crucial issue on the second day that we are back. I am slightly disappointed with the motion. It is weak, and it is a bit of a masterclass in understatement. The Sinn Féin amendment calls for more money for the Education Department without earmarking which other Departments should give it. We will be supporting the SDLP amendment.

What a mess we have got ourselves into. We need to completely rethink how we are doing the Budget, but at least it is a consultation and a chance for everyone to have their say. Hopefully, there is some room to move. It should not be a blame game of blaming the Brits before the election, and it should not be — I hope that it is not — a bleak picture being painted so that everything looks a bit nicer when we come to a solution. I hope that the Minister is not playing any games of that type.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for giving way. He outlined that he is happy to support the SDLP amendment, which does not call for any extra funds for the Department of Education. Are the Ulster Unionists saying that they are satisfied with the funds currently earmarked for Education?

Mr Kinahan: No, I am not, but I am choosing that as the better of what we have in front of us. We need more money; you will hear more from me as we go into this.

When this came to the Education Committee, I remember listening and thinking, "Here we are, still trying to do absolutely everything that we're doing now but with vastly less money." That is absolutely daft. We have to rethink and look at what we are doing. We need a completely new approach.

The priority has to be to maintain the excellence of our teaching at every school. The pupils and the standard of education must come first. We have called for protecting the aggregate school budget. We did not support the ring-fencing of the whole budget because we thought that that was the wrong approach for starting the whole Budget process on the Executive. We need to try to find as much as we can of the £70 million that is being taken away from the coalface of education.

The message from the schools and the boards is that the cuts mean that they will not be able to deliver education the way it is today, particularly if it is carried out as proposed. That resulting failure will be cataclysmic. I wrote to all the schools, and I am very grateful for the replies I have received. Many of them are what the Minister will have received, with some extra points. I am also very grateful for the Ballymena meeting, which Mr Rogers referred to, and I am especially grateful to all the principals for their sturdy resilience when such cataclysmic cuts were thrown at them before Christmas. What a Christmas they and their colleagues had. I hope that the Minister will apologise to them for that.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: I am happy to give way.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member apologise for canvassing for the Tories, who are the authors of all our mishaps and misfortune at this time?

Mr Kinahan: I think that the Minister should realise that whoever had got into government would have had to be making those cuts. It could have been Labour. It is all of us. We have our sum of money, so we must not keep producing a begging bowl. We have to find a way to look after ourselves.

The 7% cuts are enormous, whether you are a large school or a small school. I will give you a flavour of the sorts of responses received, although those have been looked at already. It means a cut to all non-core teachers, which is most likely to end up affecting special needs. It means a cut to classroom assistants and a cut to all non-teaching staff. It means principals having to go back into teaching, larger classes, fewer specialised teachers, the dumbing-down of teaching, loss of excellence, higher stress, more absences, further stress and a complete unravelling of our excellent education system, despite all the efforts. We could have a complete failure of the education system, and, as one person put it to me, we are letting down a generation and decades of pupils and teachers, and it will then take decades to repair.

I know that the Minister always wants suggestions from all of us on how to do things, but, given the lack of transparency and the lack of detail, it is very hard for us to come up with detail. In one case, I saw something from one board that had not even got to the Committee. In future, can we please have all the information and all the detail so that we can all be helpful?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Kinahan: Do I not get an extra minute?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): I do apologise. You have an additional minute.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker.

It also disturbs me that, in the lay-offs, we will lose skills. I am also told that some of the governors have said that they may not sign off on their budget. If they do not sign off on their budget, there is a whole further battle that will run on and damage our schools further. I hope that that will not be the case.

I have many suggestions, but I am running out of time. We have all got to get ready to park our sacred cows to find the things that we can drop to make schools work. So, the plea from the Ulster Unionist Party is to give as much as we can to front-line services, and then let us look at everything else to see what can we cut, what we can park and what we can do differently in the future.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion and the SDLP amendment, although it would not have been difficult to support both amendments. However, you have to stop somewhere, so we will run with the SDLP one. To me, the motion and the amendments effectively all say the same thing anyway, although the Sinn Féin one is slightly different from the other two, but not by much.

All three call on the Minister to ensure that protecting front-line services must be his absolute priority and that maximum devolution of the available budget to school level is vital. I fancy that the Minister will be able to confirm that he feels that he has been doing that all along, and, indeed, he confirmed it during Question Time. However I doubt that he has been faced with a funding situation — a crisis — on the scale currently proposed, with a draft budget indicating a 7% reduction in the aggregated schools budget and more huge reductions in the allocation for capital expenditure. I wonder how long the schools that have been listed for new builds or rebuilds in the past four years will have to wait, or even whether there is any point in listing more in each financial year. We appear to be long on announcements but a bit short on laying foundations.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that, as well as the uncertainty over the budgets for the classrooms themselves, there is the additional uncertainty over capital funding for schools such as Strandtown in my constituency, which has just got its planning permission through and now has no idea as to when it may be able to put bricks on the ground?

Mr Lunn: The Member makes a fair point. I suggest that Strandtown is earmarked for around 2024, because that is the way that things are going at the moment.

The Sinn Féin amendment is different, in that it refers to the need for a significant uplift in the final Budget settlement and calls on the Executive to ensure that protecting education is a priority. Given that the Minister's party is one of the two that make the decisions in this place, it would not be a surprise if the DUP and Sinn Féin were to find some extra allocation for education, but at whose expense? Which other Department can afford to give up part of its budget? That is what is involved.

Would it be DEL, for instance, or the Department of Justice? I have a particular interest. Just this morning, I heard the Finance Minister confirming that he wants to try to find some more money for DEL to protect the situation around universities. Every Department will have its defence mechanisms and its priorities.

We do not think that throwing more money at education or ring-fencing it, as Mr Sheehan said, is necessarily the way forward. To our minds, the problem is not the amount of money in the education budget but how it is spent. It is a fact that others have referred to — I think the Committee Chair referred to it — that education gets more money over here per capita but spends the lowest amount of any part of the UK on actual school provision through the aggregated schools budget. I heard the figures. I can see the Minister shaking his head and Mr Hazzard too, and I heard the figure of 80% versus 59%. It is probably a bit more complicated than that, but, at the same time, I think there is a difference. It indicates inefficiency in the Department; that is what it boils down to.

Maybe the new Education Authority, which we all welcome, can do something to rectify that imbalance, but I think that the problems go a bit deeper than that. Do we really think that the separation of our children into sectors and the failure to implement area planning in any kind of meaningful, cross-sectoral way does not have a cost? Do we think that the determination of the Catholic authorities to resist any cross-sectoral or integrated solutions does not have a financial consequence? Do those who point to sharing as some kind of panacea not recognise that sharing also comes at a cost and that Atlantic Philanthropies will not be there for ever?

Are we content with the situation? I have every sympathy with teachers in schools at the moment who face the prospect of losing their job, but should we continue, through our teacher training arrangements, to produce more teachers than we need? Frankly, I doubt it. Do the advocates of shared campuses such as Lisanelly — massively expensive new builds — not have any doubts that it might be better to take the hard decisions and merge schools instead? It would certainly normally be more cost-effective to have one school instead of two. It would be easier to deliver the curriculum, and it would have obvious societal benefits.

Since I joined the Education Committee in 2007 — eight years ago — we have had budget discussions galore. We have gone through two attempts at ESA, sustainable schools, area-based planning, sharing promotion, imbalance of funding between primary and secondary, integration growth being restricted and, in every aspect, the failure to take hard decisions. We now have more empty desks than in 2007, I fancy, and a real budget crisis that is, as it stands, deeply damaging to individual schools.

We will support the motion as amended by the SDLP. If that does not pass, we will be happy to support the motion as it stands. We are at a watershed in education. Hard decisions had to be taken to bring about the Stormont House Agreement, so I hope that the same attitude will trickle down to the Education Department. For now, I join others in asking the Minister to protect classroom practice, but it must go beyond that: we should be talking about the cost of division —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The Member's time is up.

Mr Lunn: — in education as in so many other aspects of our activities.

Mr Newton: I want to make a number of remarks about what, I believe, is a very competent motion before the Assembly today.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair)

We often talk about the cost of education, and that seems to be the approach that we take, rather than what many of us actually think, which is that it should be about investment in education. Whether that is investment in the pupils who sit behind a desk or in the youth services that the education services provide, it is a benefit for our young people from the time they enter the school system until they leave it. You can criticise the system as much as you like. In fact, Mr Kinahan said in his opening remarks — he may well be right — that we needed a completely new approach. Mr Kinahan has not tabled any amendments today, but he spent six minutes on his speech. At the end of his six minutes, he said, “I have a lot of ideas, but I haven’t time to share them with you”, but in his opening remarks he said:

“We need a completely new approach.”

We need to understand what that completely new approach might be, but we are dealing with the education system as it is.

4.00 pm

The motion, which the DUP Committee members tabled and the Chair proposed, recognises that we work in a challenging financial environment. It also recognises that there is widespread concern in schools about the draft Budget. I doubt whether any Member has not been lobbied or contacted by schools or had telephone calls or letters from schools. An opportunity has now been presented to the Minister to make savings under the new Education Bill.

The Minister talks in the right ethos about that area and about investing in our children. In welcoming the Education Bill, in his press statement, he said that it was a significant way forward for children and young people. I agree, but action is required to make that happen. When he was speaking to the Catholic Principals Association, he also said:

“Children are at the heart of the education system”.

I think that we would all agree with that, but teachers, principals and boards of governors do not currently recognise that in the proposals under the draft Budget.

The Minister talks about bringing about change. There is an opportunity to bring about change under the Education Bill, but change will not happen. I have expressed my disappointment to the Minister in Committee about the lack of progress that was being made under the Education Bill or ESA, as it previously was, to prepare for change. We need to profit from the change, as do our pupils and young people. In doing that, we need to adapt to changing circumstances. We need to control the changing circumstances and to make effective the change that that will bring about.

I referred to being lobbied by schools. I have been lobbied specifically, not by a school in my constituency but by a school that provides a service to pupils with difficult and challenging circumstances. That is Glenveagh Special

School. I hope that we will meet the school in the not-too-distant future. I received a detailed reply from another school that indicated that, if the current budget were to go ahead, it would lose about £220,000, which would approximate to six teachers. The school would end up having to remove —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Newton: — subjects from the curriculum and having to tailor other aspects of the school, which would result in the pupils losing out.

Mr McCausland: I am in a similar position to many other Members, in that I have received a vast amount of correspondence on this important issue. I find it hard to decide whether this is a tactical approach by the Minister or a ploy — I have to say that it would be a very callous ploy, if it is one — to present as difficult a picture as possible to extract more money out of the system. This question has already been asked: if there is more money, where does it come from? The Finance Minister is a politician; he is not a magician. He cannot conjure money out of thin air. If money is to be moved into education, it has to be taken away from some other Department. There is the challenge and the difficulty.

It may not be tactical: it could be simply political. It may be simply that the Minister wants to keep more money in the centre so that he has more money to run his pet projects and can lavish resources on them. I do not believe that that is the right way to run an education Department. Money should be directed to schools and to schools directly as far as possible. We should protect the classroom, and, certainly, there should be no reduction in the money going to classrooms. The cuts should be made elsewhere.

I have talked about the Minister’s pet projects. I just looked at two examples that came to mind. This was not a case of going through the Department’s entire budget very carefully: two things just stood out in the past while. Back in the October monitoring round, the paper stated that the Department of Education was transferring up to £1 million to DCAL in respect of the City of Culture and that the actual amount was being finalised. It did not tell us what it was for nor what the final amount was, but the Minister said that he was prepared to transfer £1 million from the education budget to the DCAL budget. If it is the case that this Department is strapped for cash and is facing a very strict, difficult and challenging time, why is the Minister suddenly handing away £1 million to another Department? I think that this is about the Minister having money in the centre — a slush fund or whatever you call it, money lying around — that can be put into pet projects or shifted off or decanted to another Sinn Féin Department. That seems to be the way in which money is dealt with in DE.

I also noticed that, a few weeks ago, the Minister announced that he was giving an extra £140,000 to Irish-medium youth work. In the scheme of things, £140,000 is not the biggest sum in the world. It is a big sum for most of us, but, in the scheme of the budget of the Department of Education, it is not that big an amount. We are talking about many millions of pounds. Bearing it in mind that, I think, around 1% of children go to Irish-medium schools — it is a smallish figure anyway — if you scale the £140,000 up, you are talking about putting the equivalent of £14 million into one of the Minister’s personal party

pet projects. That is what this is about to a large degree: keeping and grabbing as much as he can into the centre so that he can go around as Mr Bountiful, handing out money to projects that he personally likes. The victims in this and the people who suffer are the children, teachers and schools across Northern Ireland. They lose out on money so that he can fund his favourite schemes and lavish money on them as he does.

We should be in the business of empowering schools. As the Chair of the Committee said, we should be in the business of resourcing schools. We should not be in the business of having lots of special interventions. Quite frankly, the running of many of them is cumbersome, burdensome and is not necessarily being done most effectively. We should be moving towards the position in England of getting as much money as possible —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McCausland: Yes. I have another 10 seconds, thank you.

We should be getting as much money as possible right there into the classrooms to benefit children.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirim an iarraidh seo le tacaíocht a thabhairt do leasú an SDLP. I rise on this occasion to support the amendment proposed by the SDLP.

There is no doubt about it: the proposed reduction in the aggregated schools budget — 8% at primary-school level and 7% at secondary-school level — is serious. That is no overstatement. The total figure amounts to £87 million. Although some Members have said that the Minister has embarked on a scaremongering crusade to blackmail his colleagues into coughing up more money, there is no doubt that the proposed cuts will negatively impact on every school, classroom, pupil and teacher.

If we look at the Department's stated aims, we see that the first of its primary aims is to raise standards for all. These cuts will lead to larger classes and to higher pupil:teacher ratios. How can we raise standards under those circumstances? The likely outcome of that situation is a drop in standards. The Department also aims to close the performance gap and to increase access and equity, but if we have a reduction in the number of classroom assistants and reduced special needs provision, how can we close the performance gap, increase access and achieve equity? The simple answer is that it is going to be extremely difficult.

The Department also seeks to develop the education workforce. If we had higher pupil:teacher ratios, we would have greater teacher workload, leading to greater stress on teachers and a reduction in absentee cover, all of which would create a dispirited workforce. There would not be much development for the education workforce under those circumstances. How will overcrowding in classrooms and fewer teacher/pupil resources improve the learning environment?

I spent 25 years teaching, and I know well from first-hand experience the impact that these cuts will have. If these unprecedented draft Budget proposals are imposed on the education sector, our schools' capacity to facilitate our young people's aspirations to take their place in the world and make a positive contribution will be seriously

undermined. Others have referred to the fact that, to have a healthy economy, we must have a healthy, thriving, effective and efficient education system. These cuts will not lead to that. There was reference to the division of the education budget between the aggregated schools budget and the amount that goes to administration. The figures may be disputed, but perhaps the Minister will look at this area and attempt to give the schools more money. The schools know best how the money can be best used, especially at the chalkface.

The Stormont agreement has provided us with a pot of gold. How much of that pot of gold will go to front-line services? I note that £500 million has been apportioned to shared and integrated education. Perhaps the Minister can tell us what degree of flexibility there is within that particular pot of money. Perhaps some creative thinking on behalf of the Department will lead to some of that money being diverted to —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr D Bradley: — front-line services. That will alleviate the problems in the situation that schools, teachers and pupils find themselves in.

Mrs Overend: I will speak on the issue, and, as indicated, we will support the SDLP amendment.

At the outset, let me say that it must be remembered that, although the present acute financial problems appear to have emerged in the summer during the 2014 June monitoring round, we now know that the Executive were informed of their allocations for 2015-16 as part of the 2013 UK spending round in June 2013. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that the Minister has demonstrated a lack of transparency on budgetary matters throughout the 2011-15 budgetary period. At various mini-crisis points, he has found extra money from contingency funds. There has been no demonstration of financial prudence or of the Minister being proactive in making efficiency savings during his tenure in office. The most glaring example of that is, of course, the money that was spent on failing to set up ESA, the Education and Skills Authority implementation team and associated departmental costs. As of the end of the 2013-14 financial year, that came to £18·145 million.

4.15 pm

At the start of this budgetary period, in 2011, the Executive exempted the Minister's Department from cuts on the basis that the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) had been commissioned to undertake work on the scope for and delivery of significant cost reductions. The PEDU report, published nearly four years ago, highlighted potential efficiency savings in administration. At the Education Committee on 7 December 2011, a departmental official said:

"savings could be used to ease pressures in the core areas of teaching and learning."

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) was meant to have been culled and its responsibilities absorbed by ESA. Not only is this not happening under the Education Authority proposals but we now have a new sectoral body for controlled schools that, inevitably, will cost money and does not seem to have been mentioned in the draft Budget.

Moreover, recent Assembly questions have shown that the PEDU recommendations have not been implemented, the excuse being that they were predicated on the establishment of ESA. On 4 November 2014, the Minister, in reply to my party leader, admitted that he had not implemented the PEDU recommendations and that they had been put on hold. So, before we go much further, the Minister needs to quantify how much of the expenditure on ESA has not been lost and be clear on whether he expects the new Education Authority to implement the four-year-old PEDU recommendations. In that context, and when debating the draft education budget for 2015-16, we must interrogate the Minister of Education on whether he has demonstrated any financial prudence or acumen at all.

As has been highlighted, the proposed 7% cuts in the aggregated school budget have been met with understandable consternation amongst the teaching fraternity. However, even more stark are the threat to the preschool education budget and the proposed cut to the budget of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland. Preschool education faces a cut of £2.5 million, or 15%, and the Youth Council, which supports the youth work sector across the Province, faces a £3 million, or 20%, cut.

I highlight those two areas merely to put into some sort of context the Minister's recent decision to fund the opening of a brand new secondary school near Dungiven, at which it is proposed that pupils will be educated through the medium of the Irish language. In the development proposal for that school, which is available to read online, it is estimated that approximately 11 double mobile classrooms will be required at a cost of approximately £600,000, plus VAT, every year, with specialised accommodation increasing the cost. The school's estimated first year deficit is in and around £100,000, and that will have to be carried forward to subsequent years. For the Minister to approve this, against the advice of his officials and even contrary to that of the ministerial advisory group on advancing Irish-medium education, borders on farcical. Meanwhile, Sinn Féin Members pull on our heartstrings and say that the only alternative to the current budget proposals is to have children starve. Such financial flagrancy, as demonstrated by the Minister in his decision-making, gives the Ulster Unionist Party no confidence that he has any competence or responsibility in budgetary matters.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw her remarks to a close?

Mrs Overend: Sorry. The draft Budget 2015 must be completely redrafted. In the face of budgetary cutbacks, we certainly cannot afford party political decisions made by the Minister of Education.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): John McCallister will have the four minutes of the debate that remain.

Mr McCallister: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and apologies for not being here for all of the debate.

Several things strike me about the debate. It is a DUP motion, with an amendment tabled by the SDLP, mainly getting at a Sinn Féin Minister. Everybody is in the Government together, so this is a Government debate attacking a different part of the Government. No doubt, over the next few weeks, we will have a Sinn Féin motion against the DUP Health Minister or an SDLP motion against an Ulster Unionist Minister and so on. It is as though none of this is the responsibility of any of your party colleagues — it

is as though the Stormont House Agreement and looking at the finances had never happened.

Mr Bradley talked about the pot of gold promised in the Stormont House Agreement. I would point out that a huge chunk of that pot of gold has to be repaid after a certain time. What effect will that have on our classrooms and schools? That, I think, is the crux of this issue. What options will the Minister have? What options will the Minister have to look at? We will have to wait and see how the Minister does it, how he manages his budget, what extra he gets from the Stormont House Agreement and how he decides to use that. There are going to be proposals that are going to involve difficult decisions, but I want to make sure that the Minister hears from the Assembly that he needs to prioritise the classroom and the front-line services in his Department. That is what we need to do. As we move forward, and he looks at various things, we see that he is getting more money for shared and integrated education. He has to make sure that that is not just about bussing children around the countryside but is meaningful and that it extends choice.

Some of the ideas that the Minister is looking at around consultation on transport could well have a huge impact on our children and on parental choice of what school their children will go to, because we are a long way from making every school a good school, as has been promised for many years by the party that is holding the education brief. That is one of our difficulties. If every school is not a good school, it is very hard to deny parental choice, because a poor school is not where parents and children opt to go to school. That is something that would be hugely regrettable and almost regressive in the tackling of our education system, dealing with its shortcomings and how we improve that choice.

All of that, Mr Deputy Speaker, comes back to the fact that, for almost eight years of the Assembly and Executive being in place, we have fundamentally failed to address public sector reform. We have not got to grips with it, despite the First Minister's efforts, when he was Finance Minister, with PEDU and the PEDU report, which Mrs Overend spoke about. There has been no buy-in —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McCallister: That goes back to an unreformed Assembly and Executive. You do not have a proper Programme for Government and a proper ministerial, collective-cabinet Government.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis na Comhaltáí as an rún seo a thabhairt chun tosaigh, agus failtímh roimh admháil Comhaltáí go bhfuil staid airgeadais dhúshlánach os comhair na hearnála oideachais. I thank the Members for bringing forward the debate and motion, and I welcome the acknowledgement by Members of the challenging financial position that the education sector is in. However, it would be true to say that there are parties in the Chamber that are of the view that the education budget will suffice. Their estimations, economic policy, education policy and philosophy says that the education budget will suffice, but they are saying that we have to make the cuts everywhere other than in the classroom. I will outline the implications of that during my address.

I do not support the motion because, despite some of the comments from even the sponsors of the motion, it is not seeking to protect or enhance funding to youth services. My mailbox in the Department of Education is full of letters from Members seeking more funding for youth services, but the motion does not seek that. In fact, as a result of the motion and comments by Members that all cuts should take place outside of the classroom and outside of schools, our youth services would be decimated. The aggregated schools budget takes up 59% of the education budget. Under the proposal that is before us today, and which Members are being asked to vote for, we are being asked to ring-fence that 59% of the education budget.

The Department of Education is facing cuts of 8·36%. If you translate that into 41% of the budget, that turns into cuts of 20% to youth services, the education boards, transport, SEN, free school meals entitlement, and 20% cuts to everything else. When Members vote, as they will, they have a choice of either the substantive motion, which in essence calls for cuts across the board everywhere but schools, or the SDLP amendment, which basically says the same thing.

Despite comments from the proposer of the amendment, Mr Rogers, that he is also concerned about youth services, and comments from Mr Bradley about the SDLP's concerns about the wider education system, they are not looking for further funds for education. They are looking to protect funds in the classroom. When you are lobbied by youth services, Sure Start, Bookstart and all those other bodies, be honest and forthright in your response to them and say, "No, no, no". If the SDLP, the Ulster Unionist Party, the Alliance Party and perhaps some of the independents in the Chamber vote for the motion, they will have to say, "No, no, some of us actually believe that the education budget will suffice, and we all believe that education in the classroom is the central core of education, and the cuts should come from everywhere else". That is because any other answer —

Mr Wilson: Will you give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will in a minute. Any other answer will be untruthful. If you support the substantive motion or amendment No 1, you cannot state support for services other than the classroom.

Mr Wilson: Does the Minister accept that, even with the aggregated schools budget, he holds so much money at the centre for a plethora of nearly 50 special initiatives — some of which are questionable, anyway — that, even if he worked on the aggregated schools budget and devolved more of that to schools, the kinds of issues that have been described in the Assembly today could have been overcome?

Mr O'Dowd: I was going to come to what the Minister holds at the centre for his devilish plan. Let us look at what I hold at the centre and what the centre is, because that is also quite interesting. The aggregated schools budget is 59% of the education budget; the ELB block grant is 20%; ELB-earmarked budgets are 12%; voluntary grammar schools and grant-maintained integrated (GMI) central support costs are 2%; other non-departmental public bodies and education services are 2%; early years provision is 2%; youth and community relations are 2%; and DE staffing and costs are 2%. Despite earlier comments that the Department of Education

was overcome with bureaucracy and cutting less in departmental bureaucracy than in the aggregated schools budget, that is not the case.

The headline figure for the reduction in the aggregated schools budget is 7%. The Department of Education's overall budget is being cut by 8·36%. However, when you add £10 million to the aggregated schools budget from one of those central pots that I hold for targeting social need, the reduction is 7%. Let us look at what we are cutting in administration in the Department of Education. We are cutting 9%, which is above the overall cut to education. If you compare the Department of Education's budget — it is the second-biggest in the Executive — with other Departments, DE has far fewer staff, pro rata, than any other Department. Some of the Departments that are running on lower budgets than DE have many more staff, pro rata, than DE.

Where are you going to find this £162 million or £163 million? We are asking the wrong question. As I started out by saying, that is where some parties and their Members support the austerity policies of the Conservative Party. Some parties in the Chamber canvassed for them.

Mr Kinahan had the opportunity to apologise for canvassing for a party, that is now decimating our public services and our economy, and refused to do so. He said that we could not blame it on the Brits. I am not blaming it on the Brits; I am blaming it on the Conservative Party. I am blaming it on the Westminster Government, because they are the people who are delivering an economic strategy that is decimating not only their own people but people here as well — and you canvassed for them. So, no wonder you support their economic strategy. We are asking the wrong question about where the cuts should come from. I would like to think that the Assembly would support investment going into education.

4.30 pm

We have a number of core services, health being one of them. My party and I have supported the ring-fencing of health funding. Indeed, during the draft Budget deliberations I and my party supported an additional £200 million going into health, because we see it as a core public service. The other core public service is education. As I have said in the Chamber many times, if we get education right we will lift the pressure off many other Departments. A well-educated individual is more likely to be employed, less likely to need the health service, less likely to end up in the justice system and more likely to be a positive contributor to society. So, let us get education right; but to get it right we need to invest in it.

I would have hoped that the parties in the Chamber would have set aside their narrow political positions and would have been able to have a long-term vision for our society and of the benefits of education going into the future —

Mr Kinahan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: — I will, in one minute — and not work on the basis which, disappointingly, the Alliance Party has worked on. It said at one point that it could support the Sinn Féin amendment, but had to ask where would the money come from and whether it would come from DEL or Justice. I am not suggesting that it should come from DEL or Justice, but what I am saying is that the Executive, the Assembly and society need to get their priorities right. If our priorities

are the health and well-being of our citizens then we have to support the health service, but we also have to support our education system.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister. I am listening to what you are saying, but all the way through all we seem to be doing is cutting everything by a percentage, whereas if we go to the point where we need a whole new approach, we then need to look at all the sacred cows and all the things we are doing and decide which things we are not going to do. Do you feel that it is all right just to keep trying to do everything that we are doing but cutting by not a little but a whole lot? We need to look at every single item.

Mr O'Dowd: I believe that, as we move into the future, we are going to continue to face financial pressures, but I also think that we have to stabilise our education system and bring forward a sustainable education estate. I am one of the only Ministers around the Executive table who have brought forward and delivered changes to their Departments and to the service delivery mechanisms — in this case, to schools. I have taken on the difficult decisions of closing schools or amalgamating them. I have taken on the public wrath in many instances around these matters.

Where else across our Administration are Ministers prepared to take those decisions? You cannot make a difficult decision one day and on the next day say that because of a poor public reaction you are going to reverse it.

Mr Lunn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: You have to be prepared to make the decisions that are right for delivery of service, for protecting public finances and for building a stable education system for the future.

I will give way in one moment. If the forecasted projections in public spend are carried out, there is a strong onus on current Executive Ministers to put policies in place that will continue, as best they can, to stabilise public services. You cannot turn a blind eye to what is going on into the future. I am one of the only Ministers who have done that.

People, to be fair to me, say that the Minister has not done anything with the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) reports. The PEDU reports, if fully implemented, would save around £10 million, which is, a substantial amount in anybody's money. However, compared to what we need in education, it is chicken feed. The PEDU reports are based on two areas, the first of which is home-to-school transport. We published a substantial report on that and we will have to go out to public consultation on it. There are difficult decisions to be made in relation to public school transport, which covers a budget of over £70 million. Difficult decisions lie ahead.

The other area it covers is the delivery of school meals. If its most dramatic and drastic elements were carried out, it would save possibly £3 million or £4 million. I set it on the shelf because during that period we could have been saving tens of millions of pounds through the implementation of ESA, and nobody would move on ESA. So, I said that under no circumstances was I going to turn round and start reducing posts in one of the low-paid elements of our education system, namely those who work in free school meals. There was no justice or fairness to that whatsoever, so I make no apologies for putting that report back on the shelf and taking no action. Actions will have to be taken on school transport.

Mrs Overend talked about her concerns about the Youth Council, but you cannot have concerns about the Youth Council. You do not have any justified concerns about the Youth Council. You cannot turn round to the Youth Council and say, "I'm out fighting for you. Stick with me; I'll sort that out for you", because you are about to vote for a motion that says that classrooms should be protected and the cuts come from everywhere else.

Your party is also quite clear from your contribution, and from Mr Kinahan's contribution, that it is more than satisfied that education has a sufficient budget. It is quite clear from your contributions today that you are content with the education budget and that education does not deserve an uplift. You are quite content with it, so there is no sector outside schools where you can turn round and say, "We're fighting your corner", because you are not — and you are about to vote to prove that you are not.

I will let Mr Lunn in quickly.

Mr Lunn: It is a bit historical now, Minister, but you did comment that you were the only Minister who managed to take difficult decisions around school closures and that type of thing, and, by implication, that you had done something about the arrangement of the school estate. So, how come we still have 60,000 empty desks?

Mr O'Dowd: Because when I came into post, we had 80,000. I have taken action to reduce that number by 20,000; that is why. I put in place a programme in area based planning that makes decisions. Every time it makes a decision, Members in this Chamber jump up and down, saying, "Oh, you can't make that decision, you can't make that decision". I then say, "Well, what decision should I make?", and the answer is, "Uh, I don't know". You see, "Uh, I don't know" does not do anything. It does not solve any problems.

Members may disagree with what I do and with my decisions and policies, but at least I have policies and at least I make decisions. Mr Kinahan again came into the Chamber today and said, "I have a raft of ideas for you" —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Minister draw his remarks to a close?

Mr O'Dowd: — but I have not had the time to read them out. But I will give you an idea: do not canvass for the Tories and do everybody a favour. Thank you very much.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome this opportunity to make a winding-up speech on amendment No 2. I apologise to the proposer of the motion for not being here earlier.

It has been a positive enough debate in that we certainly learned something, namely that, for some, the vision is still far too narrow. I am absolutely baffled that the SDLP amendment was even accepted because it is exactly the same as the motion. It calls for the prioritising of funds for the classroom and devolution of the maximum amount of the available budget to the school. That is the exact same language as the DUP motion originally. Also, it does not ask for more funds to go into the system, which the Minister talked to. So, I am quite surprised that it was even accepted. Indeed, I am equally surprised that the Ulster Unionists and Alliance are happy enough to go with that amendment, although that is probably more for political reasons than anything else.

The motion and, indeed, the SDLP amendment have a narrow focus on that teacher:pupil relationship just inside the classroom. Of course, that is important, absolutely, and we need to put that at the centre of our education system, but the system as a whole is far bigger than that. We must not reduce the education system and the entire learning process of individuals and the children who we teach to that very small classroom. I have said numerous times in the Chamber that, from the age of 4 to 18, a child spends as little as 9% of those years inside the school gates. A total of 91% of a child's learning experiences are outside school.

Therefore, it would be a false economy if we were to attack the education budget everywhere but the classroom. Of course the classroom must be cherished and protected to a certain extent, but we cannot ignore the other things.

My colleague Pat Sheehan referred to a letter in the paper today in which it was said that education is the greatest weapon against inequality. The other side of the coin, of course, is that inequality is the greatest weapon against education. We need to look at the areas in which poverty outside the school permeates the classroom. We have touched on that today, be it attendance or anything like that, and that is what we need to keep at the forefront of our mind.

If we vote for the motion today, we are voting for an attack on Sure Start and an attack on early years provision. We will also be voting for a reduction in free school meal entitlement, which this year will see an additional 12,000 pupils receiving nutritional meals, benefiting their learning processes. We will also be reducing uniform grants for parents. Are we saying that we need to attack those things? Do we need to attack transport? Are parties in here today saying that it is no longer permissible for tens of thousands of kids to be bussed into Belfast to the super-schools? Are parties saying that they do not want to see that happening?

Nurture units, breakfast clubs, extended schools, after-school clubs and youth services will also be affected. We know the great amount of work that youth services do in our community. As the Minister outlined, if we were to go ahead with what the DUP and others are saying here today, we would see a massive attack on youth services, and that would have a hugely detrimental impact on children's experiences. CRED, the community relations policy, and the various sports initiatives would also be affected. That is just not possible.

On the SDLP amendment, we all agree that there is widespread concern. Sinn Féin shares that concern. We have said from the outset that there simply is not enough money in the education budget and that we need to see more money. The SDLP has argued that the classroom needs to be a priority, but the vast majority of the education budget is spent in and around the classroom, on teaching and everything else.

There was mention made again of poverty. Poverty does not exist in the classroom, but the effects of poverty permeate the classroom and the teacher and child relationship. Therefore, if we do not address the effects of poverty outside the school and as the child comes into school, forget about the classroom, because it is too late at that stage. We have looked at the need to devolve the budget to the lowest point of the school, but that does not give the schools any more money. Yes, there are pros and cons to giving schools the autonomy to spend money on

what they want. We should remember also that some of the schools —

Mr Rogers: I thank the Member for giving way. I have this one question: how can we maintain a quality learning environment in the classroom if we are to lose 1,000 teachers and 1,500 classroom assistants? That is the big question.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Hazzard: I am not saying that that will not have an impact. That is why I am saying that we need more money in the system. What I am saying is that it is wrong to suggest that, if we simply protect the classroom, the child's education will be OK. It simply will not be, because all the other things, such as transport and early years provision, will be affected. That will affect vulnerable pupils especially and those who come from socially deprived backgrounds, because those things are the lifeblood of their education. We will be consigning a generation of vulnerable people to the dustbin if that is the case, and we simply should not be allowed to do it.

In the motion, in the SDLP amendment and from the contributions of various Members who spoke, we are still short on solutions. People come to the Chamber and are very quick to point out all the different problems. It may be the same in other debates, but I have heard no solutions for where £162 million would be spent elsewhere.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Hazzard: That is what we seriously need to look at.

I want to finish by saying that the DUP's finance spokesperson, Paul Girvan, said yesterday that the education budget should be ring-fenced. I agree entirely.

Mr A Maginness: I thank Miss McIlveen for bringing about the debate. I support the SDLP amendment. It has been a good debate. The education budget means that there are clearly very serious pressures on the education system, but you cannot have it both ways. The Sinn Féin deputy First Minister said that the overall draft Budget was as good as it could get and that anyone who believed otherwise was living in a "fantasy world".

Those were his words. They were not my words but his words. The Minister of Education and his colleagues supported that view 100% with absolutely no dissent whatsoever. The Minister of Education voted for the Budget in the Executive.

4.45 pm

If the Minister of Education is critical of his own budget, saying that that budget is inadequate, insufficient, imperfect or whatever way he wants to describe it, he is, in effect, the author of his own misfortune. That is the reality of the situation, and Sinn Féin Members have to come to terms with that. They, of course, look around and say, "Who is there to blame? Is the DUP to blame? Is it the Ulster Unionists? Is it the SDLP? No, it is not. It is the Tory Government at Westminster who are to blame". However, of course, the responsibility lies here in the Executive. The responsibility lies with Sinn Féin Ministers who supported this Budget. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot say that the Budget is wrong on the one hand and then still

support it. If the Minister has problems with the Budget, cannot support it because he cannot deliver an education system with it — it is clear from what colleagues are saying around the House that the education system cannot be delivered properly with this Budget — it will create all sorts of problems down the line, such as more poverty, and, as Mr Sheehan said so well in his speech, education is a weapon against poverty, then the Minister should say, “Well, I cannot do this job. Therefore, I give up this post. I resign”.

Mr O’Dowd: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member is absolutely right: I did vote for the draft Budget. I believe that the draft Budget was the best possible deal in November, but in voting for the draft Budget, we were also conscious that we had a number of items in front of us that were unknowns. One was the autumn statement from the Westminster Government, which has produced over £70 million of Barnett consequentials, and the ongoing and planned talks in relation to a wide range of matters, including the finances and the financial relationship between us and the Westminster Government. All those things have now been settled, and we have an opportunity to increase funding in a number of areas in the Budget. Those parties that voted against the draft Budget at the Executive did not produce an alternative then and have not produced an alternative since. So, you cannot have it both ways either. Your strategy would have led to the collapse of the Executive. My strategy and my party’s strategy gave the Executive and the Assembly breathing space.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I remind Members that interventions should be brief. The Member has an extra minute.

Mr A Maginness: I go back to the original point that the Minister doth protest too much in relation to this. He knows that he is caught. He knows that he is caught by the commitment of his own leadership. Yet, he seeks to criticise the Budget. Yet, he seeks to try to ameliorate his own political difficulties by saying that it is the fault of other people. It is not the fault of other people; it is the fault of his own party’s commitment to this Budget.

Mr Sheehan may be able to stand outside a school, protest against the cuts and seek to express solidarity with teachers and classroom assistants who are sacked. He may have the Minister’s blessing and approval for doing that — I know that the Minister has said that — but that is not a truthful or honest position to adopt. It is disingenuous, to say the least, to adopt that position. That is why the amendment that the SDLP has brought forward, and which I believe will receive the support of the DUP, the Ulster Unionists and the Alliance Party, is preferable.

I think that it is time for the Minister and Sinn Féin —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr A Maginness: — to get over the difficulties that they have created for themselves and to say that there must be a fresh start.

Mr Craig: As I listened in the Chamber today, it was quite clear that there is a huge challenge facing Members. That challenge is, of course, the cuts to public spending, which are coming from central government. I do not think that any of us can afford to adopt the emu approach that some people seem to think will work. There is £1.3 trillion of debt in the public sector in the United Kingdom. It is a matter

of debate whether one agrees with the Tory-led coalition in Westminster and the speed with which they are cutting those budgets and the impact that it is having on the public sector. I know that many parties around the Chamber disagree with the level and speed of those cuts. There is huge debate, I think, in all political parties about what the correct level should be. There seems to be only one party in the Chamber that agrees with the speed with which they are doing it, and that party seems to comprise our colleagues to the right.

Most Departments, including Education, are facing these cuts. There is no question about that. The Executive made some hard choices in the draft Budget. One of those hard choices was to ring-fence Health. I do not think that anyone in the Chamber is saying that we should not ring-fence Health, given the impact that it has on individuals’ lives. That leads to the impossible situation where, if you start ring-fencing other Departments, you will very quickly run out of options for where your public-sector savings come from.

Prior to the creation of the draft Budget, I listened carefully to what the Minister said regarding his own budget. I can clearly recall several occasions when he made it very clear that he would do everything within his power to protect front-line services. I am sure that I am not the only person in Northern Ireland who heard those comments. That is why, when the draft budget for Education came out, it came as such a surprise to me to see the level and extent of the cuts coming to front-line services. When we see what is regarded as a 7% cut to secondary education and an 8% cut to primary education, it is quite clear that those will have a massive impact on front-line services. It is hard to see how we will deliver the same high-quality education in Northern Ireland with fewer teachers, larger classrooms and ultimately a workforce that is demoralised because of the lack of finance for it. That is why, when we looked at that as a party, we asked, “Will those cuts to front-line services happen too deep, too quickly?”, which, I have to say, is the same complaint that we have about the Tory party.

When we look at the back-room services, we see that we have to put a question mark over them. The Minister knows only too well that we do not get to see all the finances of his back-room services, so we cannot make those judgements. That is a judgement for the Minister. Could larger cuts be made to those back-room services that are there to allegedly support education?

Mr Hazzard: Thanks to the Member for giving way. I am interested in the Member’s definition of a “back-room service”. I presume that he is not talking about services such as Sure Start, breakfast clubs and others that are vital to the running of a school. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Craig: That is why I was careful to talk about front-line services. I regard those as front-line services.

However, as we all know, there are —

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept that, however he describes them — backroom services or money held at the centre — the fact is that, in Northern Ireland, we hold about 20% more at the centre than is held for the aggregated schools budget in other parts of the United Kingdom? That is why schools find themselves under pressure.

Mr Craig: I totally agree with the Member, and I thank him for coming to my next point in the speech, which is the level of finance that we hold at the centre. Efficiencies have to be found there before we look at front-line services. The balance between whatever level of cuts has to be made between those two needs to be rebalanced. As it stands, the draft Budget will have a major detrimental impact on front-line services, which will have a major impact on the quality of service that we deliver.

Cull the overheads and give the schools a chance. That is the message that we are trying to send out; that is the message from teachers, principals and the boards of governors to just about every Member. They want to be given a chance to deliver high-quality education.

I listened with interest to what Members had to say. I listened very carefully to what Pat Sheehan had to say about his party's approach, and he basically asked where and how we should make the cuts. The Minister has given us an outline of his thoughts on where we should make the cuts; that is what the draft Budget is. It is the Minister's choice. However, it is also right for us to question those choices and ask whether there is a better balance for them. That is why we tabled our motion and why we have said that we will support the SDLP's amendment.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for giving way. I will make a quick point. Neither your motion nor the SDLP's amendment offers an alternative or supports funding going anywhere else other than into schools. Vote for what is on the paper rather than what you think you are voting for.

Mr Craig: Minister, ultimately, we are asking for a better balance of funding for front-line services. The Minister knows only too well that negotiations have taken place since the draft Budget was published. I would like to see not only the draft Budget but the final Budget.

I listened with interest to what Danny Kinahan had to say, and I am quite content that I do not share his views about the complete failure of education in Northern Ireland. That seems to be the Dr Doom approach —

Mr Kinahan: I did not say that.

Mr Craig: Hansard will correct me if I am wrong, but I know what I heard.

Trevor Lunn made the very important point that it is all about how the money is spent. Not for the first time, my colleague got it right. The debate is about how it is actually spent. *[Laughter.]* He is looking shocked.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way again?

Mr Craig: I certainly will.

Mr Wilson: Does he accept that, rather than the Minister's contention, the motion makes it quite clear how the DUP would spend the money. It would give it to schools rather than leaving it with a Stalinist-type Department that wants to control —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Could all remarks be made through the Chair, please?

Mr Wilson: — the money that is available to schools and, therefore, deny money to the front line.

Mr O'Dowd: So, close everything else —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Order.

Mr Craig: It is about how the money is spent. As my colleague quite rightly pointed out, we would look at the issue of how it is spent slightly differently from the party opposite. Maybe more than slightly differently.

My colleague Nelson also quite correctly pointed out that other choices are being made by the Minister. When you hand millions of pounds over to the City of Culture and £140,000 to the Irish language for different projects, no matter how justifiable those projects are, you are taking it away from front-line services.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Craig: Different choices are being made. I will give you one chance, because I am out of time.

Mr D Bradley: During my speech, I mentioned that there was £500 million in the Stormont House Agreement for education. I know that that has been designated as capital, but previous negotiations have allowed capital to be converted into resource. That is an avenue that we should go down to get more money for education across the whole gamut.

5.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Craig: That is an issue for the Treasury to decide. What we are debating here is how the Minister spends his budget, and we have outlined our rationale behind the motion and our support for the SDLP's amendment.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I remind Members that, if it is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly acknowledges the challenging financial environment in which education will operate from 1 April 2015 and the widespread concern amongst schools regarding the implications for the classroom of the Department of Education's draft budget; recognises that from 1 April 2015 there will be a single Education Authority in place of the five education and library boards to oversee the allocation of the majority of the education budget; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that protecting classroom practice is his first priority and to use the new administrative arrangements to devolve maximum budget autonomy to schools that have demonstrated sound financial management skills in order to achieve the best possible educational outcomes whilst ensuring value for money.

Motion made:

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. —
[Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs).]*

Adjournment

Post-16 Education: Antrim

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes and all other Members will have approximately six minutes.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much. Did you say six minutes?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Sorry, 15 minutes for the proposer and six minutes for all others.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much indeed. I am very pleased to be having a debate on the post-16 provision in Antrim, and I thank the Minister for being here. I hope that this debate will be conducted in a more friendly manner than the previous one.

I want to highlight the lack of provision post-16 and to ask the Minister whether he will cause a study to be done and a long-term plan to be put together for Antrim. We have no regional college in Antrim. We have Parkhall Integrated College with no post-16 provision, St Benedict's College in Randalstown with no post-16 provision, Crumlin Integrated College with no post-16 education, and Antrim Grammar, which is full and only able to take 10 or 15 pupils each year at 16, so everyone else has to go somewhere else for their post-16 education.

As one key teacher put it to me, if you are academic and in Antrim Grammar, you are fine; if it is St Benedict's, Parkhall or Crumlin, you have to move schools and take a bus. If you are going for a vocational future, it is a bus to Newtownabbey or Ballymena, so you are second-class citizens unless you are academic. If you leave Antrim Grammar at 16, you may well have an even harder time scrambling for places in schools; whether they are in Belfast, Lisburn, Ballymena or Magherafelt, you have to scramble for places. So, I am asking the Minister whether we can look at having an Antrim solution.

Parkhall Integrated College is a really excellent school, despite its split site, and it is really pleased that it is getting its rebuild, which was published today. I do not want anything that I say today to affect that in any way.

St Benedict's, which is another great school, is doing its best but with creaking and windswept rooms. It is also very much part of Antrim, but is being undermined by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) approach to area planning. Area planning, which has caused sectors to merge together, has, in this case, led to arrangements to work with St Louis Grammar School in Ballymena, but which will likely lead to leakage to Ballymena and could threaten the very existence of St Benedict's in the long run.

St Benedict's and Randalstown are very much part of the Antrim borough, and part of the reason for this debate is to push for that Antrim solution and not to lose St Benedict's.

Crumlin Integrated College is another school dear to my heart and one that we have debated and discussed here at length. I am glad to say that it seems to be much closer

to a secure future as a grant-maintained integrated (GMI) school, subject to the development proposals and, of course, the Minister's decision.

Some 1,100 pupils leave Crumlin every morning, costing just short of £1 million in transport. When canvassing, it became very clear that, if Crumlin had post-16 provision, parents would think twice, and think seriously, about sending their children further away. I remind everyone that parental choice is what we all believe in. Keeping a child at the same school throughout their post-primary life must be a very high priority when choosing schools. I wonder whether a study has ever been done on the effects on children of changing school at age 16. There is much food for thought there. We have to keep in mind that, if Crumlin were to have post-16 provision, that would affect Parkhall and, indeed, the other schools. It is the right thing to look for, but we need to consider it properly. That is why I am asking in today's debate for a long-term plan.

Antrim Grammar is full and very successful academically. It works very well with its neighbour, Parkhall Integrated, but can take only 10 or 15 pupils from the surrounding schools each year. It has not been allowed to expand. When I explored this, the indication was that parents were not queuing up because of the lack of facilities. The sporting facilities in the Antrim area are extremely poor, and, if you have the chance of a school for the full time with better facilities, of course, you are likely to go there.

The new principal has, quite rightly, looked at choosing from AQE and GL separately. Not only will this spread sharing in Antrim, it will improve the school's links with the excellent Catholic schools nearby. The review that I am calling for should take all this into account. If there were more post-16 provision and better facilities, I think that very many parents would want to stay in Antrim. An excellent report by Parkhall argued for post-16 provision, but it was shelved because of the rebuild. All those comments, however, still stand. Just because a development plan does not exist, it does not mean that a long-term view or plan is not needed.

As I said, we no longer have a regional college. We have a very good area learning community, but, without a regional college, it has one vital limb missing. We also have an integrated learning community, which includes Sperrin and Slemish schools. Despite excellent close relationships between the schools, there is a lack of vocational and skills training in certain subjects. If expansion were allowed, these skills or subjects could be offered. When visiting Antrim Grammar and talking to pupils who had got excellent results, it was sad to hear one or two saying that they could not do physics at A-level. The school could not offer it because not enough pupils wanted it. Were it to expand, it could well offer physics.

I know that we are in a time of austerity, but we still need to plan a way forward. We are in the middle of a transport review, and initial suggestions seem to target reduced travelling. The cost of transport is very likely to go up in the long term, so we should be looking at how we reduce everyone's travel.

I referred to the 1,100 pupils leaving Crumlin every morning, and I am told that we have 1,000 leaving Antrim. Some 200 leave the Antrim district at post-16 — 200 scrambling for those places. In times of austerity, there has to be a better way. A needs assessment study in

2011 showed some 4,108 primary places, growing by, depending on how you read the document, between 7% and 9%. Yet it refers to just under 2,000 post-primary places, so some 2,500 are moving. In the same needs analysis, we see that there are some 240 empty places — probably more now — but some of those will be due to the development plan mechanism and others to the lack of services that I mentioned.

I wonder whether a study has ever been done on not having post-16 provision. All those whom I talk to in the education world feel that parents prefer schools with post-primary provision to age 18, and especially so in today's climate, when jobs are hard to find.

I also wonder whether any study has been done on the effects of absenteeism, early starts and years of travelling, especially for teenagers. When you think about nightlife and the way that many live now, that would make it especially difficult to get up early every day. Think of those 200 every year.

Minister, today's debate is a request for a constructive long-term view of Antrim and to plan for joined-up thinking on its provision. Antrim town and district is not well served, and the scramble for places for the less academic is wrong. Can we have a proper study and a plan? It is our duty to provide choice. That is what we should be doing to avoid that scramble for places.

Mr Clarke: I thank the proposer of the topic. It is very timely. I am pleased to be part of the debate today. Reference has been made to Parkhall Integrated College. I put on record thanks to the Minister for listening to the delegation from the Antrim area from all the political parties in support of the Parkhall site. Education in the Antrim borough has been ravaged. It is about time that that tide turned. More should be done now in post-primary education.

I had a slight chuckle when I heard the proposer of the topic say that there was no regional college. I remind him that it was his Minister who removed the regional college from Antrim back in 2010; he made that announcement. It was disappointing, because it served Antrim particularly well. Even though it was the newest of the sites at the time, it served the people well. That aside, the Member's point in relation to post-16 education in Antrim, Randalstown and Crumlin — I will just call it the Antrim borough — was well made. We have been served poorly. Reference was made to the provision that Antrim Grammar received. As the Member said, that provision is quite small. We are appealing for the Minister to do whatever he can to deliver more post-16 education for our constituents in the Antrim council area.

Another statistic that the honourable Member mentioned was the number of people who decide to get on buses to leave Antrim town, Crumlin and some of the outlying areas every day. That is very unfortunate. We can talk about austerity and how we can save money, but it is a sad and unfortunate indictment on our society. The Member talked about choices. I had a choice: I grew up in that area, and my children were educated in it. When the Member made that point, I had a chuckle because he chose to go outside not only Antrim but the whole island to educate his children. That is just an aside.

The problem, Minister, is that the schools estate in our area has been ravaged. We need development in the area. I support the point that the Member well made in relation

to Parkhall. We all support Antrim Grammar because it is the only grammar school that we have left in our area. When people, parents and children look at education now, they are looking for post-16 provision. It could be suggested that, for that reason, some people choose to get onto a bus every morning and their children are bussed to Belfast, Ballyclare or Ballymena. Children are making those choices because they are deciding what they are going to do post 16. That has to be addressed. I support the proposer of the topic in doing whatever he can to help to address that situation. In the long term, there will be savings for the Education Authority in the amount of money we spend on transporting our children across the Province. There is an opportunity for Antrim Grammar, Parkhall and Crumlin to assist by providing more post-16 education to keep our kids in the area and prevent them from having to get up early in the morning to set off on long journeys and not get home until late in the afternoon. I support the proposal.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Member for proposing the topic this evening. It brings me back to something that has happened in the town that I went to school in. To offer a full curriculum of opportunities to young people in years 13 and 14, Ballyclare Secondary School and Ballyclare High School have combined so that they can offer a wide range of subjects. If physics is not offered in the secondary school, pupils can transfer to the high school for physics. That opportunity is available, and it could be used in Antrim, which has been bereft of such an opportunity for young people.

5.15 pm

Encouragingly, young people are staying on at school to get qualifications, and, as a consequence, parents are making judgements. If a child is not offered the opportunity to get an A-level or AS-level qualification in the subjects that they want to study, parents will vote with their feet. As was said, a large number of parents are sending their children to schools outside the area. That is not because quality education is not available. Unfortunately, as the Member who secured the debate said, it is because they do not like their child having to move halfway through a course to another school. That is a big upheaval, maybe involving a change of peer group and everything associated with that. That is vital.

I ask that a study be carried out to evaluate the best available options at the least cost to ensure that we can deliver a full curriculum of A levels and AS levels to the young people of Antrim and the surrounding area. It is a growing area in which the population has not been stagnant. Populations tend to go through cycles in certain areas. I think of what has happened in one of the largest estates in Europe, which was built in the 1960s: Rathcoole. It had three schools at one time, and now it has none. Families are starting to come back into the area, and a lot of young people have to be bussed from Rathcoole to other areas. It is important to plan properly and ensure that it goes forward.

We have requests for additional sports facilities, and we know that, for pupils in Antrim who want to do PE, as I call it, at A level, the facilities are not there. We can do something when we are dealing with the redevelopment and the new school at Parkhall to ensure that adequate facilities are available for others to use as well. It is

important that a report be brought forward to address the issue so that we do not spend a lot of money for young people to sit on buses to go from one area to another. There are good facilities on their doorstep, but parents will make a judgement that they do not want their child to have to move to another area when they finish their fifth year — year 12. It is important to assure people that we have invested in the facilities in the area and that the courses that are available will be shared between Antrim Grammar and other schools. There are a number of very good schools in the area that can and should be able to deliver AS level and A-level courses. We should make that provision, so I support the topic. I ask that the Minister tasks the Department to do a report on provision of sixth form — years 13 and 14 — facilities in the Antrim catchment area.

Mrs Cameron: I also support the topic, and I thank my fellow Member for South Antrim Danny Kinahan for securing the Adjournment debate.

We are all aware that the education system in Northern Ireland is well renowned for producing world-class academic achievements and is the envy of education systems throughout the United Kingdom and beyond. It is unfortunate, however, that young people in my constituency are being let down by the lack of learning provision once they have reached the age of 16 and wish to continue their education. Antrim Grammar, Parkhall Integrated and St Benedict's College have a combined enrolment of around 2,000 pupils, yet only Antrim Grammar offers A level or Key Stage 5 post-16 further education. I should say at this stage that all three of my children, who are all now over the age of 18, were fortunate enough to have been able to avail themselves of the opportunity to study for their A levels at Antrim Grammar, which is a very successful school.

However, that opportunity is simply not there for all of our pupils in the Antrim area. This leaves many pupils adrift, following their GCSEs without proper structure or direction to their academic future. I know of several pupils who are either forced to enrol and travel to other schools as far afield as Larne and Carrickfergus or take up a place at Newtownabbey or Ballymena regional colleges, or at Belfast Metropolitan College.

My greatest fear is that the inconvenience and upheaval is resulting in young people leaving the education system altogether and joining the not in education, employment or training trend. During those formative years, many young people do not have the confidence to leave the security of the school that they have attended for the last five years and are simply dropping out of the education system through lack of support and provision for their futures. I fully appreciate that every student is not suited to the post-16 formal school system and feel that the possibility of some vocational training also needs to be explored for the young people of Antrim. For a young person, it is a huge leap from school to working life, and I believe that local schools could also look at providing support for those who wish to pursue apprenticeships or begin the search for employment.

To put it bluntly, the lack of post-16 education in Antrim is failing the young people of my constituency. It is also planting the seeds of economic inactivity, which will have ramifications for generations to come. I am concerned that, by allowing that impasse to continue, young people,

through no fault of their own, will put additional pressure on our already stretched welfare system, which we all know creates a cycle of reliance on benefits and is detrimental to the confidence of young people who are just starting out towards their adult lives.

I implore the Minister to look at the long-term consequences that the lack of post-16 education will give to the current and future generations of young people in Antrim. I feel that a more strategic view is needed for the town to continue to prosper economically and socially. The young people of Antrim need to continue to contribute to and be proud of the education system that we have in Northern Ireland. I hope that the current situation will be rectified in the near future.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I welcome this opportunity to set out my position on the planning of post-primary school provision and, in particular, the focus on post-16 provision in the Antrim area. In responding to the debate, I wish to put on record that I have noted the issues raised by Members on area planning. I will pass on their concerns and ask for a report from the relevant planning authorities in the area, the board and CCMS.

The Antrim area, as Members will know, is served by four post-primary schools; one grammar school providing 11-18 education, and three secondary schools providing 11-16 education. There are strong links between the schools, the NRC and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise.

I have often said, and I am happy to repeat again, that the vision that we have set for education here is aimed at ensuring that all of our young people have the opportunity and are encouraged to reach their full potential. This is particularly important for young people at 16 years old as they start to think about the courses that they will undertake in years 13 and 14 —

Mr Clarke: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Just give me one moment and I will — and look forward to their preferred pathway for further study, training or employment. I will give way to the Member.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way. I am picking up on the point he has just made about being well served by the NRC. That is the point I was trying to make. We had an NRC that served us well in Antrim, but we are still in the same scenario. The children in that area, whether in Templepatrick, Crumlin or Antrim town, actually have to get on the bus and head to Ballymena. The grammar provision in Ballymena is no different. We need the post-16 education service in the Antrim area rather than expecting our children to get on to buses every day.

Mr O'Dowd: I take the Member's point on board. He will also accept that I am not responsible for the regional colleges. It may be a good argument for bringing further and higher education into DE, but that is a debate for another day.

As I said earlier, I have tasked the education and library boards, working with CCMS and other sectors, to plan for high quality education that meets the needs and aspirations of young people in any given area, including Antrim town. I expect all boards — and, in the near future the Education Authority — and CCMS to be aware of the future needs of young people and plan to meet them.

In the Antrim area, the North Eastern Education and Library Board has worked with all other sectors in bringing forward the area plan. Development proposals have been brought forward for a number of significant changes at post-primary level, and I am aware that there are more in the pipeline.

So, it appears that the North Eastern Board is working to its plan and is planning to bring forward proposals.

Currently, there are two development proposals being considered by my officials. Both relate to Crumlin. One is to close the controlled integrated school, and the other is to establish a grant-maintained integrated school, which, I know, Members in the Chamber, including Mr Kinahan, have expressed interest in.

You will understand that this is a statutory process and, as the final decision maker, I am not in a position to discuss the detail of the proposals. I wish to emphasise that, when making my decisions, I will be focusing on the best interests of the young people and not institutions. As I have said time and time again, it is the responsibility of the planning authorities — in this case, it is the North Eastern Education and Library Board and CCMS — to bring forward robust proposals that will provide viable and sustainable schools that will provide high-quality education well into the future.

As I said at the start of these deliberations, Members have raised concerns about sixth-form provision in Antrim town and their desire to have young people accessing sixth-form provision there. I will raise those matters with the North Eastern Education and Library Board, and I will also raise them in conjunction with CCMS, and ask them to report back to me as to how they envisage the provision post-16 meeting the needs of young people from Antrim in Antrim town. I will inform Members of that report when I receive it.

Adjourned at 5.27 pm

Committee Stages

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Regional Development
8 December 2014

Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill [NIA 40/11-16]

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Trevor Clarke (Chairperson)
Mr Seán Lynch (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Joe Byrne
Mr Alex Easton
Mr Ross Hussey
Mr Declan McAleer
Mr David McNarry
Mr Stephen Moutray

The Chairperson (Mr Clarke): I inform members that the Committee will now agree separately each clause of and schedule to the Bill. A hard copy of the Bill as introduced has been provided.

Question, That the Committee is content with clause 1, put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the long title, put and agreed to.

The Chairperson (Mr Clarke): We will now move into closed session to discuss the Committee report on the Bill. Are members content for the work experience student to remain in the Room? He is with me.

Members indicated assent.

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 5 December 2014

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 34242/ 11-15, to detail the outcome of the meeting with the Secretary of State on 4 September 2014.
(AQW 36595/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Junior Ministers, amongst others, met with the Secretary of State and it was agreed to keep this issue under consideration.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how social enterprises and entrepreneurs are being encouraged to make use of Social Enterprise Hubs to gain business advice and practical support.
(AQW 36612/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Accelerating Social Enterprise is part of the unique approach by the Executive to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

The Delivering Social Change framework represents a new level of joined-up working by Ministers and senior officials across Executive departments to drive through initiatives which have a genuine impact on the ground and helping to break the long term cycle of multi-generational poverty.

It is about creating a new culture and focus on cross-cutting work to achieve social benefits and through the Accelerating Social Enterprise Signature Programme, Social Enterprise Hubs are now operational across the nine Social Investment Fund (SIF) zone areas. Programme delivery is designed to encourage local social entrepreneurs and enterprises to gain access to and make use of the Hubs.

Nine Delivery Agents have been appointed in each of the nine Social Investment Fund zone areas to deliver a range of business support services to new incubating social enterprises in local communities throughout Northern Ireland. Each Hub contract is being managed by a Hub manager and delivery team with the relevant expertise to develop social enterprises. The support services being provided include ideas generation training, action planning, mentoring and business planning.

The Social Enterprise Hubs provide shop front retail space; hot-desking facilities; conference / meeting rooms; training suites; general workspace; and areas from where, depending on the business sector, social economy businesses can operate on a 'test-trading' basis.

The Delivery Agents are working with various community organisations through a structured community engagement process. The Agents are also working with a stakeholder group to ensure that Hub delivery is covered across the entire Social Investment Fund zone area.

The Programme is also being promoted to potential clients across Northern Ireland through various launch and social enterprise events, web and social media and press coverage.

As at 31 August 2014, the Social Enterprise Hubs have helped eight new enterprises begin to test-trade across Northern Ireland. These enterprises include craft collectives, a digital media company, musical therapy, addiction training and support service and a social farm.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the organisations that have (a) applied for; and (b) received funding as part of Delivering Social Change; (ii) the criteria applied in assessing bids; and (iii) how each organisation scored against the criteria.
(AQW 38512/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Delivering Social Change framework has a central fund that services the Social Investment Fund, Childcare Fund and the initial six Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes.

Details on funding arrangements for the Social Investment Fund are outlined on the OFMDFM website.

Funding in respect of the initial six Signature Programmes has been allocated to the identified lead department for each. The detail of this funding can also be found on the OFMDFM website.

With regard to Childcare, the Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme launched in March 2014, a first call for applications closed in May 2014 drawing some 77 responses from school age childcare providers. Of these, 50 met the criteria and Letters of Offer for the 50 successful projects will issue shortly.

A second call closed on 30 September 2014 and generated 42 applications from school age childcare providers. These applications are currently being assessed.

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on Delivering Social Change.
(AQO 6980/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Considerable progress is being made in achieving positive outcomes through the delivery of the signature programmes. Not only are we already seeing tangible outcomes on the ground, the programmes will also inform joined-up and evidence-based policies that will, in time, provide a significant influence on mainstream programmes.

Work is also underway on the development of three signature programmes in partnership with Atlantic Philanthropies which will focus on Dementia, Early Intervention and Shared Education to improve the lives of those who need it most.

The first phase of the Bright Start Childcare Strategy (A Strategic Framework and Key First Actions) was launched on 25 September 2013. The Framework sets out a general direction of travel for the Strategy, while the 15 Key First Actions represent an initial response to the childcare priorities identified during public consultation and research.

All 15 Key First Actions are now being taken forward and are being delivered through the School Age Childcare (SAC) Grant Scheme.

The first phase of Bright Start was intended as interim to the full Bright Start Childcare Strategy, which is currently in development ahead of its intended publication before the end of the current financial year.

Looking to the future and using a co-design process with stakeholders, a new Delivering Social Change Strategy for Children and Young People post 2016 will be developed.

The Executive is also working on a longer term approach to improve the quality of life for our communities in the areas of health, education, employment, family and community cohesion. The outcome of this work will be a framework for future social policy interventions and investment plans.

Ms McCorley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much their Department has spent on interpreting services for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss, in the last five years.
(AQW 38805/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our Department has spent £18,149.45 in the last five years on interpreting services, as set out in the table below.

Financial Year	Amount spent on interpreting services
2010 - 2011	NIL
2011 - 2012	NIL
2012 - 2013	£3,100
2013 - 2014	£7,435.75
2014 - to date	£7,613.70
Total	£18,149.45

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in their Department that earn less than the living wage of £7.20 per hour, as calculated by Oxford Economics for the Northern Ireland Commission for Voluntary Action (NICVA) Centre for Economic Empowerment.

(AQW 38861/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have no employees earning less than £7.20 per hour.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 38025/11-15, what is the average time taken to process applications for Private River Watchers; and for her assessment of the time taken.

(AQW 38783/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The Foyle Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC) is one of the North / South Implementation Bodies established under the North / South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (NI) Order 1999.

The appointment of a Private River watcher is made under Section 55 of the Foyle Fisheries Act (NI) 1952 and is made by any of the persons specified in Section 55 (1) (a), (b), (c) or (d). That person makes the appointment by an instrument in writing in the form set out in the fifth schedule to the Act. The appointment must then be confirmed by the District Judge. The overall process is not time bound in statute.

The processing time is often complicated by the need for the Courts Service to process the applications and set a suitable date for proposed candidates to appear before the District Judge for confirmation of appointment. The Loughs Agency does not receive many applications and estimates that from initial application to confirmation can take on average nine months for a straightforward application.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to attract EU funding for aquaculture.

(AQW 38959/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Funding for aquaculture businesses has consistently been a feature of the EU funding programmes for fisheries administered by my Department. The current European Fisheries Fund (EFF) programme made provision for some £1.6m of public funding for aquaculture and the Department has awarded £700k in grants in response to the applications received. The new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund which is expected to come into operation in mid 2015 will continue to provide opportunities to financially support the local aquaculture industry.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether he will take action to close any legal loopholes or introduce legislation against the use of animals for the baiting, training or bleeding of dogs for hunting or fighting.

(AQW 38988/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Section 8 of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 (the 2011 Act) created a number of offences in relation to animal fighting including baiting and training. It defines animal fighting as an occasion on which a protected animal is placed with an animal or with a human for the purpose of fighting, wrestling or baiting. As a protected animal includes any animal under the control of man, whether on a permanent or temporary basis, an animal fight can be deemed to have taken place, even if both animals are wild animals.

I am content that the 2011 Act has robust provisions to deal with animal fighting. Investigations are undertaken by the PSNI in relation to animal fighting and wildlife crime and they also investigate animal welfare issues where other criminal activities are involved. The legislation allows for penalties on conviction in the magistrates' courts of up to six months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £5000, and in the Crown Court of up to two years imprisonment and/or and unlimited fine.

You may recall that I wrote to you on 18 July 2014, following the Private Members' Motion debate on animal cruelty on 31 March 2014, to advise you that I had initiated a Review of the implementation of the 2011 Act. This is being taken forward in conjunction with the Department of Justice. Since then a series of Stakeholder Discussions Sessions have taken place and my officials are currently reviewing the feedback from the Sessions. If you are aware of any legal loopholes that affect the implementation of the legislation, I would welcome your input to that review. Should you wish to contribute you should contact Geraldine Fee (Tel:02890524193 or email Geraldine.fee@dardni.gov.uk) as soon as possible.

I hope that the Review will issue a report, including recommendations, early in 2015.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the (i) South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society; (ii) Tyrone Cultural Society; and (iii) North Antrim Historical Society have received any funding from her Department or its arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 39014/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The (i) South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society; (ii) Tyrone Cultural Society; and (iii) North Antrim Historical Society have not received any funding from Department of Agriculture and Rural Development or its arm's-length bodies.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of staff employed (i) directly by her Department; and (ii) by its agencies, who currently earn less than the living wage.

(AQW 39034/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The current British and north of Ireland Living Wage as published by the Living Wage Foundation is £7.85 per hour.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, including its Agencies, has no non-industrial employees who earn less than £7.85 per hour based on 37 net hours per week.

The Department currently employs 16 Industrial staff who are being paid below a basic hourly rate of £7.85 based on 37 net hours per week. This is currently under review as part of the NICS wide Industrial Pay & Grading Review which is looking at the pay rates for all Industrial staff.

All staff employed in DARD are paid in line with the NICS Industrial and Non Industrial pay scales.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the compulsory testing of bovines for Bovine Viral Diarrhoea.

(AQW 39121/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My officials are continuing to work closely with the industry body Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI) with the aim of eradicating BVD in the north of Ireland. Compulsory testing will be a key component of this work.

Similarly, my officials are working with the EU Commission to clear the necessary draft legislation which I hope to introduce as soon as possible in 2015.

There remain, however, a number of issues which AHWNI needs to resolve, including providing assurance as to the organisation's long-term sustainability, before the legislation can be introduced. DARD officials are currently working with AHWNI to try to reach a successful outcome.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to quantify the number and percentage of (i) male; and (ii) female (a) workers on farms; (b) in labour input (Annual Work Units); and (c) managed farms in each available year in since 2010; and how her Department intends to increase the number of females in each category.

(AQW 39122/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the farm labour force is collected by DARD as part of the annual June Agricultural and Horticultural Survey Statistics and details on male and female farm workers and managers are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Male and Female Farm Labour 2010-2013

	2010		2011		2012		2013	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Male Workers ¹	9,704	87%	9,963	87%	10,535	87%	10,807	87%
Female Workers ¹	1,477	13%	1,479	13%	1,579	13%	1,565	13%
Total	11,181	100%	11,442	100%	12,114	100%	12,372	100%
AWU Total Male ²	23,280	83%	23,209	83%	23,440	83%	23,802	83%
AWU Total Female ²	4,798	17%	4,756	17%	4,797	17%	4,824	17%
Total Labour	28,077	100%	27,964	100%	28,237	100%	28,627	100%
Farm: Male Principal	23,171	95%	23,134	95%	22,994	95%	23,195	95%
Farm: Female Principal	1,311	5%	1,278	5%	1,291	5%	1,308	5%
Total	24,482	100%	24,412	100%	24,285	100%	24,503	100%

1. Workers: paid, unpaid, full-time, part-time, casual and family labour.
2. All labour including spouse and other farm business partners.

The various services and programmes offered and operated by my Department provide equality of opportunity for female participants, but my Department has no specific targets to increase the proportion of females in the farm labour force.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the current status and future of Camlough Lake.
(AQO 7121/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: NI Water currently abstracts water from Camlough Lake as a source of raw water for Camlough Water Treatment Works (WTW), which supplies approximately 35% of the drinking water for the Newry area. The lake is extensively used for fishing and other recreation and tourism activities, all of which are promoted by Newry and Mourne District Council. The lake also feeds Newry Canal, which is operated by the council. While the lake is used for these purposes it is not owned by NI Water or Newry and Mourne District Council.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is currently progressing the Reservoirs Bill through the Assembly. This primary legislation will, when enacted, introduce a management regime for reservoirs capable of holding 10,000m³ or more of water. The Reservoirs Bill will place a responsibility on reservoir managers to mitigate the risk of flooding from an uncontrolled release of water due to dam failure, thereby protecting the public, the environment, cultural heritage and economic activity. Camlough Lake will fall within the scope of this legislation.

As regards NI Water's future use of the lake as a source of raw water, a Water Resource and Supply Resilience report, due to be completed by 2017 will include consideration of Camlough WTW and the extent to which Camlough Lake will continue to be used by NI Water as a source of raw water.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures has she put in place to prevent Avian Flu spreading to Northern Ireland.

(AQW 39283/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In response to the confirmation of high pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N8 in Yorkshire, my Department carried out an assessment of the risk and immediately took additional precautionary measures to mitigate against risk of spread of the disease to the north of Ireland. As a temporary precautionary measure, my Department has imposed additional controls on movements of live birds, poultry products and poultry meat coming here from all parts of Britain. This has been in place since Monday 17 November, the day following confirmation of disease in Yorkshire. DARD has also introduced a ban on the movement of live birds coming to the north for bird sales and pigeon races from Britain. These controls are being implemented and enforced by DARD portal inspectors, working 24/7, at Belfast and Larne Harbours and will be subject to ongoing review and risk assessment as the situation in Britain becomes clearer over the coming weeks. In addition to this, my Divisional Veterinary Offices have carried out tracing and investigation of all live poultry consignments imported from Britain since October. This has now been completed.

My Department reiterated its advice that poultry keepers remain vigilant for signs of disease, report their suspicions early and maintain good biosecurity. As a further precaution I have asked that bird keepers revisit their own contingency arrangements for housing birds should that be required. We are keeping the situation and the veterinary risk assessment under review.

Throughout this outbreak, my Department continues to work closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. There are daily teleconferences to ensure the most up to date information is available to support evidence based decision making in support of animal health and welfare. Stakeholders are regularly updated on the latest situation and further information is available on the DARD website including a Question and Answers section. Very close contact has also been maintained with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in Dublin and a Fortress Ireland approach is being adopted to protect against disease incursion.

DARD veterinary officials respond to cases of suspicion of all epizootic disease such as avian influenza, foot and mouth disease and swine fever to protect local livestock and the agri-food industry as part of normal business. An increased number of calls to report suspicions of avian influenza have been recorded as a result of the case in Yorkshire. These have involved veterinary investigation and sampling, restricting premises and laboratory testing at the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute but all have proved negative.

As regards future steps, it is my intention that the range of ongoing preventive measures that is already established in the north of Ireland will remain in place. In addition, my Department will continue to keep the Avian Influenza situation and the need for further measures under constant review in proportion to the level of risk.

In addition to the steps outlined above which have been taken in response to the situation in Britain, my Department is constantly monitoring developments and reviewing the risk of Avian Influenza being introduced here. A range of preventive measures are in place to address the risk of Avian Influenza entering the north of Ireland and to prevent its spread in poultry. A Bird Register is in place to gather essential information about poultry, game and other captive birds for the purpose of risk assessment, disease prevention and control. My Department also has extensive guidance for bird keepers on biosecurity measures to protect their birds. This is available on the DARD website. My Department also carries out routine monitoring of wild bird mortalities on an ongoing basis as part of our surveillance arrangements.

DARD has also taken steps, since the foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001, to put in place a robust and well rehearsed contingency plan to deal with the possibility of an outbreak of any major epizootic disease here in the north. My officials have developed a plan with priority areas, ranging from disease surveillance and emergency preparedness to information sharing, public awareness and effective containment measures. Since October 2013, DARD staff have been involved in four separate avian epizootic disease training events and contingency exercises.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the average change in the (a) number; and (b) health of fish in rivers between 2009 and 2014.

(AQW 38626/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): My Department commissions the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to carry out monitoring and research on the numbers of salmon, eel and coarse fish and analyse trends in these stocks in DCAL's area of jurisdiction.

Due to the different circumstances of the various fish species it is not possible to provide a single meaningful assessment of the change in fish stocks in our rivers. The position in respect of the various fish stocks is as follows:

Salmon

Salmon stocks are monitored at 6 index rivers in two ways:

- (1) The number of adult fish entering rivers to spawn, assessed against a conservation target level required to ensure continuance of the population;

- (2) The annual "recruitment" of young fish to the population as a result of the spawning of the adult fish from the previous year.

AFBI scientists are able to establish a Conservation Limit, which defines annual minimum numbers of adult salmon needed to spawn in each river to avoid a decline of that river stock. Results vary between rivers and table 1 below presents numbers of adult salmon as a percentage of conservation limits in the 6 index rivers:

Table 1

River/year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Blackwater	-	-	-	64	83	45
Bush	103	62	56	46	79	144
Clady	-	-	-	163	120	159
Glendun	96	33	64	76	88	178
Maine	170	68	61	77	129	53
Shimna	-	-	99	53	n/a	n/a

Table 2 below presents salmon recruitment on index rivers in the DCAL area (Average number of salmon fry counted per sample for each river, Target = 15).

Table 2

River/year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Blackwater	18.2	19.8	9.6	5.1	8.4	12.8
Bush	11.9	6.9	12.0	8.5	14.2	21.4
Clady	19.1	15.1	5.0	4.8	9.7	21.7
Glendun	5.6	8.8	10.3	7.2	9.7	7.3
Maine	15.4	19.2	10.1	6.7	15.3	28.8
Shimna	1.0	2.8	1.9	8.4	2.3	4.7

In addition to the main salmon index rivers, an experimental programme of salmon restoration is in operation in the River Lagan, where salmon were extinct from circa 1750 until re-introduced in 1993. Upstream migrating numbers of adult salmon are estimated using data from an automated fish counter at Stranmillis. The numbers from 2009 to 2013 are presented in table 3 below:

Table 3

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Number of salmon	38	92	36	49	85

Eels

Data on eel stocks are collected in the three river basin districts, one of which is cross border. On the Erne, the commercial fishery was closed in 2010 to meet the requirements of the North West Eel Management Plan (NWEMP). Juvenile eels are collected at Ballyshannon and transported upstream of the two dams for restocking in the upper catchment. The adult silver eels migrating to sea are collected in the upper catchments for transportation and stocked into the estuary at Ballyshannon below the two dams.

Erne River and Lakes - Elver collections have successfully trapped and transported significant amounts of elvers to Lough Erne from Ballyshannon and details are presented in table 4 below:

Table 4

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Elvers (Kg)	88.3	96.6	74.3	145.7	219.7	547.4
Elvers (approximate number)	264900	289800	222900	437100	659100	1642200

Silver eels are trapped and transported to Ballyshannon from Erne Conservation fisheries and the estimated total escapement is presented in table 5 below:

Table 5

Year	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Trap and transport (Kg)	19,333	25,252	34,166	39,319
Total escapement estimate (Kg)	37,940	39,858	57,365	64,285

Eel numbers in the Bann system are monitored as part of the Lough Neagh/River Bann eel management plan drawn up to comply with the European Eel stock recovery regulation. Two data points are monitored:

- (1) The annual recruitment of young eel captured at Coleraine and taken upstream to Lough Neagh, and;
- (2) The escapement of adult silver eel to sea via the river Bann

Details of both are presented in table 6 below:

Table 6

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Average
Elvers entering Bann at Coleraine (Number, thousands)	476	195	48	610	1032	2001	727
Silver eels escaping to sea in Tonnes (Target = 200 T)	134	165	315	262	276	Still in production	230

Other Fish Surveys

Lower Lough Erne fish stocks have been monitored for a number of species on a regular basis since 1992. Average numbers of individual species caught are presented in terms of Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE). One sample is taken at a variety of monitoring sites that represent a range of habitats along the perimeter of Lower Lough Erne. Details are presented in table 7 below.

Table 7

Species of fish	1992	1996	2000	2002	2004	2007	2010
Perch	15.6	21.3	38.0	28.8	47.1	46.5	58.5
Roach	32.0	41.2	31.1	28.2	45.1	45.4	28.5
Hybrids	0.8	1.7	2.1	2.1	3.4	5.9	1.2
Bream	1.2	1.1	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.0
Trout	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.4	0.7	0.6	0.2
Pike	0.7	1.2	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.3

Numbers of perch have shown a general increase since monitoring began in 1992 with numbers nearly four times greater in 2011 (58.5) than in 1992 (15.6). Bream numbers have shown a general decrease since 1992 and were virtually absent in the 2010 monitoring exercise. The numbers of trout have fluctuated between a high of 0.7 in 2004 and a low of 0.2 in 2010. Roach numbers have fluctuated over the 18 years between 28.2 (2002) and 45.4 recorded in 2007

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given the recent decision by Belfast City Council to provide £100,000 to the Ulster Orchestra, what financial contribution her Department will make to secure the future of this musical asset.

(AQW 39291/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I understand that the Belfast City Council offer is conditional upon the orchestra's future viability and sustainability. If the Orchestra presents a new sustainable operating model, I will give it serious consideration and, subject to receiving assurance that it can be delivered, I will engage with Executive Colleagues to assess how the Executive might support it.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding has been given to the Ulster-Scots Education Project through the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Ulster-Scots Academy.

(AQW 39323/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Ulster-Scots Education Project was commissioned in 2013 through public procurement. The University of Ulster were appointed to deliver the project for the agreed contract price of £370,603. The project is proceeding on schedule and is due to complete during the second half of 2015.

Department of Education

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many (i) primary; (ii) post-primary; and (iii) special schools offer shared classes for pupils.

(AQW 38555/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Schools participate in a wide variety of shared class activities with other schools and education providers. The Department does not hold data on the number or type of schools that offer shared classes.

The 2013 School Omnibus Survey included a module of questions on Shared Education. It was issued to all Principals in grant-aided schools, with an overall response rate of 52% (569). Of those who responded, 76% (433 respondents) indicated that their school had been involved in Shared Education with another school. The respondent profile was broadly representative of all schools, with no groups particularly over or under-represented in terms of school type, ELB or management type.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many (i) Irish-medium (ii) integrated; and (iii) special schools are involved in shared classes with pupils from other schools.

(AQW 38556/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools participate in a wide variety of shared class activities with other schools and education providers. The Department does not hold data on the number or type of schools that offer shared classes.

The 2013 School Omnibus Survey included a module of questions on Shared Education. It was issued to all Principals in grant-aided schools, with an overall response rate of 52% (569). Of those who responded, 76% (433 respondents) indicated that their school had been involved in Shared Education with another school. The respondent profile was broadly representative of all schools, with no groups particularly over or under-represented in terms of school type, ELB or management type.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Education what percentage of his Department's DEL is spent on salaries; and how he intends to reduce this spend in order to make efficiency savings.

(AQW 38691/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I can confirm that approximately 80% of my Department's Resource DEL budget is spent on salaries across the education sector.

As part of the Draft 2015-16 Budget outcome, education's 2015-16 Resource Budget is facing cuts, in cash terms, of 4.9% (£94.4 million) compared to the 2014-15 baseline budget. I have addressed my concerns with the Finance Minister and I am intent on enhancing the funds available to education in the 2015-16 Final Budget.

I have now published my Department's draft budget which sets out in full my proposed 2015-16 reductions across all areas of the budget.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many 'paired observations' have been undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate within schools since January 2014.

(AQW 38873/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Training Inspectorate have been piloting, on a phased basis towards the end of the 2013-14 school year and in the first term of the 2014-15 school year, a practice of 'joint' lesson observations, between an inspector and a school principal (or vice-principal), for the purpose of developing a shared understanding of effective teaching and learning.

During the pilot period, 35 joint lesson observations have taken place during district visits and 12 during formal inspection visits.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has undertaken its own research into shared education; and if not, whether it has funded any research on shared education.

(AQW 38882/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There is an extensive body of international research regarding the effectiveness of school collaboration generally and in divided societies more particularly.

This has been supplemented by specific local research evidence on recent Shared Education pilot projects. There is an active and vibrant Shared Education research community in our universities.

I appointed a Ministerial Advisory Group to report on how best shared education could be advanced. They undertook a wide consultation and research as part of their work.

A major evaluation was undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate on the International Fund for Ireland funded shared education project. In addition, the 2013 School Omnibus Survey included a module of questions on Shared Education. The survey has provided an important baseline measure of participation, perceptions and costs associated with Shared Education. Shared Education will be included in future Omnibus Surveys.

The recently launched Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature project will provide further local research evidence on Shared Education. A range of educational and reconciliation outcomes from the project will be fully monitored and evaluated.

Additionally my Department will undertake a consultation on a Shared Education Bill which I plan to bring to the Assembly.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education how much his Department has spent in relation to Ulster-Scots in each year since the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages came into force in the UK.

(AQW 38893/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below provides details of the Department's expenditure in relation to Ulster-Scots each year from July 2001:

Year	Expenditure
1 July 2001 – 31 March 2002	0
2002-2003	0
2003-2004	£69.95
2004-2005	0
2005-2006	£49,000
2006-2007	£50.61
2007-2008	£162.26
2008-2009	£260.61
2009-2010	£35.00
2010-2011	0
2011-2012	0
2012-2013	£173.95
2013-2014	0

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to detail the process for the appointment of a new school principal in each of the education sectors.

(AQW 38966/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is not responsible for the appointment of school Principals.

Within the controlled sector each Education and Library Board (ELBs) has devised a Teaching Appointments Committee Scheme (TACS), a copy of which is available from each Board.

While the ELBs operate a TACS for their own Board area, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools operates a scheme for the appointment of principals in maintained schools province-wide, which can be obtained from the Council.

In the Voluntary Grammar, Grant Maintained Integrated, Irish Medium and other maintained sectors the Board of Governors of each school as both the employer and employing authority is responsible for the criteria, selection and appointment of principals in accordance with relevant employment legislation.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education when the current process for the appointment of new principals for controlled schools, which in some cases requires the Board of Governors to forward three potential names to the Education and Library Board, was first introduced.

(AQW 38967/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is not responsible for the appointment of school Principals.

The process for the appointment of new principals for controlled schools was introduced under the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1972 Schedule 10.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what percentage of overall education spend is spent directly by schools.

(AQW 39002/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Education expenditure spent directly by schools includes the following:

- Amounts spent by schools that falls within the Local Management of Schools (LMS) budgets they are allocated;
- Earmarked funding delegated to schools;
- Resources attributable to schools from ELB Centre such as teacher substitution costs, special education costs and school rates; and

■ Funding provided for Delivering Social Change

Based on this, the overall percentage of education expenditure spent by schools is 80% of the Department of Education's Resource budget based on 2013-14 final outturn position.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the school buildings in North Down that have listed status.
(AQW 39003/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are no schools in the North Down area with listed status that fall under the responsibility of my Department.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of staff employed (i) directly by his Department; and (ii) by its agencies, who currently earn less than the living wage.
(AQW 39062/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of staff employed (i) directly by my Department; and (ii) each of my Department's agencies (arm's-length bodies), who earn less than the living wage is as follows:

	As at 21/11/14
DE	0
BELB	2,055
WELB	1,934
NEELB	2,654
SEELB	2,652
SELB	2,737
SCELB	0
CCMS	8
CCEA	63
CnaG	0
GTCNI	0
NICIE	0
YCNI	0
Middletown Centre	1

- The figures in the table above include Headquarter staff, school based staff, permanent and temporary staff.
- The living wage figure of £7.85 an hour (gross) has been used in this response.
- Multi jobbers are counted once if they hold one or more posts with an hourly rate of less than £7.85.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the deficit in promised funding for each of the twenty primary schools selected to trial nurture units; and to detail (i) why it has not been paid; and (ii) when it will be paid.
(AQW 39068/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Each of the twenty schools with a Delivering Social Change Signature Project Nurture Unit requires £70,000 per annum to cover the running costs of the unit. In this financial year each school has currently received £48, 000.

Funding for this project is provided by OFMDFM and is transferred to my Department as part of the quarterly Monitoring Rounds. DE has released all transferred funding to the schools as soon as we have received it.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of primary school pupils in receipt of free schools meals in North Down, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 39078/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information provided in the table below has been extracted from the 2013/14 school census. While the 2014/15 school census took place on the 10th October this year, provisional figures will not be available until December 2014 and will not be finalised figures until February 2015.

Primary school pupils entitled to free school meals in the North Down constituency (pupil residence) – 2011/12 – 2013/14

Year	Total enrolment	Number of pupils entitled to Free school meals
2011/12	6,992	1,235
2012/13	7,224	1,516
2013/14	7,429	1,561

Source: NI school census

Notes:

1. Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
2. Figures include all pupils entitled to free school meals; including nursery units (whether free school meal or JSA).
3. Eligibility under the Working Tax Credit criterion was introduced on a phased basis with Nursery, Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 pupils eligible from September 2010 and Key Stage 2 pupils eligible from September 2011.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to detail the budget allocation for implementation of the Autism Act (NI) 2011, including the required compliance with the amended Disability Discrimination Act.

(AQW 39157/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am fully committed to supporting pupils with autism and since 2011/12 I have provided additional resources of £6m, over and above the core funding for all special educational needs, to support autism.

The NI Executive's Autism Strategy and Action Plan is a key requirement of the Autism Act (NI) 2011. The strategy identifies that even though the initial Action Plan attached to the Strategy realistically assumes that there may be limited additional investment, this does not mean that progress on the development of autism services in the future cannot be achieved. My Department, through the Education and Library Boards and the Middletown Centre for Autism will continue to deliver and develop services to ensure the needs of children with autism are met and to provide support for parents/carers. This will be achieved through the innovative and efficient use of the considerable existing resources invested in this area.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what steps his Department has taken in relation to implementing the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(AQW 39162/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The NI Autism Act 2011 prescribed that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety lead on the development and implementation of a cross departmental strategy. Subsequently, the Autism Strategy (2013-2015) and Action Plan (2013-2016) set out the NI Executive's commitment to improving services and support for people with autism. My Department has been fully engaged in this process.

Both the Strategy and Action Plan have been developed through a process of collaborative and consultative working between people with autism, their families and carers, NI government departments and some key community and voluntary sector organisations.

My Department is working closely with the Education and Library Boards and the Middletown Centre for Autism on the implementation of the education-related actions; and will continue to work with other Departments in supporting pupils with autism. I recognise the importance of close collaboration between the Education and Health sectors and currently effective collaboration is ongoing and developing to support for pupils with autism.

I am confident that the key actions in the Autism Action Plan which require specific input from education sector bodies will ensure that children and young people with autism receive a high quality education that prepares them for life and work and enables them to fulfil their potential.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to detail the cross departmental projects (i) in place; and (ii) that are planned in response to the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 requirement for cross departmental collaboration to implement the NI Autism Strategy and Action Plan.

(AQW 39163/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department will continue to work closely with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and other key Departments/Agencies to ensure that joined up working is effective for those children and young people who rely on the services of more than one sector.

There is currently a great deal of effective collaboration between Health and Education Autism Spectrum Disorder Services, ongoing and developing, in respect of diagnostic assessment clinics, support for pupils with autism and joint training programmes. In addition, the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) actively participate in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services led diagnostic clinics.

Currently, the ELBs are involved in joint home-based or school/clinic based meetings with Health and Social Care Trust professionals to ensure seamless care and support is delivered at transition stages. Consideration is currently being given to the expansion of these co-ordinated health and education transition teams.

I remain committed to the close collaboration between the Education and Health sectors and other Departments in supporting pupils with special educational needs, including those with autism.

Mr I McCre asked the Minister of Education how many pupils, who reside in Cookstown District Council, travel to schools located in Magherafelt District Council and receive transport assistance for travel by bus, broken down by school in (i) 2013/14; and (ii) 2014/15.

(AQW 39164/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern and North Eastern Education and Library Boards have provided the information detailed in the tables below in respect to pupils eligible for transport assistance travelling by bus between the Cookstown and Magherafelt District Council areas in the (i) 2013/14 and (ii) 2014/15 years.

(1) Schools in the Magherafelt District Council area attended by pupils resident in Cookstown District Council area in 2013/14 and 2014/15 who receive transport assistance for travel by bus

School name	2013/14	2014/15
Magherafelt High School	44	42
Rainey Endowed	149	156
St Mary's Grammar School Magherafelt	313	280
St Pius' College	338	311
Sperrin College	102	99
Total	946	888

(2) Schools in the Cookstown District Council area attended by pupils resident in Magherafelt District Council area in 2013/14 and 2014/15 who receive transport assistance for travel by bus

School name	2013/14	2014/15
Cookstown High	*	*
Cookstown High (Special Unit)	*	*
Cookstown Primary School (Special Unit)	6	9
St Patrick's Primary School (Loup)	9	12
St Patrick's Primary School (Moneymore)	*	*
Holy Trinity College	*	*
Total	27	29

* Denotes fewer than 5. Number suppressed due to possible identification of individual pupils.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education, for each school in the North Belfast, to detail (i) the number of children at each school; (ii) the number of children who receive free school transport; (iii) the percentage of children who receive free school transport; and (iv) the cost of providing free school transport.

(AQW 39180/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I can advise that in the North Belfast Constituency (i) the number of children at each school, (ii) the number of children who receive school transport assistance, (iii) the percentage of children who receive school transport assistance, and (iv) the cost of providing school transport assistance for the 2013/14 year, the most recent year for which data is available, are shown in the table below;

School	Number Attending	Number receiving transport assistance	Percentage receiving transport assistance %	Cost of providing school transport assistance £
Abbots Cross Primary School	292	0	0	0
Ashgrove Primary School	381	0	0	0
Ballyhenry Primary School	134	0	0	0

School	Number Attending	Number receiving transport assistance	Percentage receiving transport assistance %	Cost of providing school transport assistance £
Ballysillan Primary School	130	0	0	0
Belfast Boys' Model School	943	29	3.08	5,139
Belfast Model School For Girls	916	8	0.87	6,540
Belfast Royal Academy	1,409	534	37.90	320,820
Ben Madigan Preparatory School	124	0	0	0
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	133	0	0	0
Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain	61	*	*	*
Carr's Glen Primary School	342	*	*	*
Cavehill Primary School	404	0	0	0
Cliftonville Integrated Primary School	249	0	0	0
Currie Primary School	152	7	4.61	6,080
Dominican College	1,030	431	41.84	260,860
Edenbrooke Primary School	223	0	0	0
Edmund Rice College	604	47	7.78	30,973
Gaelscoil Eanna	136	12	8.82	7,596
Glengormley High School	873	62	7.10	68,852
Glengormley Integrated Primary School	293	40	13.65	32,555
Glenwood Primary School	509	0	0	0
Hazelwood College	894	444	49.66	268,409
Hazelwood Primary School	465	36	7.74	13,926
Holy Cross Boys' Primary School	436	0	0	0
Holy Cross Girls' Primary School	162	0	0	0
Holy Family Primary School	435	0	0	0
King's Park Primary School	375	0	0	0
Ligoniel Primary School	160	0	0	0
Little Flower Girls' School	684	185	27.05	109,930
Lowwood Primary School	239	*	*	*
Mercy College	423	18	4.26	11,930
Mercy Primary School	212	0	0	0
Mossgrove Primary School	253	0	0	0
Newtownabbey Community High School	206	*	*	*
Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School	611	0	0	0
Our Lady's Girls' Primary School	326	0	0	0
Rathcoole Primary School	149	0	0	0
Sacred Heart Primary School	149	0	0	0
Seaview Primary School	400	0	0	0
St Bernard's Primary School	554	*	*	*
St Malachy's College	1,068	420	39.33	253,082
St Mary's Star of the Sea Primary School	124	0	0	0
St Mary's-on-the-Hill Primary School	349	*	*	*
St Patrick Primary School	549	*	*	*
St Patrick's College	705	40	5.67	26,229

School	Number Attending	Number receiving transport assistance	Percentage receiving transport assistance %	Cost of providing school transport assistance £
St Therese of Lisieux Primary School	444	*	*	*
St Vincent de Paul Primary School	224	0	0	0
Wheatfield Primary School	173	0	0	0
Whitehouse Primary School	446	0	0	0

* Denotes fewer than 5. Number suppressed due to possible identification of individual pupils.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 37527/11-15, when the Independent Review of Sure Start will be published.

(AQW 39181/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department expects to receive a final report by the end of the year.

I will wish to have an opportunity to consider the way forward for Sure Start taking account of the report findings, as well as wider Government and Departmental priorities and the overall budgetary position, after which the report will be published.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what access the teaching staff at Woodlands in Bangor have to the substitute or replacement teachers on any list held by his Department or Education and Library Boards.

(AQW 39187/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In 2006 my Department determined that only teachers registered on the Substitute Teachers Register (NISTR) should be employed as substitute teachers in schools.

NISTR is an online booking system, managed on behalf of all the employing authorities by the Belfast Education and Library Board which offers a wide pool of available teachers to all schools in the education sector. The primary purpose of NISTR is to offer protection to pupils, schools and employers by ensuring that all substitute teachers are properly checked as suitable to work with children and qualified to teach before being employed in schools within the education sector.

The Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre (Woodlands) in Bangor is part of the juvenile justice system and although teaching is undertaken at Woodlands, it is not a recognised school within the education sector and its' teaching staff are employed by the Department of Justice and not by the Department of Education or the South Eastern Education and Library Board. Consequently, Woodlands does not access NISTR to engage the services of substitute teaching staff.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the full name and publisher of the education journal EDSEC as described in a press release by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment on December 3 2013 which refers to the Principal of Portora Royal School as a member of the EDSEC's editorial advice board.

(AQW 39207/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am informed that a reference to the publication "EDSEC" in a DE news release of 2 December 2013, which was subsequently retweeted by CCEA, was erroneous. The publication referred to is actually titled "SecEd".

SecEd was launched in April 2003 by MA Education Limited, the independently owned educational specialist publishing company, part of the Mark Allen Group.

CCEA has now amended Mr Morton's profile on its website to make it clear that he is a member of the editorial advice board for SecEd.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education whether he will place the most recent edition of EDSEC in the Assembly Library.
(AQW 39208/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As outlined in my answer to AQW 39207/11-15, the member may be referring to the weekly newspaper SecEd. It is published by an independently owned educational specialist publishing company and is delivered free of charge to post-primary schools.

It would not therefore be for me to place a copy in the Assembly Library as this is not a publication belonging to my department or its public bodies but the Assembly Commission would of course be free to seek a copy directly from the publishers.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education when (i) the Belfast Education and Library Board approved the admission criteria for year 8 admission to Wellington College, Belfast; and (ii) the North Eastern Education and Library Board approved the admission criteria for year 8 admission to Antrim Grammar School using AQE and GL Assessment tests; and whether he

will name the source and place a copy of each detailed methodology used to establish such an equating procedure in the Assembly Library.

(AQW 39209/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the responsibility of a school's Board of Governors to set admissions criteria for entry to its school. The Education and Library Boards publish the admissions criteria set by each school in booklets or on their websites. Neither the Department of Education nor the Education and Library Boards have any role in setting admissions criteria other than to offer guidance.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education why his Department encourages schools to participate in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Pisa assessments when neutral academic observers report there are serious flaws at all levels of the programme.

(AQW 39211/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I agreed earlier this year that, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) PISA-Based Test for Schools should be available to our post-primary schools, should they wish to use it, to support self-evaluation and school development planning. This new PISA-based assessment complements, but is not part of, the PISA studies undertaken every three years.

The OECD PISA assessments can provide professional development for teachers as they learn about, and engage with, the cross-curricular questions used by PISA to assess Reading Literacy, Mathematical Literacy and Scientific Literacy. The Assessment outcomes also provide valuable information on pupils' attitudes towards English, mathematics and science.

Each participating school receives a report of its school-level results which have been calibrated on PISA-comparable scales. This contains:-

- descriptive information and analysis on the skills and creative application of knowledge of their 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics and science;
- individualised tables and charts;
- examples of strategies, policies and practices from education systems around the world; and
- comparisons based on type of school and socio-economic circumstances.

In recent years there has been academic debate about the merit of PISA. The debate centres on the robustness of the underlying methodology.

Criticisms of PISA methodology have been strongly refuted by the OECD and it has pointed to significant flaws in the evidence behind the arguments presented.

From the Department's perspective participation in PISA assessments allows us to access a wealth of evidence about our own and other education systems.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the established educational category in which Church of Ireland or Presbyterian maintained schools have been placed for the purposes of transport arrangements and temporary variation in enrolment.

(AQW 39215/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are three local schools which are Church of Ireland maintained schools, namely Desertmartin PS, Drelincourt Infants School and Seagoe PS. There is also one school that is a Presbyterian maintained school – Kilcoan PS.

For the purposes of home to school transport, these schools are categorised in the 'Controlled and Other Voluntary' category. Within the Department's Temporary Variation (TV) policy, however, there is no reference to this type of school. In order to provide clarity, the Department has written to the four schools and a number of other educational stakeholders to propose that they should be treated alongside controlled schools when considering TV requests. All responses to this proposal will be considered before a final decision is taken.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether legal advice from his Departmental Solicitor's Office was sought or given for the decision to re-categorise Seagoe Primary School as a controlled school for transport and temporary variation in enrolment purposes.

(AQW 39216/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Seagoe PS has not been re-categorised as a controlled school for either transport or Temporary Variation (TV) purposes. The Department wrote to the school in August to explain that the school fell under the 'Controlled and Other Voluntary' heading for home to school transport assistance. This was to clarify the existing position and did not change the categorisation of the school.

For TV purposes the position is different. The Department's TV policy does not specifically identify how either Church of Ireland or Presbyterian managed schools should be treated. As a result, the Department is consulting on a proposal that the four schools concerned, including Seagoe PS, should be treated alongside controlled schools for TV purposes. The views of those affected will be considered before a final decision is taken on the matter.

Legal advice was sought and received in relation to this work.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail all payments made to schools in the Southern Education and Library Board area following staff attendance at the Regional Training Unit in the last three years.

(AQW 39222/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The payments made to schools in the Southern Education and Library Board area following staff attendance at the Regional Training Unit in the last three years are as set out in the table below. Payments are in respect of substitute teacher costs to allow teaching principals or vice-principals to be released from their teaching duties in order to attend First Time Principals and First Time Vice-Principals Induction Courses.

Name of School	School Year			Total
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	
Donaghey PS			154.43	154.43
Kingsmills PS			617.50	617.50
St Francis of Assisi PS, Keady			156.07	156.07
St Joseph's PS, Ballymartin			140.81	140.81
Edendork PS			145.09	145.09
Banbridge Nursery School			153.79	153.79
Aghamullan PS		282.79	133.01	415.80
Drumgor PS		403.06		403.06
Windsor Hill PS	155.37	155.74		311.11
Gaelscoil Eoghain		142.26		142.26
Gaelscoil Aodha Rua		284.87	159.65	444.52
Churchill PS		132.81		132.81
St James PS, Drumatee	425.81			425.81
St Patrick's PS, Drumgreenagh	306.50			306.50
St Teresa's PS, Tullyherron	278.46			278.46
Ballylifford PS	264.11			264.11
Total	£1,430.25	£1,401.53	£1,660.35	£4,492.13

Source: Southern Education and Library Board

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of primary school pupils that are in receipt of free school meals in Strangford, broken down by school, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39264/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information provided in the table below has been extracted from the 2013/14 school census. While the 2014/15 school census took place on the 10th October this year, provisional figures will not be available until December 2014 and will not be finalised figures until February 2015.

Primary school pupils entitled to free school meals in schools situated in the Strangford constituency – 2011/12 – 2013/14

	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Abbey Primary School	128	20.5%	134	21.5%	139	22.2%
Academy Primary School	24	5.8%	42	10.3%	47	11.4%
Alexander Dickson Primary School	21	22.1%	25	30.1%	26	29.5%
Andrews Memorial Primary School	14	4.4%	25	7.6%	31	9.1%
Ballykeigle Primary School	10	25.0%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ballynahinch Primary School	52	20.3%	69	26.2%	63	24.8%
Ballywalter Primary School	38	22.6%	43	27.2%	59	35.5%
Carrickmannon Primary School	10	10.5%	13	13.5%	11	11.0%

	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Carrowdore Primary School	29	21.5%	38	27.5%	39	26.0%
Castle Gardens Primary School	58	22.1%	77	27.3%	66	25.5%
Comber Primary School	64	18.9%	88	23.2%	81	21.1%
Derryboy Primary School	11	12.8%	13	16.0%	10	14.3%
Drumlins Integrated Primary School	25	18.5%	45	29.6%	50	31.3%
Grey Abbey Primary School	17	20.5%	20	25.0%	17	19.1%
Killinchy Primary School	12	3.8%	21	6.0%	24	6.9%
Killyleagh Primary School	33	46.5%	35	47.9%	39	50.6%
Kircubbin Primary School	29	23.6%	35	23.2%	57	31.8%
Kirkistown Primary School	17	12.7%	17	13.9%	34	27.4%
Londonderry Primary School	118	32.3%	125	33.2%	127	33.1%
Loughries Primary School	5	7.5%	6	9.2%	10	18.5%
Millennium Integrated Primary School	11	4.8%	13	5.4%	22	8.7%
Moneyrea Primary School	20	11.4%	17	9.0%	13	6.4%
Newtownards Model Primary School	104	26.9%	124	31.3%	118	29.3%
Portaferry Integrated Primary School	14	24.6%	21	33.3%	26	41.3%
Portavogie Primary School	18	7.9%	32	13.2%	42	17.7%
Regent House School	0	0.0%	*	*	*	*
St Caolan's Primary School, Ballynahinch	6	9.1%	11	16.4%	9	12.7%
St Finian's Primary School, Newtownards	39	23.9%	58	34.1%	51	32.7%
St Joseph's Primary School, Crossgar	7	8.2%	18	22.2%	15	18.1%
St Mary's Primary School, Comber	7	11.3%	10	14.9%	8	13.6%
St Mary's Primary School, Killyleagh	44	35.5%	39	31.7%	43	36.4%
St Mary's Primary School, Kircubbin	27	20.5%	20	14.9%	21	15.1%
St Mary's Primary School, Portaferry	49	21.7%	50	22.4%	45	21.4%
St Mary's Primary School, Saintfield	7	10.8%	9	14.1%	7	10.6%
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballynahinch	76	29.3%	97	37.5%	110	41.5%
St Patrick's Primary School, Portaferry	20	15.7%	15	11.5%	9	6.6%
Victoria Primary School (Ballyhalbert)	38	25.9%	47	33.1%	40	30.8%
Victoria Primary School, Newtownards	102	20.0%	144	28.0%	147	27.6%
West Winds Primary School	109	63.4%	120	65.6%	113	65.3%

Source: NI school census

Notes:

4. * denotes fewer than 5 pupils suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils
5. Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
6. Figures include all pupils entitled to free school meals; including nursery units (whether free school meal or JSA).
7. Figures are based on schools situated in Strangford constituency, rather than pupil residence.
8. Eligibility under the Working Tax Credit criterion was introduced on a phased basis with Nursery, Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 pupils eligible from September 2010 and Key Stage 2 pupils eligible from September 2011.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils at Strangford Integrated College that currently receive free school transport.

(AQW 39265/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board informs me that it currently provides transport assistance to 511 pupils attending Strangford Integrated College.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education when the controlled schools sectoral body will be operational.
(AQW 39266/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has provided funding to support the Working Group which will establish a Controlled schools' support body. This group recently submitted an application for funding of costs associated with the establishment and running of the controlled schools' support body. My officials have requested further information to support this claim and will progress the necessary appraisal and approvals on receipt of this information.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education when he will approve the advertisement of the Chief Executive of the controlled schools sectoral body.
(AQW 39267/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has provided funding to support the Working Group which will establish a Controlled schools' support body. This group recently submitted an application for funding of costs associated with the establishment and running of the controlled schools' support body; including the salary costs of the Chief Executive. My officials have requested further information to support this claim and will progress the necessary appraisal and approvals on receipt of this information.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 38964/11-15, how much money has been provided by the Department of Education to the production of educational materials relating to (a) the Ulster-Scots language; and (b) Ulster-Scots culture in each of the last three years.
(AQW 39275/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has not provided any money for the production of educational materials relating to Ulster-Scots in each of the last three financial years, nor have any requests been received by the Department. However my Department has spent circa £50,000 on Ulster Scots materials since the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages came into force in the UK in 2001/02.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children in South Antrim who have been diagnosed with an autism spectrum condition, or are currently being assessed or awaiting a diagnosis, that are not in full time education, broken down by (a) age profile; and (b) electoral ward.
(AQW 39278/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The responsibility for diagnosis of children with autism rests with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Addressing the individual special educational needs (SEN) of a child with autism is not, however, dependent upon receipt of a diagnosis. The identification, assessment and provision for children with SEN, including those with autism, will be addressed in line with procedures outlined in the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to bring forward policy for schools in each of the education sectors which are not provided for under the remit of the new Education Authority.
(AQW 39318/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department makes policy and legislation in relation to all grant-aided schools. The Education Authority will inherit the role currently performed by the education and library boards, which is to deliver services in accordance and legislation made by the Department. In the case of voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools, the services currently provided by the education and library boards will continue to be made available by the Education Authority. These schools will continue to receive their Local Management of Schools (LMS) recurrent funding directly from the Department.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to list by (i) school; and (ii) Education and Library Board area the travel costs associated with implementing the Entitlement Framework.
(AQW 39360/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: This data is not currently available from the Office for National Statistics for Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA). However, the requested information is provided overleaf for the Derry Local Government District (LGD), which contains the Foyle PCA, for the most recent three years available.

Table: Number of business births and survival¹ rates (2009-2011)

Derry LGD2	2009	2010	2011
New business births ³	215	235	175
One year survival	86.0%	83.0%	88.6%

Derry LGD2	2009	2010	2011
Two year survival	69.8%	70.2%	..
Three year survival	53.5%

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS), Business Demography 2012

- 1 A business is deemed to have survived if having been a birth in year t or having survived to year t; it is active in terms of employment and/or turnover in any part of t+1.
- 2 Derry LGD contains the entire Foyle PCA and an additional 2 wards (Banagher and Claudy) from East Londonderry PCA.
- 3 A birth is identified as a business that was present in year t, but did not exist in year t-1 or t-2.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how much additional funding has been allocated to Area Learning Communities to support the implementation of the Entitlement Framework in each of the last three years.
(AQW 39361/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The amount of additional funding provided directly to Area Learning Communities to support the implementation of the Entitlement Framework over the last three years is as follows:

Area Learning Communities - Collaboration Element

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Total
Total	£1,603,000	£846,000	£723,000	£3,172,000

This is on top of the money that has been provided directly to schools based on courses delivered collaboratively.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how he intends to fund the continuation of work associated with the Entitlement Framework in the 2015/16 financial year.
(AQW 39362/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools are funded through their core delegated budget to deliver their statutory obligations, including the curriculum of which the Entitlement Framework is part. The additional funding support that I have provided for the Entitlement Framework has never been intended as a permanent funding stream, but has been provided as a contribution to the costs associated with developing an expanded curricular offer at Key Stage 4 and post-16.

As you will be aware, I extended the additional Entitlement Framework funding, which had been due to finish by April 2014, through to the end of the 2014/15 financial year. You will also be aware that my departmental budget for the 2015/16 financial year has been published for consultation via <http://www.deni.gov.uk/>. You will see that, despite the pressures on the education budget, I am proposing to allocate a further £4.9m to continue to support the delivery of the Entitlement Framework. I will finalise this once the consultation has concluded.

It remains important for schools to continue their good work and focus on meeting the full statutory requirements from September 2015 for the benefit of our young people.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what additional support is provided young people who are deaf to ensure that they achieve 5 GCSEs at grades A*- C, including English and Maths and to reduce the current attainment gap.
(AQW 39364/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Education and Library Boards provide a comprehensive level of support, tailored to the individual needs of each child, to help hearing impaired children across the ability range achieve their full potential. Support will be in place from point of diagnosis and on a continuing level throughout school, appropriate to the pupil's needs. Support includes whole school training and advisory support for school staff with specific advice regarding:

- the pupil's hearing loss and the implications on learning;
- maintenance of hearing aids and associated equipment;
- management of the pupil within the classroom;
- strategies for developing the pupil's attention and listening skills;
- strategies for maximising linguistic opportunity;
- strategies for improving memory skills;
- strategies to assist the pupil access the curriculum;
- strategies to develop social skills and self-esteem.

Attainment is not, however, solely influenced by hearing loss but can also be attributed to a range of factors including age of diagnosis, use of prescribed amplification devices and the pupil's cognitive ability.

The Education and Library Boards have advised that in addition to the wide range of measures provided to support young hearing impaired people from diagnosis to school leaving age, appropriate access arrangements at GCSE level may also be provided including:

- a modified examination paper and/or extra time;
- Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and examination officers will be reminded of special access arrangements available to the pupil;
- a live speaker in an aural examination;
- a sub-titled version of a video/film.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how he intends to replace the educational element of the Ulster Orchestra, should it close.

(AQW 39379/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Music is a compulsory element of the curriculum from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3. Pupils may choose to study it as an exam choice at Key Stage 4. The Department delegates as much funding and decision making as possible to schools so that they can decide the appropriate resources or programmes they wish to use to enhance teaching and learning. Currently, each Education and Library Board organises a Music Service as part of its provision in support of education. These services provide additional music provision for pupils wishing to learn a particular instrument.

The Department does not prescribe or recommend resources for schools. Should the Ulster Orchestra close, music will remain a key part of the curriculum and schools will continue to decide the appropriate resources for their pupils.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the special schools and their enrolment numbers in each of the last five years.

(AQW 39383/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information provided in the table below has been extracted from the 2013/14 school census. While the 2014/15 school census took place on the 10th October this year, provisional figures will not be available until December 2014 and will not be finalised figures until February 2015.

Special schools and their enrolments – 2009/10 – 2013/14

School name	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Ardmore House Special School	0	1	8	2	2
Arvalee School and Resource Centre	110	105	112	102	103
Beechlawn Special School	186	152	161	153	159
Belmont House Special School	120	119	125	127	129
Brookfield Special School	113	119	123	122	136
Castletower School	254	261	256	255	253
Ceara Special School	96	102	102	113	122
Cedar Lodge Special School	167	177	166	173	193
Clarawood Special School	10	16	12	17	19
Clifton Special School	122	118	127	129	144
Donard Special School	54	60	66	68	76
Elmbrook Special School	49	46	40	N/A	N/A
Erne Special School	98	88	82	N/A	N/A
Fleming Fulton Special School	142	141	124	128	127
Foylview Special School	115	113	110	114	120
Glenveagh Special School	196	190	193	190	189
Greenwood House Assessment Centre	50	51	57	54	52
Harberton Special School	196	199	200	201	206
Hill Croft Special School	85	92	95	112	122
Jordanstown Special School	47	45	47	51	63
Killard House Special School	163	151	153	156	179

School name	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Kilronan Special School	64	69	80	72	82
Knockavoe School & Resource Centre	77	83	93	105	116
Knockevin Special School	86	92	89	89	91
Lakewood Special School	8	6	6	6	6
Lisanally Special School	100	99	98	100	100
Longstone Special School	146	143	152	156	145
Mitchell House Special School	86	86	84	90	83
Oakwood School and Assessment Centre	95	104	107	107	107
Park Education Resource Centre	122	140	126	126	126
Parkview Special School	151	153	159	161	169
Rathore School	112	122	138	153	156
Riverside Special School	49	50	46	48	49
Roddensvale Special School	83	82	90	79	84
Rossmar Special School	73	79	85	81	88
Rosstulla Special School	176	172	167	170	172
Sandelford Special School	140	145	138	146	164
Sperrinview Special School	84	87	94	100	102
St Gerard's Education Resource Centre	184	167	193	226	223
Thornfield House School	94	85	88	86	86
Tor Bank Special School	140	148	157	159	159
Willow Bridge School	N/A	N/A	N/A	126	130

Source: NI school census

Note:

9. Figures include single registered pupils and dual registered pupils that are main registered at the special school only. Dual registered subsidiary pupils have been excluded (approximately 2-3% of the total number of pupils attending special schools).
10. "N/A" denotes that the school was not open in this year

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of inspections each special school has received from the Education and Training Inspectorate in each of the last five years.

(AQW 39384/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

Institution Name.	Academic Year	Inspection Activity
Ardmore House Special School	2013-14	Inspection
Beechlawn Special School	2013-14	Inspection
Belfast Hospital School	2010-11	Follow-up Inspection
Brookfield Special School	2012-13	Inspection
Castletower School	2009-10	Inspection
Ceara Special School	2013-14	Sustaining Improvement (Pilot) Inspection
Cedar Lodge Special School	2011-12	Inspection
Clarawood Special School	2009-10	Follow-up Inspection
	2012-13	Inspection
Clifton Special School	2011-12 - 2012-13	Completed Inspection

Institution Name.	Academic Year	Inspection Activity
Donard Special School	2013-14	Sustaining Improvement (Pilot) Inspection
Fleming Fulton Special School	2013-14	Inspection
Glenveagh Special School	2013-14	Inspection
Greenwood House Assessment Centre	2011-12	Inspection
Harberton Special School	2009-10	Inspection
Hill Croft Special School	2013-14	Inspection
Jordanstown Special School	2010-11	Follow-up Inspection
	2011-12	Follow-up Inspection
Killard House Special School	2009-10	Inspection
Kilronan Special School	2009-10	Inspection
	2013-14	Sustaining Improvement (Pilot) Inspection
Knockavoe School & Resource Centre	2009-10	Inspection
Knockevin Special School	2010-11	Inspection
	2012-13	Follow-up Inspection
Lakewood Special School	2012-13	Follow-up Inspection
Lisanally Special School	2009-10	Inspection
	2013-14	Sustaining Improvement (Pilot) Inspection
Oakwood School and Assessment Centre	2009-10	Inspection
Parkview Special School	2012-13	Inspection
Riverside Special School	2009-10	Follow-up Inspection
Roddensvale Special School	2012-13	Inspection
Rossmar Special School	2010-11	Inspection
Sandelford Special School	2010-11	Inspection
St Gerard's School and Support Services	2009-10	Inspection
Thornfield House School	2011-12	Inspection
Tor Bank Special School	2011-12	Inspection
Willow Bridge School	2012-13	Inspection

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education how he is encouraging primary schools to employ more teachers with a qualification in science of A-level standard or higher or professional experience in science.

(AQW 39402/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not employ teachers; this is the responsibility of the Employing/Funding Authorities.

The Bachelor of Education primary programme is the most common route into teaching in the primary sector in the north of Ireland. This initial teacher education programme prepares students for all areas of the primary curriculum including science. Students may also select optional science related modules as part of this provision.

The curriculum in schools here has been designed to provide flexibility for schools to develop experiences that suit the needs of their pupils and provide opportunities for teaching science as part of a balanced curriculum.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of whether encouraging primary schools to employ teachers with a background in science should be a priority for future consideration.

(AQW 39404/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not employ teachers; this is the responsibility of the Employing/Funding Authorities.

The Bachelor of Education primary programme is the most common route into teaching in the primary sector in the north of Ireland. This initial teacher education programme prepares students for all areas of the primary curriculum including science. Students may also select optional science related modules as part of this provision.

The curriculum in schools here has been designed to provide flexibility for schools to develop experiences that suit the needs of their pupils and provide opportunities for teaching science as part of a balanced curriculum.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail the schools that were unsuccessful in the first call for expressions of interest in the Shared Education Campuses Programme; and to outline the reasons for this.

(AQW 39405/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The schools which were unsuccessful under the first call to the Shared Education Campuses Programme are listed below.

- St Vincent de Paul Primary School & Ligoniel Primary School, Belfast
- Lilliput Complex
- St Malachy's College, Belfast Royal Academy, Carr's Glen Primary School
- St Mary's Primary School, Brookeborough & Brookeborough Primary School
- Sperrin Integrated College, Magherafelt
- Duneane Primary School & Moneynick Primary School
- North Coast Integrated College, Ballysally Primary School, Millburn Primary School, Coleraine
- St Mary's Convent, Magherafelt, Sperrin Integrated College, Holy Family Primary School, Magherafelt Primary School
- Royal School, St Catherine's College, St Patrick's College, Saints & Scholars Integrated Primary School, City of Armagh High School, Armstrong Primary School, Lisanally Special School, Armagh
- Newtownhamilton High School, St Paul's High School, Bessbrook, Newry High School, St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen
- Holy Trinity Primary School, Cookstown & Cookstown Primary School

Ineligible applications:-

- 'Brighter Futures' Alternative Education Provision, Belfast; and
- North Belfast STEM Centre (Hazelwood Integrated College).

Of the 16 expressions of interest received, two were deemed to be ineligible, eight were deemed not to have met the essential criteria and six were considered as having met the essential criteria. These six were then scored and prioritised against the set criteria, with the three highest scoring projects selected to proceed to the next stage.

Individual feedback was provided to the proposals which were unsuccessful at the first call. They were advised that they could resubmit their application under the next call for proposals, if they considered they could address the issues identified in the feedback.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education whether the provision of Entitlement Framework requirements are measured in terms of courses delivered or courses offered.

(AQW 39406/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: To meet the requirements of the Entitlement Framework schools must offer access to a minimum number and range of courses for pupils at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Success is measured in terms of the courses offered, so long as this is a genuine and deliverable offer designed to meet the needs of the pupils and the economy. This broader consideration forms part of the inspection process.

As part of the annual Area Learning Community Implementation Plan, schools set out how they will manage their curricular planning, including considering the reasons if courses have been offered but not delivered. The Department expects schools to take action to ensure that the curriculum on offer is economically relevant and individually engaging, taking account of the needs of all pupils in an area.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what steps are being taken to ensure that the Controlled Sector Support Body will be operational by April 2015.

(AQW 39419/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has provided funding to support the Working Group which will establish a Controlled schools' support body. This group recently submitted an application for funding of costs associated with the establishment and running of the controlled schools' support body. My officials have requested further information to support this claim and will progress the necessary appraisal and approvals on receipt of this information.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education when he intends to announce the membership of the new Education Authority.

(AQW 39421/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My intention is that the full membership of the Board will be appointed by 1 April 2015. A press release will issue announcing the appointments at the appropriate time.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the cost of the Dissolving Boundaries project in the last full year of its operation; and (ii) the rationale for its cessation.

(AQW 39422/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funding for the Dissolving Boundaries programme ceased on 31 October 2014 hence the last full year of operation was 2013/14. The programme was funded jointly between the Department of Education (DE) in the north of Ireland and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in the south. In 2013/14 DE made £150k available for the programme.

Regarding the rationale for cessation of the programme, the benefits of this programme have been largely realised. Good principles and learning have been embedded over the duration of the programme.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to explain the policy rationale in recategorising three Church of Ireland primary schools and one Presbyterian maintained primary school as controlled for home transport and temporary variation in enrolment purposes.

(AQW 39447/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The three Church of Ireland maintained primary schools and one Presbyterian maintained primary school have not been recategorised for home to school transport purposes. For home to school transport, the policy position is that primary schools are categorised into one of four groupings: 'Controlled and Other Voluntary'; 'Catholic Maintained'; 'Integrated'; and 'Irish Medium'. Following a misinterpretation of the policy at an operational level, a letter issued to the schools concerned in August to clarify the existing policy position.

For the purposes of deciding on temporary variation requests, the Department's current policy in this area does not specifically identify how these schools should be treated. The Department has consulted on the proposal that the schools should be treated alongside controlled schools when deciding on temporary variations. The views of all those who responded will be considered before a decision is made on the way forward. The rationale for this exercise is to ensure clarity on the issue when dealing with future temporary variation requests.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what consultation was undertaken prior to September 2014 with the Principals and Boards of Governors of the three Church of Ireland primary schools and one Presbyterian maintained primary school which have been recategorised as controlled for the purposes of home transport and temporary variation in enrolment.

(AQW 39448/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There has been no change to the categorisation of the three Church of Ireland maintained primary schools and one Presbyterian maintained primary school for the purposes of either home to school transport or temporary variation requests.

For home to school transport, the policy position is that primary schools are categorised into one of four groupings: 'Controlled and Other Voluntary'; 'Catholic Maintained'; 'Integrated'; and 'Irish Medium'. A letter issued to each of the four schools in August which clarified the existing position that these schools come under the heading 'Controlled and Other Voluntary'. This did not constitute a change to the categorisation of the schools; rather the Department was correcting a misapplication of the policy at operational level which had led to "Other Voluntary" schools (which include the Church of Ireland and Presbyterian maintained primary schools) being grouped with "Catholic Maintained" schools.

The position in relation to determining the outcome of TV requests is different. The Department's TV policy does not specifically identify how these schools should be treated. As a result, the Department is consulting on the proposal that the schools should be treated alongside controlled schools for TV purposes. The views of those affected will be considered before a final decision is taken on the matter.

The letters to consult on the proposal issued in October 2014, therefore there was no consultation prior to September 2014.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the projected number of primary 1 applicants in North Down in each of the last five years; and whether this corresponds with the actual enrolment.

(AQW 39505/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department creates overall pupil projections annually by year group but this is at an aggregated level and cannot be broken down by constituency. It is therefore not possible to provide the information you have asked for.

You can view the current overall summary pupil projections on the Department's website under facts and figures, in the education statistics section.

Department for Employment and Learning

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students from each European Union country, excluding the United Kingdom, studying at (i) Queen's University; and (ii) the University of Ulster, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 38785/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The attached table was produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and shows the latest figures available, for the 2012/13 academic year.

Country of Domicile refers to a student's permanent place of residence prior to enrolment on a Higher Education course.

Enrolments at Queens University, Belfast and the University of Ulster from EU Countries outside of the UK from 2008/09 to 2012/13

Country of Domicile	2008/09		2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13	
	QUB	UU	QUB	UU	QUB	UU	QUB	UU	QUB	UU
Austria	5	5	0	5	0	0	0	5	5	5
Belgium	5	5	5	0	15	0	5	0	5	5
Bulgaria	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	20	5	20
Czech Republic	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Germany	45	55	40	70	35	55	20	50	30	65
Denmark	5	0	5	0	0	5	0	0	0	5
Estonia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spain (includes Ceuta, Melilla)	10	10	15	5	20	10	20	15	20	15
Finland	5	0	5	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
France (includes Corsica)	40	25	40	20	25	25	35	20	20	20
Gibraltar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greece	15	20	15	10	10	20	10	10	10	5
Hungary	5	0	5	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
Ireland	930	2250	920	2810	1130	3070	825	2615	755	2010
Italy (Includes Sardinia, Sicily)	30	5	25	5	25	0	20	5	10	5
Lithuania	0	0	5	0	5	5	0	5	5	5
Luxembourg	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Latvia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Malta	5	15	5	15	0	10	5	5	5	5
Netherlands	10	0	5	5	5	5	10	5	10	5
Poland	35	5	25	5	20	5	15	5	5	5
Portugal (includes Madeira, Azores)	5	5	5	0	5	0	10	0	5	0
Romania	10	0	15	0	10	5	5	5	10	5
Sweden	20	0	25	0	5	0	10	0	5	0
Slovenia	0	0	5	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
Slovakia	5	5	0	0	5	0	5	5	0	5
Cyprus	10	10	5	5	5	0	0	5	0	0
Total	1205	2420	1180	2965	1345	3225	1000	2795	910	2195

Source: HESA

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department is taking to increase the number of people from North Antrim enrolling in Higher Education courses.

(AQW 38853/11-15)

Dr Farry: One of the key aims of my Department's higher education strategy, Graduating to Success, is to ensure that higher education is accessible to all who have the ability to benefit.

This is reflected in Access to Success, my Department's regional strategy to widen participation which focuses on the creation of a more accessible sector in which the people who are most able but least likely to participate are given every encouragement and support to apply to, and to benefit from, higher education. Raising awareness is an important aspect of

the implementation plan and my Department has developed a campaign under the "Reach Higher" banner to raise awareness across Northern Ireland of the benefits of higher education.

Although the implementation plan for Graduating to Success and Access to Success does not target specific geographical areas, it does aim to improve learner information in regard to higher education to support all students including those from North Antrim in their decision making. Work is ongoing to enhance the higher education information available through NIdirect and is due to be completed by the end of December.

Improving rural access to higher education is also a key aspect of the implementation plan and I can confirm that Northern Regional College's allocation of full-time higher education places has increased from 249 in academic year 2010/11 to 332 in academic year 2014/15. This significant increase is the result of my Department's annual review of college full-time higher education allocations and additional full-time places that I have made available.

These additional full-time places were allocated to the college based on established current and future demand for higher education in the college catchment area which includes North Antrim; the college's alignment with my Department's strategic priority areas as demonstrated in its College Development Plan; and support for the Department's Widening Participation goals in the geographical distribution of higher education places across Northern Ireland.

However, it is the responsibility of the senior management in the regional college to manage their allocation of full-time higher education places across campuses and curriculum areas to balance local demand and Departmental priorities.

My Department is also committed to carrying out further reviews of college allocations in the future.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the drop-out rate for students who are at the end of their first year in (i) Queen's University; and (ii) the University of Ulster.

(AQW 38883/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) has provided the information attached at Annex A.

The latest available information is for 2011/12 entrants who are no longer in higher education in 2012/13. Non-continuation rates are only available for Full-Time Undergraduate entrants no longer in Higher Education following entry in the previous year.

Percentage of full-time undergraduate entrants to Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster, failing to continue in HE in 2012/13 following entry in 2011/12

Institution	Continue or qualify at same HEI	at other UK HEIS	Not in HE	Total	Non Continuation Rate
The Queen's University of Belfast	3,780	45	145	3,970	3.6%
University of Ulster	4,225	50	415	4,685	8.9%
Total	8,005	95	560	8,660	6.5%

Source:HESA Performance Indicators

Please note that the figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 in line with HESA policy. Due to rounding the sum of the columns may not match the totals shown.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the current level of gaming and digital animation skills in Co Fermanagh, as a result of the work carried out by the Image Centre at the South West College in Enniskillen.

(AQW 38900/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) sets high level targets in respect of the FE curriculum to be delivered by the FE sector, and agrees broad targets with individual colleges through the annual college development planning process.

I am pleased that since the creation of the IMAGE Centre at the Enniskillen Campus of South West College (SWC) there has been positive engagement at various qualification levels in gaming and digital animation both from students attending SWC and from students outside the college.

The Creative IMAGE Centre is used on a daily basis with approximately 200 students attending courses every week, and in this academic year (2014/15) the college has designed and equipped two additional creative media suites because of the rise in the numbers of students wishing to use creative digital software and hardware, as a direct result of the IMAGE studio launch.

At level 2, students have the opportunity to study and develop skills in 2D animation, animation production, animation for film and for games. This also covers storyboarding and pre-production techniques to enable them to produce their own short animation show-reel as part of their final assessment.

At level 3, the IMAGE Centre delivers a Games Development course which includes both 2D and 3D Animation skills. Areas covered include:

3D modelling, Games Engines and Animation techniques. This programme is also delivered by further education staff to students attending the IMAGE centre from outside the college and to local sixth form school pupils through the Department of Education's 'Entitlement Framework' programme.

In Higher Education (HE), the Foundation Degree in Creative Media Technologies delivers high level Games Animation modules as well as Digital Film Making, 3D Animation techniques and Digital Photography.

There are regular transfers of Animation and Game Design students to the University of Ulster (UU) from the level 3 qualification in Creative Media and the Foundation Degree in Creative Technologies.

It is also very encouraging to note that a new Foundation Degree in Games and Animation is currently being developed in conjunction with UU for delivery from September 2015. This will create an additional opportunity for those wishing to concentrate on Games and Animation skills in the SWC catchment area.

As a hybrid creative digital studio, the Image Centre focuses on digital creativity in both an educational and industry context in which students and industry are exposed to highly trained creative practitioners using cutting edge industry equipment and software that is at the forefront of digital creativity in a modern and emerging sector. Through the ConnectEd programme, which connects industry, FE and HE, students and staff are able to work on a number of live projects and provide assistance to a number of new animation businesses. In addition, the programme has a number of on-going projects with, Queen's University (QUB) and UU. These include:

- 3D Animation for Rugby – working with QUB and Ulster Rugby
- 3D Animation for Healthcare – animated training for Health Professionals
- 3D Animation for a local mining Company – using a 3D Spatial Scanner, creating an environment for online development.

One key aim of developing animation skills locally is to encourage graduates to open their own businesses in the South West Region in order to stimulate growth and replicate the growth of games and animation companies that are continuing to emerge.

You will be interested to note that between September 2013 and September 2014, there have been 21 industry projects delivered through schemes such as my department's Employer Support Programme (ESP), Invest NI Innovation Vouchers, Gazelle Colleges and Internal College Projects in SWC.

Finally, I would highlight the engagement with international bodies in relation to gaming and digital skills. Through the Erasmus programme, (a European Union (EU) exchange student programme) which provides foreign exchange options for students from within the EU, digital technology staff from SWC were able to spend time with a partner institution in Lleida, Spain where the games industry is flourishing and where students from Ilerna College are successfully progressing to work in local games companies.

The college has already hosted a number of students from Ilerna College on both Computing and Creative Media courses, as well as at Foundation Degree level, and it is hoped that students from SWC will spend time in Ilerna in 2015.

The IMAGE centre is now recognised as having a growing influence in the South West Region and in Northern Ireland over the past three years. University Lecturers from QUB and UU have attended the IMAGE centre for customised training in animation software, Maya and Blender. These skills are already being developed and used further, and have contributed to a growth in the numbers of trainers in this key area of 3D animation and in the games industry.

An extremely successful two day Conference was held in the Enniskillen campus in May 2014 as part of the NI Creative Hi tech Expo (NICHE). Keynote industry speakers attended from Film, Games, Animators and Comic Art companies. Over 300 attendees participated in workshops on storyboarding, 2D and 3D animation and comic art.

The Creative Media industry is a growing sector for the Northern Ireland economy and is continuing to increase its demand for high quality, versatile and high level digital skills. I am confident that the Image Centre is equipping our young people with the skills needed to ensure businesses can be creative and can respond to the opportunities and challenges ahead and, ultimately, to ensure further investment in this exciting new sector.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the (i) quantity; and (ii) percentage of people who have entered the Steps 2 Work programme since its creation who (a) worked full time before entering the scheme; (b) worked part time for more than two years before entering the scheme; (c) secured full time permanent jobs; (d) part time permanent jobs; (e) full time temporary jobs; and (f) part time temporary, jobs after completing the programme; and to detail (i) the average earnings of those who gained employment after the scheme; (ii) the level of qualification held by those going onto the programme; (iii) the number of people who secured a position with their placement company at the end of the process; and (iv) the reasons for people leaving the Steps 2 Work programme, **(AQW 38977/11-15)**

Dr Farry: Steps to Work (StW) was the Department's main adult return to work programme between September 2008 and May 2014. The programme aimed to help the unemployed and economically inactive to find and sustain employment.

The specific detailed information requested in your question is addressed below:

The quantity and percentage of people who have entered the Steps 2 Work programme since its creation who:

- (a) worked full time before entering the scheme; (b) worked part time for more than two years before entering the scheme;

The information sought is not systematically captured therefore I am unable to advise you on the actual number or percentage. However, a survey, undertaken on behalf of the Department by RSM McClure Watters in December 2011, of leavers from the StW programme found that:

- 36% of respondents had spent most of their life in steady jobs;
- 16% had spent most of their time working in casual or short term work;
- 2% were self employment;
- 21% had been in and out of work several times over; and
- 20% had spent more time out of work than in work.

Further information on the work history of respondents can be sourced at section seven of the leaver survey report. <http://www.delni.gov.uk/steps-to-work-leavers-survey.pdf>

- (c) secured full time permanent jobs (d) part time permanent jobs; (e) full time temporary jobs; and (f) part time temporary, jobs after completing the programme;

From its launch in September 2008 to September 2013 a total of 33,310 (29%) Steps to Work participants moved into unsubsidised employment sustained for 13 weeks. Detail information on the distinction between full time and part time employment is not captured. The definition of 'employment' used by the programme is detailed at the 'User Guidance' section of the published StW statistical bulletin <http://www.delni.gov.uk/steps-to-work-statistical-bulletin-june-2014.pdf>

and to detail:

- (i) the average earnings of those who gained employment after the scheme; The information sought is not systematically captured.

- (ii) the level of qualification held by those going onto the programme;

Detail on the qualifications held by those participating on StW is not systematically captured. Findings from the 2011 StW leavers found that 29% of all respondents had no qualifications. Of those respondents who had a qualification 57% had a school or college qualification and 54% had a vocational qualification.

A detailed breakdown of those with qualification can be sourced at section five of the survey. <http://www.delni.gov.uk/steps-to-work-leavers-survey.pdf>

- (iii) the number of people who secured a position with their placement company at the end of the process; and

The information sought is not systematically captured.

- (iv) the reasons for people leaving the Steps 2 Work programme. The information sought is not systematically captured. However, the leavers survey found that 26% of those who left the programme early found employment while 22% left for health reasons. A fuller breakdown of why respondents did not complete the programme can be found at section eight of the survey. <http://www.delni.gov.uk/steps-to-work-leavers-survey.pdf>

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his efforts to address north-south mobility problems for undergraduates.

(AQO 7170/11-15)

Dr Farry: In implementing Graduating to Success my Department has established a project group to facilitate cross-border cooperation and student mobility. Membership includes representation from the Higher Education Authority and the Institutes of Technology.

A key part of this project is addressing the relevant recommendations from the Irish Business and Employers Confederation and the CBI Joint Business Council's study of obstacles to cross-border undergraduate education.

In particular, my Department's Careers Service continues to build the knowledge of its advisers to ensure that students are fully informed about opportunities in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

My officials are working with officials in the Department for Education and Skills to research and analyse cross border student flows. A joint report, which will inform policy development, is scheduled for completion by the end of the year.

An anomaly in relation to student finance has been resolved and, since 2013, students from Northern Ireland studying in the Republic of Ireland have had access to a repayable Student Contribution loan and other financial support.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his efforts to improve opportunities for people with learning difficulties.

(AQO 7159/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has undertaken a range of actions to improve our services. This includes an audit of further education provision, an increase in further education funding support for people with a disability, the successful advocacy of the use of social clauses in public sector contracts and continued engagement with colleagues in the Health and Social Care sector.

We are also developing an Employment and Skills Strategy for people with disabilities. The Strategy will include all the key services for which my Department has lead responsibility and will deliver more integrated and cohesive disability employment and skills support for people with significant disability-related barriers to work, including of course, learning disability. The key aim is to provide a clear pathway from education through to paid employment and all the support options that a person will encounter throughout their journey.

We are also making good progress in finalising an Economic Inactivity Strategy and concluding a review of our Careers Service. All of these initiatives seek to deliver improved services for people with learning disabilities.

I raised the issue of transitions for young people with severe learning disabilities with the Bamford Ministerial Group on Mental Health and Learning Disability.

The Ministerial Group agreed that my Department would chair a cross departmental group of officials to consider current gaps in provision and opportunities for making improvements. This departmental group consisted of representatives from eight Departments.

The outcome of the work undertaken by the cross departmental group of officials was presented to the Bamford Ministerial Group meeting on 20 November 2014.

The Ministerial Group agreed that there should be a further meeting at official level to agree the way forward on the ac

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the practical effect the draft Budget 2015/16 will have on Youth Training Projects.

(AQO 7164/11-15)

Dr Farry: Currently, through the Training for Success Programme, my Department provides a guarantee of training for all 16 and 17 year olds with extended eligibility for those with a disability or from an in care background.

Although decisions have not been taken on my Department's 2015/16 budget, youth training will be a priority and I will continue to reflect this in discussions with Executive colleagues.

Youth training plays a vital role in preparing young people for sustained employment through improving skill levels. The Review of Youth Training Interim Report and consultation envisages a new system of youth training to form a key part of the wider education and skills landscape. As achievement at level 2 is critical in preparing young people for the demands of the labour market, for the first time in Northern Ireland, youth training will be available to all young people aged 16–24 who require training at level 2, regardless of where they reside on their employment and learning journey.

The proposed system will balance the needs of young people with the requirements of employers, better match demand and supply, and provide a seamless progression route for young people to a breadth of professional and technical occupations.

Youth training projects will also be supported through the European Social Fund.

For the 2015-16 financial year, £2.8m ESF funding will be made available to support projects aimed at supporting young people to improve their employability skills and enable them to enter further education, other government training programmes or employment. This will require £4.1m of match funding from other public or private sources, giving a total programme value of £6.9m.

£1.2m ESF funding will also be sourced to support young people on the Community Family Support Programme, requiring match funding of £1.8m to give a total budget of £3m.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department, as well as Further and Higher Education providers, work with the Letterkenny Institute of Technology to improve cross border collaboration in the North West.

(AQO 7165/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has held meetings with Letterkenny Institute of Technology in the context of improving cross-border collaboration in the North West. An example of this is the partnership between the advanced manufacturing and engineering sector in the North West region, including the University of Ulster, Letterkenny IT, Ilex and North West Regional College to examine the issues constraining the growth of the sector in the North West and to look at how these can be best addressed through a collaborative approach.

Additionally, for many years the University of Ulster and Letterkenny Institute of Technology have jointly offered the MSc in Innovation Management in the Public Service. The programme leads to a joint award by the University and Higher Education Training Awards Council Ireland.

North West Regional College has also been working with the Institute in a number of curriculum areas, including the development of early years education, qualifications in sport, coaching and development, applied medical science and bioscience and fine art, fashions and textiles. Links in health and social care at both further and higher education levels have also been established.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what assistance is available for people with dependants entering postgraduate education.

(AQO 7166/11-15)

Dr Farry: There is no specific support for students with dependants within the current postgraduate studentship awards scheme. Support for postgraduate study has always been discretionary and subject to change from time to time to reflect wider government priorities. My Department's annual postgraduate budget is awarded to Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster and they select, by competition, the students to fill these awards within the limits of funding available.

Each postgraduate award carries a core cost of up to approximately £20,000, made up of a stipend of £14,000 for the student and institutional payments for tuition fees of up to £3,800 and training costs of £2,200. The support is not means tested and is non-repayable.

Students may also apply for Support Funds if they are facing financial difficulties, priority groups include mature students, especially those with existing financial commitments and students with children, especially lone parents. This support is individually assessed and is a one-off rather than on-going payment.

In financial year 2014/15 my Department has committed £2.79 million Support Funds to help both postgraduate and undergraduate students in financial hardship. The minimum payment is normally no less than £100. The maximum would normally be no more than £3,500, in total, towards living costs in an academic year

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he is encouraging young people to look for employment.

(AQO 7167/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is committed to offering a quality all age service to help individuals overcome barriers to work and to move towards and into work at the earliest opportunity. This Client Offer is delivered by Employment Service staff working throughout our network of 35 Jobs and Benefits Offices and Jobcentres.

The Client Offer includes an individually tailored Work Readiness Assessment and an action plan which sets out what the client needs to do to prepare for work. Within the Offer a range of support is available including Job Clubs, which include activities such as CV building and interview techniques. These are delivered in partnership with local employers and community organisations. Staff may also refer clients to a range of programmes, specialist support and incentives when appropriate.

Additional support is available, where appropriate, from my Department's Careers Service who support the Employment Service in assisting young people into work.

In relation to the 18 to 24 age group I introduced the Youth Employment Scheme in July 2012, which provides the opportunity for participants to undertake periods of work experience and skills development to gain the skills which employers are looking for so that they can compete for jobs. In addition employers who are offering a full-time permanent job can avail of up to 52 weeks subsidy with a training allowance.

As part of the Executive's Economy and Jobs Initiative my Department introduced First Start as a targeted intervention for unemployed 18-24 year olds. This provides a period of supported employment for a minimum of 6 months within either the private, public or third sector and is aimed at those young people who have been unemployed and claiming Jobseekers Allowance for at least 6 months.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the number of job losses in Higher and Further Education predicted by his Department as a result of the draft Budget 2015/16.

(AQO 7168/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is still too early to assess fully the specific impact across the different services provided by my Department, including higher and further education.

However, the scale of the potential reduction means that there will be a detrimental impact on staff in the higher education institutions and the further education colleges.

The higher education institutions have advised that potential job losses could be as high as 660 whilst the estimate from the further education colleges stands at 500.

Based on current projections of cuts, total job losses could, therefore, be in the region of 1,100 to 1,200 posts.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the current budget for the delivery of the United Youth Programme.

(AQO 7169/11-15)

Dr Farry: The United Youth Programme is currently being developed through an innovative co-design process, which involves key stakeholders including young people themselves. As part of this co-design process organisations have been asked to come forward with concept proposals to test different approaches that could achieve the best outcomes for United Youth.

My Department is committed to this co-design approach and is keen that the pilot work will commence early 2015. I have set aside £1m for the current financial year to allow pilots to commence. However, confirmation of the necessary central funding

to allow pilot work to be completed during the 2015/16 financial year is necessary to allow pilots to begin early in 2015. The number of pilots going forward will obviously depend on the level of funding secured.

United Youth pilot work will inform the shape of the eventual programme and provide more detail in terms of the cost of delivering it.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the future employment opportunities for people with an advanced proficiency in the Irish language.

(AQO 7171/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Employment Service has no indication of future employment opportunities but is working with customers who have advanced proficiency in Irish and will continue to do so.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department aims to protect services for people with disabilities in the 2015/16 financial year.

(AQO 7172/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have demonstrated my commitment to the provision of resources and support to people with disabilities on a consistent basis over the past number of years. The respective services and programmes will not be immune from the proposed budget cuts, however my department will work in partnership with the local disability sector and other key stakeholders to ensure that this client group receives the type and level of support required.

My Department is currently developing a new Disability Employment and Skills strategy, in partnership with local disability sector organisations.

The strategy will help to create a seamless and integrated pathway for people with disabilities. In doing so, it will improve the transition into and out of the various departmental services, culminating with in-work support for those who are successful.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the level of support InvestNI has provided to companies that supply weapons to the Israeli government and organisations based in Israel.

(AQW 35455/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Invest NI has no clients that supply weapons to the Israeli government and organisations based in Israel.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department promotes Co Fermanagh as a location for gaming and digital animation companies to invest in, given the location of the Image Centre in Enniskillen.

(AQW 38901/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland's International Business Group visited the Image Centre as part of its annual Conference in May 2014 and is aware of what the Image Centre can offer and is prepared to utilise this knowledge in discussions with potential investors.

The Image Centre is an important asset in helping to develop the skills needed to support the growth of the gaming and digital animation sector. Invest Northern Ireland, together with colleagues in the Department for Employment and Learning, has engaged directly with the local animation sector to develop an "Animation Academy" which will seek to address current and future skills needs within the sector. I am pleased to confirm that the South West College, together with Belfast Met, will be involved in the delivery of this new training programme and that recruitment is scheduled to begin in early 2015.

It is important to note, however, that Invest Northern Ireland operates in an intensely competitive market for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The initial objective is to encourage potential investors to visit Northern Ireland and to demonstrate the capability of the region as a whole to meet their needs. The investor will then make the decision about where to locate their operation based on a number of factors, including the presence of businesses operating in the same sector, the supply of a skilled workforce, the availability of suitable property and other infrastructure requirements.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of visits facilitated by InvestNI for potential inward investors to each of the 26 council areas during the 2013/14 financial year.

(AQW 38903/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below details the number of visits facilitated by Invest NI for potential inward investors to each of the 26 council areas during the 2013/14 financial year.

Investment Visits by District Council Area (2013-14)

District Council	13-14
Antrim	1
Ards	1
Armagh	2
Ballymena	0
Ballymoney	1
Banbridge	0
Belfast	150
Carrickfergus	0
Castlereagh	1
Coleraine	3
Cookstown	0
Craigavon	1
Londonderry	9
Down	1
Dungannon	1
Fermanagh	3
Larne	3
Limavady	0
Lisburn	22
Magherafelt	0
Moyle	0
Newry & Mourne	4
Newtownabbey	12
North Down	4
Omagh	3
Strabane	0

Notes:

1. In addition to the above listed visits, Invest NI has also facilitated a number of visits by other organisations e.g. influencers, overseas governments and trade bodies, which serve to strengthen FDI & Trade links in overseas markets.
2. 2013-14 figures include 25 visits associated with the investment conference.

Mr B McCre asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to shift from providing subsidies for local businesses to offering incentives for development in key growth areas.
(AQW 38960/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's focus is already on promoting business development in the key economic growth areas defined in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government and Economic Strategy.

In its Corporate Plan 2011/2015, Invest NI has clearly outlined how it plans to target incentives for development in key growth areas to support the rebuilding and rebalancing of the Northern Ireland economy.

Invest NI offers a range of incentives for business development across key growth areas such as research and development, trade and exports, skills, access to finance and employing additional staff.

Mr B McCre asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to lessen bureaucracy in InvestNI.
(AQW 38961/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's Transform Programme has focused on ensuring the improved efficiency of the organisation and putting the customer at the centre of its activities. Invest NI's overall customer satisfaction has increased to 80% for 2013/14 – compared to 64% in 2010/11. At the same time the proportion of customers who are dissatisfied has decreased to 5% in 2013/14; from 12% in 2010/11.

Invest NI has recently achieved The Cabinet Office approved Customer Service Excellence standard and will use this business improvement methodology to evaluate and improve how services are delivered to customers. The organisation has also recently achieved Investors in People Gold status, one of only a handful of public sector bodies to attain this accolade.

Currently, Invest NI is undertaking an End to End Process Review Project to further simplifying internal processes. As a result, Invest NI will shortly roll out a further simplified process for customer claims to further reduce processing time. There has already been a significant reduction in claims processing times achieved over the past year (from 45 days in 2012/13 to 35 days by the end of 2013/14).

As part of its wider digital engagement strategy, Invest NI is moving towards offering businesses wider online access to products and advisory services and to simplify administration through greater automation. Ultimately this will enable businesses to apply online for support, register for events and monitor progress, increasing operational and resource efficiencies and delivering greater value for money.

Invest NI recognises the need to balance customer friendly processes alongside the obligations that come with managing public money. Invest NI will continue to review and test its process efficiency to provide the optimum balance between public sector governance and effective customer service.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many local companies applied to the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises since its inception; and to list the companies successful in securing funding.

(AQW 39158/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Median Sized Enterprises Programme (COSME) is run centrally by the European Commission and its appointed intermediary bodies. Applicants apply directly to the EC and not through Member States. Therefore, the Commission itself is the primary source of data on programme uptake.

The EU Commission does not routinely publish details of applications. In terms of beneficiaries, they have confirmed that the main sources of data will be their Financial Transparency System¹ (FTS) and Implementation, Evaluation and Performance reports².

As COSME only launched in 2014, this data is not yet available.

Further information can be obtained from the COSME website (http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/initiatives/cosme/index_en.htm) or directly from DG Enterprise and Industry.

1 http://ec.europa.eu/budget/fts/index_en.htm

2 http://ec.europa.eu/cip/documents/implementation-reports/index_en.htm

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of installed ground source heat pumps; and what steps she is taking to encourage the use of ground source heat pumps as a sources of low carbon energy.

(AQW 39160/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Support for Ground Source Heat Pumps is provided under the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive (NI RHI) which was introduced in November 2012. To date 141 Ground Source Heat Pumps have been installed under current heat incentives mostly in the domestic sector. I am in the process of introducing the Domestic RHI Scheme which includes upfront support and 7 year tariffs for ground source heat pumps.

The NI RHI continues to be promoted through the Executive's Energywise campaign. The most recent marketing campaign commenced in November 2014 and will continue into early 2015.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many of the 30 jobs promoted by software services company SQS Group Ltd will be based in Derry.

(AQW 39343/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There will be approximately 10 of the 30 new jobs promoted by SQS Group Ltd based in Londonderry.

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update her Department's consultation into the future provision of credit unions.

(AQW 39438/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department consulted on its proposals to update the legislation applying to credit unions and industrial and provident societies in Northern Ireland in summer 2013. Policy options were submitted to the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee in December 2013 which the Committee considered on 27 February 2014. Although content with the majority of proposals, the Committee raised issues in respect of three areas, two of which have subsequently been resolved.

One final issue is currently being addressed in discussion with the UK regulatory authorities and key sectoral stakeholders, and we hope to brief the Committee on this issue shortly.

Subject to the Committee being content with the response to this remaining policy issue, changes updating the Northern Ireland legislation governing credit unions will be made by way of an Assembly Bill. This legislation will remove further restrictions on Northern Ireland credit unions and thereby permit them to expand the range of their activities, and reach out to new groups.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department is aware of high levels of dissatisfaction amongst people living in rural parts of West Tyrone regarding the current broadband provision in the area. **(AQO 7176/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: I do appreciate that the issue of good broadband is important to many people living in rural Northern Ireland.

My Department has made significant investments in broadband infrastructure and currently superfast broadband services are available from one hundred and forty seven enabled cabinets in West Tyrone, something that was not available ten years ago.

Earlier this year I announced a contract with BT for the delivery of the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project. This twenty three point six million project, will improve access to basic and superfast fixed-line broadband services across many parts of Northern Ireland including West Tyrone. Indeed I understand that improvements have already taken place in the exchange areas of Beragh, Carrickmore, Castlederg, Dromore, Drumquin, Dunamanagh, Gortin, Mountfield and Newtown Stewart. Further work is planned in these areas as well as Ballygawley, Bready, Sion Mills, Strabane, Trillick and Fintona. Further details can be found on the NIDirect website.

This project will bring more choice and improved broadband speeds to over forty five thousand premises by the end of 2015.

However I want to do even more. I have recently approved the start of another project to further extend superfast broadband. Following procurement work should commence in early in the next financial year.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the development of the Enterprise Zone in Coleraine. **(AQO 7187/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: The UK Government's Economic Pact, published on 14 June 2013, set out three commitments in relation to Enterprise Zones, focusing on Enhanced Capital Allowances, ECAs, which permit one hundred percent first year allowances for qualifying plant and machinery expenditure. The pilot Enterprise Zone announced in the Chancellor's Budget statement in March 2014 will only offer ECAs as an incentive.

The pilot project, which involves the establishment of a data centre by 5NINES in Coleraine, has the potential to promote economic development and further investment in the area.

The decision to designate a particular area offering ECAs is ultimately for Treasury. Discussions are ongoing between the relevant stakeholders to put the necessary arrangements in place and it is anticipated that formal designation of the zone by HMT will be progressed as soon as those discussions have concluded.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department is in a position to honour all the financial commitments made by InvestNI to support investment and jobs announcements until March 2015. **(AQO 7179/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: Yes.

Mr Ó Muilleoir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration has been given to benchmarking local entrepreneurship against the Global Entrepreneurship Index. **(AQO 7182/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: Within Northern Ireland, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, GEM, is used to benchmark local entrepreneurship. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor has a wide range of internationally comparable benchmarks, including Ireland and the UK.

The Global Entrepreneurship Development Index, GEDI, is based on analysis of comprehensive data sets, including GEM, from more than one hundred and twenty countries to benchmark entrepreneurship levels between countries. These metrics are only available at national level so it is not feasible for GEDI to be produced on a regional basis.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration she has given to providing finance for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board Events Fund on a sustainable basis. **(AQO 7183/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: Nine key events will be supported in 2015-16 as part of a three year funding package which I established last year. This approach has been taken to help these events become sustainable. We will also be supporting a number of other events including the Irish Open and the Tall Ships.

Since the Northern Ireland Tourist Board assumed responsibility for events from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in 2010, there has not been a Budget exercise to allow for an appropriate dedicated baseline to be established. The original DCAL budget was reduced to one million pounds upon the function transfer to NITB and the NITB has had to rely on in-year monitoring rounds to ensure that adequate funding was available.

The draft Budget allocations for 2015/16 mean that significant savings will need to be identified. My Department is currently engaging with all its arms length bodies including the Tourist Board on the savings which will need to be made. The availability of funding for the broader Events Fund is being assessed as part of that work.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of InvestNI's performance in supporting job creation in rural areas.

(AQO 7184/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the five years between 2009-10 and 2013-14 Invest NI promoted nine thousand one hundred and ten new jobs in rural areas through extensive support to start-up and established businesses.

Invest NI's primary support for job creation is the Selective Financial Assistance (SFA) scheme. The SFA evaluation 2004/05 to 2010/11 found there was a good fit between SFA expenditure and the employment base, indicating that SFA was delivered in a balanced and equitable fashion across Northern Ireland. For example two hundred and sixty four new jobs at Linden Foods in 2012-13 and thirty two new jobs at Crust and Crumb Bakery in Fermanagh.

Invest NI's Regional Offices provides advice to businesses across Northern Ireland to help them identify and bring forward viable projects.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance her Department offers for the establishment of social enterprises.

(AQO 7185/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland offers support for the establishment of social enterprises through two programmes.

Social Entrepreneurship Programme supports new social economy businesses with the potential to grow. In 2013-2014 SEP supported fifty five new social enterprise start ups.

The Social Enterprise Hubs Project, an OFMDFM signature project under Delivering Social Change provides mentoring, signposting, training, and space where social enterprises can test trade. DSD, DETI and Invest NI manage the project through a Project Board The hubs are located in Londonderry, North Belfast, South Belfast, East Belfast, West Belfast, Lisburn, Downpatrick, Lurgan, Ballymena, Strabane and Enniskillen.

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any Giro d'Italia legacy events, such as the 'Gran Fondo', have been secured.

(AQO 7186/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Giro Gran Fondo is viewed as a critical part of the legacy of the Giro d'Italia. I am pleased to announce that we will be supporting it. This will be one of only ten such events in the world, with projected visitor numbers for the first year of approximately ten thousand, another coup for Northern Ireland.

Department of the Environment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether, in order to comply with the Planning General Development Order 1993 and permitted development rights, Infastrata will be required to stop the proposed well and clear the well site at Woodburn forest after four months, even if they discover hydrocarbons and wish to use this site in future for further exploration or extraction.

(AQW 38436/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Under terms of the Planning (General Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 1993 Infastrata has a period of 4 months from the date of commencement to cease works on site. Infastrata has a further 28 days from the date of cessation of operations to restore the site.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the full time equivalent staff complement in (i) his Department; and (ii) arm's-length bodies in each of the last five years.

(AQW 38462/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The complement figures for the Department of the Environment for the last 5 years, are set out in the table below. Figures are provided as at 1 April each year.

Year	Complement Figure
1 April 2010	2893.82
1 April 2011	2736.32
1 April 2012	2694.14
1 April 2013	2762.55
1 April 2014	2779.96

Complement figures are calculated as permanent Staff in Post plus Vacancies and are recorded as Full Time Equivalent (FTE).

The Department's complement figure will fall by some 700 posts at the end of the current financial year due to the transfer of vehicle licencing work to Swansea and the transfer of planning functions to local government.

The Department has two arms-length bodies – Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) and Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC). The complement figures for NILGOSC and LGSC for the last 5 years (as at 1 April) is set out in the table below.

NILGOSC Complement Figures (FTE)

Year	Complement Figure
2010	49
2011	48
2012	47
2013	48
2014	52

LGSC Complement Figures (FTE)

Year	Complement Figure
2010	10
2011	9
2012	9
2013	10
2014	10

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department is addressing the risks associated with the transfer of power to local government; and what preparation has been taken to ensure the competent transfer of these powers in April 2015. (AQW 38676/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has established a regional delivery structure for the local government reform programme which was endorsed by the Executive. The structure reflects the partnership between local and central government and is designed to bring consistency, clarity of purpose, and direction to this complex programme. The Regional Transition Operational Board, chaired by my Permanent Secretary, includes officers and officials from central and local government and coordinates the operational delivery of the reform programme. Progress is monitored by the Regional Transitional Operation Board which tracks achievement against a comprehensive Gantt chart which clearly identifies all dependencies, milestones, key tasks and a critical path. The Board monitors work streams, their delivery and the management of associated risk and provides assurance on the progress of the programme.

All of the transferring departments have been working closely with councils to ensure the smooth transition of functions. Ensuring continuity of services for all transferring functions has been paramount in these considerations. Extensive work has been carried out to provide detailed assessment of the functions and powers to transfer to local government and to verify the associated budgets, staff, assets and liabilities.

My Department has also provided councils with practical and financial support to ensure that new councils will have the capacity to effectively provide transferred services. Through the Transfer of Functions Working Group, councils have been given specialist practitioner support through a best practice approach to organisational design, to help inform future service delivery models. My officials are continuing to work closely with councils to review and revise their training plans and ensure they are cost effective and relevant to the emerging needs of elected members and council officers. The next few months are critical in terms of capacity building and in particular the need for know-how which will enable councils to be effective planning authorities. I would therefore encourage all councils to fully utilise the funding set aside by the Executive for capacity building in a meaningful way.

In addition to these practical considerations, councils will be provided with the legislative powers to enable them to exercise their new and wider authority. My Department has overseen the enactment of the Local Government Finance (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 and the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014 and a large amount of subordinate legislation to create councils that are more effective, more efficient and more responsive to the needs of their communities. The provision of regeneration powers from DSD, albeit deferred for a year, and the off-street car parking functions from DRD will also require primary legislation, and it is crucial that the necessary Bills pass through the Assembly process without delay. I will continue to support Ministerial colleagues in their efforts to ensure that all the necessary legislative provisions are introduced in the Assembly to deliver local government reform.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the budget which will be transferred to each new local council to undertake the review of old minerals permissions.

(AQW 38683/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In August the Department provided the Local Government sector with a paper which set out the financial consequences of the transfer of planning functions to councils. When calculating the level of funding each Council would require, the department considered costs associated with the full range of their planning responsibilities, including the review of old mineral permissions and extant permissions.

The Department asked each council to consider the paper and to provide comments. A number of comments have been received by my Department and these are being considered. The quantum of funding to transfer to each Council will be confirmed within the coming weeks.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the reasons for the delay in the planning system.

(AQW 38790/11-15)

Mr Durkan: During the last two years the planning system has shown, and is continuing to show, improved performance and the Department continues to meet the commitment set out in the Executive's Programme for Government. At the end of the first quarter of 2014/15, 95% of Large Scale Investment (LSI) Applications were processed within 6 months against a target of 90%.

The Department is also exceeding the processing target for local planning applications which make up 96% of all applications received, with an average processing time of 13 weeks in the first quarter of 2014/15, two weeks less than the target.

I recognise that the important role of the planning system in supporting development potential, supporting job creation and aiding economic recovery. As a result of actions I have taken, the planning system is now much better placed to deliver quicker decision making and provide greater certainty on outcomes and timeframes for managing applications. I intend to continue to make prompt and sound planning decisions and to create a planning system that is fast, fair and fit for purpose.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on interpreting services for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss, in the last five years.

(AQW 38802/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department's expenditure on interpreting services for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss over the last five financial years is set out in the table below:-

Year	Expenditure
2010/11	£11,185.37
2011/12	£11,587.46
2012/13	£6,857.40
2013/14	£4,571.60
2014/15 (to date)	£1,142.90
Total	£35,344.73

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many anti-social behaviour cases have been recorded by each council in the last two years.

(AQW 38806/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Information on the number of anti-social behaviour cases recorded by each council is not held centrally.

Under the Anti-social Behaviour (NI) Order 2004 a district council can make an application for an anti-social behaviour order to a magistrates' court in respect of a person where:-

"...the person has acted,....., in an anti-social manner, that is to say, in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself; and that such an order is necessary to protect relevant persons from further anti-social acts by him."

Given the very wide range of activities that could be interpreted as anti-social behaviour I am grateful to the Member for his subsequent clarification to officials in which he specified a number of examples:-

- Playing football when not wanted;
- Youths gathering;
- Knocking doors;
- Litter;
- Driving motor bikes on council land.

My Department does not hold information centrally on levels of enforcement activity by district councils in relation to any of the above examples, apart from littering offences.

The following Table contains figures in relation to littering offences sourced from councils. The figures do not form part of validated Department of Environment official statistics.

	2012/13 Number of fixed penalty notices issued	2012/13 Number of successful prosecutions in the courts	2013/14 Number of fixed penalty notices issued	2013/14 Number of successful prosecutions in the courts
Antrim	24	0	27	0
Ards	3	0	5	0
Armagh	17	0	20	0
Ballymena	28	0	39	0
Ballymoney	4	0	8	0
Banbridge	14	0	13	0
Belfast	1790	44	1907	59
Carrickfergus	16	0	13	0
Castlereagh	95	1	69	10
Coleraine	98	1	135	5
Cookstown	22	1	8	1
Craigavon	672	41	663	4
Derry	182	0	447	21
Down	289	8	146	2
Dungannon & South Tyrone	4	0	9	0
Fermanagh	17	0	38	0
Larne	28	2	24	1
Limavady	4	1	4	0
Lisburn	20	0	14	0
Magherafelt	45	0	45	0
Moyle	7	0	13	0
Newry & Mourne	92	0	153	0
Newtownabbey	157	4	160	4
North Down	34	1	124	0
Omagh	32	2	23	0
Strabane	48	0	46	0
Totals	3742	106	4140	107

Minister of Justice David Ford MLA has advised as follows:-

I understand Mr Easton has clarified that he is seeking details of anti-social behaviour cases brought by Councils through their anti-social behaviour teams for behaviours such as playing football when not wanted, youths gathering or knocking

doors, litter, or driving motorbikes on Council land. The Northern Ireland Courts Service has confirmed it does not hold information on the behaviours detailed by the Member.

The Northern Ireland Courts Service has checked records for Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) dealt with by the Court during 2012, 2013 and January to September 2014 and has found no record of any Councils recorded as the complainant during that time period.

The number of applications made for Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, by Local Government District of the defendant from 2012 to September 2014*, is shown in the table below.

Local Government District	2012	2013	Jan to Sept 2014*
Antrim	4	2	1
Ards	0	0	0
Armagh	0	0	0
Ballymena	0	0	1
Ballymoney	0	0	0
Banbridge	0	0	0
Belfast	0	3	1
Carrickfergus	0	0	0
Castlereagh	0	0	0
Coleraine	0	0	0
Cookstown	0	0	1
Craigavon	0	1	0
Derry	0	0	0
Down	3	0	2
Dungannon	0	0	0
Fermanagh	0	0	0
Larne	0	0	0
Limavady	0	1	0
Lisburn	0	2	2
Magherafelt	0	0	0
Moyle	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne	0	0	0
Newtownabbey	2	1	0
North Down	0	0	0
Omagh	0	0	0
Strabane	0	0	0
Defendant's postcode not recorded	1	0	0
Total	10	10	8

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

*2014 data is currently provisional and may be subject to change.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of people fined for anti-social behaviour offences in each council in the last two years.

(AQW 38807/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Information on the number of anti-social behaviour cases recorded by each council is not held centrally.

Under the Anti-social Behaviour (NI) Order 2004 a district council can make an application for an anti-social behaviour order to a magistrates' court in respect of a person where:-

“...the person has acted,....., in an anti-social manner, that is to say, in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself; and that such an order is necessary to protect relevant persons from further anti-social acts by him.”

Given the very wide range of activities that could be interpreted as anti-social behaviour I am grateful to the Member for his subsequent clarification to officials in which he specified a number of examples:-

- Playing football when not wanted;
- Youths gathering;
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My Department does not hold information centrally on levels of enforcement activity by district councils in relation to any of the above examples, apart from littering offences.

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Fermanagh	17	0	38	0
Larne	28	2	24	1
Limavady	4	1	4	0
Lisburn	20	0	14	0
Magherafelt	45	0	45	0
Moyle	7	0	13	0
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The Northern Ireland Courts Service has checked records for Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) dealt with by the Court during 2012, 2013 and January to September 2014 and has found no record of any Councils recorded as the complainant during that time period.

The number of applications made for Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, by Local Government District of the defendant from 2012 to September 2014*, is shown in the table below.

Local Government District	2012	2013	Jan to Sept 2014*
Antrim	4	2	1
Ards	0	0	0
Armagh	0	0	0
Ballymena	0	0	1
Ballymoney	0	0	0
Banbridge	0	0	0
Belfast	0	3	1
Carrickfergus	0	0	0
Castlereagh	0	0	0
Coleraine	0	0	0
Cookstown	0	0	1
Craigavon	0	1	0
Derry	0	0	0
Down	3	0	2
Dungannon	0	0	0
Fermanagh	0	0	0
Larne	0	0	0
Limavady	0	1	0
Lisburn	0	2	2
Magherafelt	0	0	0
Moyle	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne	0	0	0
Newtownabbey	2	1	0
North Down	0	0	0
Omagh	0	0	0
Strabane	0	0	0
Defendant's postcode not recorded	1	0	0
Total	10	10	8

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

*2014 data is currently provisional and may be subject to change.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment detail the number of people prosecuted for anti-social behaviour offences in each council in the last two years.

(AQW 38808/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Information on the number of anti-social behaviour cases recorded by each council is not held centrally.

Under the Anti-social Behaviour (NI) Order 2004 a district council can make an application for an anti-social behaviour order to a magistrates' court in respect of a person where:-

"...the person has acted,....., in an anti-social manner, that is to say, in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself; and that such an order is necessary to protect relevant persons from further anti-social acts by him."

Given the very wide range of activities that could be interpreted as anti-social behaviour I am grateful to the Member for his subsequent clarification to officials in which he specified a number of examples:-

- Playing football when not wanted;
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- Knocking doors;
- Litter;
- Driving motor bikes on council land.

My Department does not hold information centrally on levels of enforcement activity by district councils in relation to any of the above examples, apart from littering offences.

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Ballymoney	4	0	8	0
Banbridge	14	0	13	0
Belfast	1790	44	1907	59
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Castlereagh	95	1	69	10
Coleraine	98	1	135	5
Cookstown	22	1	8	1
Craigavon	672	41	663	4
Derry	182	0	447	21
Down	289	8	146	2
Dungannon & South Tyrone	4	0	9	0
Fermanagh	17	0	38	0
Larne	28	2	24	1
Limavady	4	1	4	0
Lisburn	20	0	14	0
Magherafelt	45	0	45	0
Moyle	7	0	13	0
Newry & Mourne	92	0	153	0
Newtownabbey	157	4	160	4
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The number of applications made for Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, by Local Government District of the defendant from 2012 to September 2014*, is shown in the table below.

Local Government District	2012	2013	Jan to Sept 2014*
Antrim	4	2	1
Ards	0	0	0
Armagh	0	0	0
Ballymena	0	0	1
Ballymoney	0	0	0
Banbridge	0	0	0
Belfast	0	3	1
Carrickfergus	0	0	0
Castlereagh	0	0	0
Coleraine	0	0	0
Cookstown	0	0	1
Craigavon	0	1	0
Derry	0	0	0
Down	3	0	2
Dungannon	0	0	0
Fermanagh	0	0	0
Larne	0	0	0
Limavady	0	1	0
Lisburn	0	2	2
Magherafelt	0	0	0
Moyle	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne	0	0	0
Newtownabbey	2	1	0
North Down	0	0	0
Omagh	0	0	0
Strabane	0	0	0
Defendant's postcode not recorded	1	0	0
Total	10	10	8

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

*2014 data is currently provisional and may be subject to change.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of people fined for dog fouling offences in each council in the last two years.

(AQW 38809/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave the Member for South Belfast on 31 October 2014 to AQW 37969/11-15.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of (i) fines; and (ii) prosecutions for breaches of environmental regulations in each council in the last two years.

(AQW 38810/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The number of prosecutions and fines levied in each of the District Council areas for breaches of environmental regulations in the last two years is set out below. Where differences exist in the numbers of fines and prosecutions, these have occurred because a number of months can often pass between sentencing and the levying of fines.

Council	Fines	Prosecutions
Antrim	3	4
Ards	8	8
Armagh	11	10
Ballymena	6	10
Ballymoney	4	8
Banbridge	3	3
Belfast	0	4
Carrickfergus	0	0
Castlereagh	1	1
Coleraine	8	8
Cookstown	5	5
Craigavon	10	6
Derry	3	3
Down	5	6
Dungannon	7	8
Fermanagh	6	6
Larne	2	4
Limavady	2	2
Lisburn	9	11
Magherafelt	1	4
Moyle	4	4
Newry & Mourne	11	12
Newtownabbey	4	3
North Down	4	4
Omagh	9	9
Strabane	7	7

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) if; and (ii) when the “further details” referred to in the published Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan in relation to Local Landscape Policy Areas will be made available on his Department’s website.

(AQW 38819/11-15)

Mr Durkan: For the 288 Local Landscape Policy Areas in BMAP my intention is to have this information available on the Department’s website before Christmas. The information will consist of clarification maps and further details of the features of each Local Landscape Policy Area.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) if; and (ii) when the “clarification” referred to in the published Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan in relation to Local Landscape Policy Areas will be made available on his Department’s website.

(AQW 38820/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Further to my answer to AQW 38819/11-15, I can confirm that for the 288 Local Landscape Policy Areas in BMAP my intention is to have this information available on the Department’s website before Christmas. The information will consist of clarification maps and further details of the features of each Local Landscape Policy Area.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment, given the recent assessment by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful outlining litter levels on beaches, what steps his Department is taking to (i) address current levels of litter; and (ii) ensure this does not negatively impact on coastal tourism.

(AQW 38826/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful has undertaken the Marine Survey on behalf of my Department since September 2012. Fourteen reference beaches are each surveyed 4 times a year. These beaches were specifically chosen because they are not regularly cleaned by local authorities. Following the survey, the litter is removed for disposal. Last year, this resulted in 20,000 fewer items of litter on these beaches.

Reporting on the extent and composition of marine litter means that the effectiveness of management and mitigation measures can be assessed, sources and activities which lead to litter pollution can be identified, and resources focused on how to best tackle the problem.

Statutory responsibility for addressing levels of litter on local amenity beaches lies primarily with beach operators, who for the most part are the relevant local authorities in which the beach is located.

My Department has issued a revised statutory Code of Practice on Litter which makes it clear that amenity beaches should, as a minimum standard, generally be kept clear of all types of litter during the traditional bathing season from 1 May to 30 September inclusive.

I chair the Good Beach Summit which brings together beach operators and other organisations with an interest in healthy beaches both from an amenity and water quality perspective. This group has developed and implemented an action plan which addresses the issue of beach cleanliness and water quality.

The Marine Litter Strategy was published by my Department in July 2013 to address the problem of coastal litter. Key strands within the Strategy are awareness-raising, data collection, statutory deterrents, coastal infrastructure and removal of litter. Specific measures taken include the Marine Survey, volunteering programmes, the Carrier Bag levy and Blue Flag Awards which can promote coastal tourism.

On 9 October 2014, I had the privilege of presenting the Coca-cola sponsored Coast Care Awards at an event managed by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful. This event recognised and rewarded the work of dedicated volunteers who regularly clean up our coast and inland waterways. I am also happy to note that in 2014 we gained 2 new Blue Flag beaches.

The Carrier Bag levy was introduced by my Department in April 2013 and already the environmental benefits are being realised. The 2013 Marine Survey recorded 24% fewer plastic bags on beaches in the period following the introduction of the levy.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department monitors the operation of the Sellafield Nuclear Processing Plant; and whether his Department is aware of any accidents, sometimes described as minor accidents or otherwise, within the Sellafield Plant in the last four years.

(AQW 38898/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Over the last four years the Department of Environment has not been made aware of any accidents, minor or otherwise, that have happened within the Sellafield Plant which is regulated by the Environment Agency (EA) and the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR).

The Department runs a comprehensive environmental monitoring programme to assess the impact of radioactive discharges from nuclear installations and the results are published annually in a joint report "Radioactivity in Food and the Environment" published by SEPA, EA, FSA and NIEA. Measurements for the period 2009 to 2013 show that the levels of radioactive contamination are negligible.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment whether it is necessary to couple and uncouple a trailer during the car and trailer test; and if so, what weight of trailer must be used for the test.

(AQW 38899/11-15)

Mr Durkan: EU Legislation, which was introduced on 1 January 1997, mandates that a coupling and uncoupling exercise is included in the category B+E (car and trailer) practical driving test. This legislation also specifies that the type of vehicle to be used must be:

- a combination made up of a category B test vehicle and a trailer with a maximum authorised mass of at least 1,000 kilograms; and
- the trailer shall be presented with a training load weighing a minimum of 600 kilograms and a maximum of 1,000 kilograms securely loaded on the trailer.

The purpose of the practical test of competence in coupling and uncoupling the vehicle is to ensure that the candidate has the ability to carry out this exercise correctly and make the vehicle and trailer combination safe for use on the road.

All driving test candidates for a category B+E test must demonstrate their ability to couple and uncouple the vehicle safely. However, for candidates with a physical disability, there is provision to conduct this aspect of the test orally, using questions and answers in place of a practical demonstration.

Mr Brady asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the compensation that businesses are entitled to claim following damage caused by floods.

(AQW 38909/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department makes payments of £1000 to eligible householders who suffer severe inconvenience as a result of flooding, in line with the Scheme of Emergency Financial Assistance (SEFA) agreed by the Executive. The £1000 payments are not compensation payments and are not intended to complement or replace insurance policies but are intended to make properties habitable as soon as possible.

SEFA, agreed by the Executive, does not extend to business, nor indeed other bodies or organisations. I do sympathise with the difficulties encountered by small business owners, particularly those in Newry that were affected by recent flooding.

I have asked my officials to consider and provide me with advice on whether or not the Scheme could be extended to cover organisations and individuals other than householders.

This of course would be subject to agreement by the Executive and by the Finance Minister and any payments would depend on funding being made available. Currently there is no provision in the Department's baseline for 2015/2016 for SEFA payments to councils and householders affected by flooding events.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on his Department's consideration on introducing a climate change bill.

(AQW 38921/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I refer you to the reply I gave to Stephen Agnew MLA for North Down on 24 July 2014, in response to question AQW 35085/11-15.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37877/11-15, whether the application in question was submitted on the advice of a senior Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement officer; and if so, to detail the grade of the officer.

(AQW 39058/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In February 2013, fonaCAB sought advice and guidance from the Driver & Vehicle Agency Enforcement Section in respect of satisfying taxi operator licensing requirements for their provision of taxis at Ravenhill rugby ground.

FonaCAB were specifically advised of the duties of licensed operators under Section 3(2) of the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and subsequently made their determination to apply for Ravenhill rugby ground to be included on their taxi operator's licence.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment why there are delays in processing waste management licences within Northern Ireland Environment Agency; and whether the number of staff involved in processing licences have been reduced.

(AQW 39067/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Under article 8 of The Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (The Order), the Department has a statutory 4 months in which to make a determination of applications for waste management licences, or within such longer period as agreed in writing between the Department and the applicant.

In the last 18 months 14 applications have been received and all have been determined within the 4 month statutory deadline.

Operational practice is that the Department must have the following in order to progress an application:

- Correctly completed form;
- Correct fee;
- Working Plan;
- Landowner Declaration;
- Planning permission;
- Water Act consent; and
- Financial provision.

Generally, when applications are not able to be determined it is because one or more of the above list has not been provided by the applicant. In such cases when more information is requested of the applicant, the "clock stops" until that information is supplied by the applicant, this can lead to the perception that the determination process is unduly lengthy.

Despite budget reductions for DOE, staffing levels in the waste management team are being maintained by the redeployment of suitably qualified staff from other areas.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the waste burning capacity of planning approval Z/2012/1387/F.

(AQW 39086/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Environmental Statement that accompanied planning application Z/2012/1387/F advises that the proposed plant utilises gasification technology which incorporates 2 x 25MWth step grate furnaces. The anticipated throughput of the approved facility is 120,000 tonnes per annum, as restricted by a condition of the planning permission.

I also wish to clarify that a gasification plant does not involve 'burning' of waste. Gasification is a process that involves reacting the waste material at high temperatures, with a controlled amount of oxygen, to create syngas.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what mechanism his Department is putting in place to carry on the work of Catchment Stakeholder Groups.

(AQW 39087/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department of the Environment is the competent authority for co-ordinating the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) leads on this. DARD, DCAL and DRD and their agencies are co-deliverers in taking forward implementation. An inter-departmental Board and Implementation Working Group are in place to co-ordinate the strategic and operational delivery of the Directive.

Stakeholder engagement on the implementation of the River Basin Management Plans takes place through nine Catchment Stakeholder Groups (CSGs) set up by NIEA. They are open to anyone who has an interest in the water environment and meet twice yearly in spring and autumn. The Groups encourage partnership working in developing and implementing the River Basin Management Plans.

In September 2014, it was proposed that Catchment Stakeholder Group (CSG) meetings would not be held in Autumn 2014. This was to enable work to focus on delivering draft Second Cycle Plans for publication in December 2014, and continuing implementation in the Local Management Areas. Catchment Management Officers (CMOs) continue to work in partnership with local stakeholders, including Rivers Trusts and Angling Clubs.

CSG meetings will be scheduled in Spring 2015 to carry on the work of the groups. This will be during the consultation period for the Second Cycle River Basin Management Plans, which runs from 22 December 2014 to 22 June 2015. These meetings will focus on the changes being proposed in the updated plans, and especially areas where partnership working may contribute to delivery of the plans in 2015-2021.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment how he ensures the Northern Ireland Environment Agency respond to concerns over rivers and provide answers on pollution incidents in a timely manner.

(AQW 39088/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Within my Department, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) monitors and protects all of Northern Ireland's waterways, including inland streams, rivers and lakes, groundwater and coastal waters out to three miles from shore.

NIEA also leads in responding to water pollution or to threats of such pollution throughout Northern Ireland. This includes investigating all such incidents or threats, overseeing the immediate steps necessary to put a stop to pollution, gathering any necessary evidence and then pursuing appropriate enforcement action.

To allow the public to immediately report any pollution incidents and concerns NIEA's Water Management Unit operates a 24-hour, 365 days a year free-phone Pollution Hotline (0800 807060), with staff on call at all times to promptly assess and respond to incidents.

NIEA sets itself very challenging targets for responding to pollution incidents throughout Northern Ireland. These targets include that for pollution incidents reported during working hours, regardless of where they occur across Northern Ireland, NIEA staff will be on site at 90% of significant incidents within two hours. For incidents reported outside working hours, staff aim to be on site at 90% of all significant pollution incidents within four hours. For all remaining minor incidents the target is to be on site within one working day. Averaged over the past ten years, 94.5% of pollution reports were responded to within set time targets.

NIEA also aims, bearing in mind that some incidents are reported anonymously, to provide an update to the person who reported the incident after investigations are complete.

Over and above responding to water pollution, NIEA also has a very wide ranging role in all aspects of monitoring and protecting water quality. This includes a comprehensive water quality monitoring programme to meet statutory requirements, with the results of this programme being made available to the public through NIEA's website.

In addition NIEA has an extensive network of locally based Catchment Stakeholder Groups across Northern Ireland, each of which meets twice per year. These groups were set up with the express aim of harnessing the experience and knowledge of local people, allowing them to deal directly and cooperate with those government agencies responsible for our waterways, and to ensure detailed knowledge about our rivers and NIEA's work in protecting them is disseminated to the public at a local level.

Press releases on all prosecutions and significant pollution incidents are published on the DOE website and a very wide range of leaflets and information on the protection of the water environment is available.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the scale and manner of engagement between the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and (a) river trusts; and (b) angling clubs.

(AQW 39089/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) signed a Partnership Agreement with the Association of Rivers Trusts in 2010 to encourage the development of the Rivers Trust network throughout Northern Ireland. The NIEA has also co-funded a Northern Ireland Rivers Trust Development Officer post since November 2011.

The initial role of this Development Officer was to help establish new Rivers Trusts and there are currently seven Rivers Trusts operating in Northern Ireland. The role recently has been to try to develop capacity within the existing Trusts to apply for funding and to carry out projects to enhance the rivers they look after. The Development Officer also ensures that the relevant NIEA Catchment Management Officer (CMO) is informed of contact details when a new Trust is set up. Several of the Trusts have successfully applied for Water Quality Improvement grants and also applied to the NIEL Challenge Fund for environmental projects.

The Rivers Trusts send representatives to the Water Framework Directive Catchment Stakeholder events which are held bi-annually in Spring and Autumn. The CMO is also available to discuss issues as and when required, outside of these meetings. The Rivers Trusts Development Officer also attends the Water Framework Directive National Stakeholders Forum which meets three times per year.

The NIEA has met with 34 different angling clubs 56 times in the past year. In addition it has met with the Ulster Angling Federation 11 times. This engagement has been through the Catchment Stakeholder events and by meetings set up to discuss specific issues. Contact details for CMOs are on the NIEA website and engagement from any stakeholder interested in the water environment is encouraged.

The NIEA currently supports the Riverfly Monitoring Initiative in six river catchments: Ballinderry; Enler; Faughan; Lagan; Roe and Six Mile Water. NIEA has trained 72 volunteers, including anglers and members of River Trusts, to carry out in-river kick samples and identify invertebrate samples on a monthly basis.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department will monitor leeching from council waste sites such as Bruslee.

(AQW 39090/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) regulates both closed and operating landfills sites that are in ownership of a series of local Councils. There are 7 operating landfills run by councils all of which have a Pollution Prevention and Control (PPC) permit to operate. It is a requirement of NIEA that these landfills are designed with impermeable liners to prevent leachate migration from the waste disposal site. In all instances leachate is collected and taken to a Northern Ireland Water (NIW) wastewater treatment works for treatment and disposal. Permit conditions require landfill operators to monitor leachate levels and quality within the landfill on a regular basis. Landfill operators are also required to monitor surface water and groundwater around the landfill on a regular basis to ensure leachate contamination is not occurring.

The NIEA reviews all monitoring data to ensure the landfill site is in compliance with the limits in the PPC permit. The NIEA also conducts regular site inspections to check compliance with the PPC permit.

There are also 6 closed landfills run by local councils which have a waste licence which was updated when the landfills closed to cover regulation of the landfills during the post-closure phase. Generally these older landfills were not designed with an impermeable liner and they were therefore required to close because they could not meet the requirements of the Landfill Regulations (NI) 2003. These landfills were required to submit a Site Closure Plan, which included measures to minimise leachate and long term monitoring plans. Monitoring is conducted monthly, quarterly or annually depending on the parameters and NIEA reviews all monitoring data to check compliance with the Site Closure Plan. NIEA also conducts regular site inspections to check compliance with the waste licence.

Bruslee Site

NIEA assumed the role of waste regulator from local councils in December 2003. The closure and monitoring requirements of the Landfill Directive apply to landfill sites that were still operating on 16 July 2001. The Bruslee site closed before July 2001 and as such the council both operated and regulated the site. It is therefore the council's responsibility to hold information on post-closure management and monitoring. Notwithstanding, NIEA also undertakes surface and groundwater monitoring in the vicinity of a number of older closed landfill sites across Northern Ireland to assess the potential risk for impact on adjacent surface water bodies. This monitoring is directed using a risk-based approach, targeting those sites where the potential for adverse impact on the aquatic environment is greatest; however Bruslee is not one of the sites currently monitored.

The Bruslee Waste Disposal Site is also consented under the terms of the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 for the discharge of treated leachate. The discharge is monitored by NIEA on four occasions per year and there are currently no compliance issues with the site.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the total number of discharge consents in each constituency; and how these are monitored.

(AQW 39091/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, it is an offence to discharge trade or sewage effluent to waterways or groundwater without the consent of the Department of the Environment. Numbers of discharge consents broken down by constituency area are listed below:

Belfast East	89
Belfast North	39

Belfast South	14
Belfast West	21
East Antrim	102
East Londonderry	213
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	408
Foyle	194
Lagan Valley	225
Mid Ulster	308
Newry And Armagh	264
North Antrim	225
North Down	60
South Antrim	223
South Down	283
Strangford	200
Upper Bann	123
West Tyrone	340

Once a discharge consent has been issued, compliance assessment monitoring is normally carried out by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency where the consent permits a maximum daily discharge of five cubic metres or more, or where the consent relates to significant site drainage discharges, such as those for quarries. This approach to monitoring has been adopted to target resources in a cost effective way at those discharges which, because of their volume or composition, have the greatest pollution potential.

Compliance monitoring normally includes the routine collection of samples, or visual inspections, or both.

Sampling frequency depends on the nature and volume of the discharge, but is usually 4 or 12 times a year at unspecified times and on unspecified dates. Samples are analysed for a range of parameters listed in the discharge consent, and results are compared with the absolute standard. To assess compliance, each parameter is considered separately on a rolling 12-month basis.

Mr Campbell asked Minister of the Environment to detail the change in numbers of people prosecuted regarding involvement with illegal taxi operations between year ending 31 December 2008 and 31 December 2013.

(AQW 39099/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The numbers of prosecutions involving illegal taxi operations for the years between 2010/11 and 2013/14 are contained in the table below.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Number of prosecutions involving illegal taxi operations	Figures not available	Figures not available	175	217	154	172

The DVA enforcement database was not introduced until 2010/11 and therefore details of prosecutions before this time are not readily available.

With the introduction of the Graduated Fixed Penalty and Deposit Scheme in February 2011, the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) commenced issuing fixed penalties for certain offences to reduce the burden and costs of taking prosecutions through the courts.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment how many reports of illegal taxis operating were made to his Department in October and November of (a) 2013; and (b) 2014.

(AQW 39100/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There were 51 reports made to the Department relating to illegal taxis from 1 October 2013 to 30 November 2013, and 49 reports from 1 October 2014 to 21 November 2014.

1-These figures are not part of DOE Official Statistics reporting

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment, as of 20 November 2014, how many of the eleven newly constituted Councils received a request which met the procedural requirements laid down in Section 41 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 and the Standing Orders of the Council to 'call in' a decision made by that Council.

(AQW 39101/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The request for the reconsideration of a council decision, under section 41 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, is an internal matter for councils.

My Department does not hold the information requested.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment what steps a home owner from North Antrim could take if turned down for an equity release scheme due to the house being in a 'lignite designated' area.

(AQW 39112/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The policy applicable to the Lignite Resource Area would be the MIN policies in Planning Strategy for Rural NI, particularly MIN 5 (Mineral Reserves).

This states that surface development which would prejudice future exploitation of valuable mineral reserves will not be permitted. Where there are mineral reserves, e.g., lignite (brown coal) which are considered to be of particular value to the economy and those reserves have been proven to acceptable standards, surface development which would prejudice their exploitation will not be permitted. Policy Areas in respect of such minerals will, where appropriate, be defined in development plans.

On land in close proximity to the protected resource, planning applications will be assessed on their merits in relation to the Department's contemporary knowledge of lignite exploitation requirements. The Department will seek to ensure that essential mining operations are not prejudiced by new developments located where they are likely to suffer nuisance as a result of those operations. Of course once plan-making powers are devolved to Councils, it would be up to the new Council to review this when considering any future plan.

My Department is not aware of any proposals to extract Lignite.

The issue of an equity release scheme would be a private matter between the homeowner and the equity release provider and would not be a matter for this Department.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of staff employed (i) directly by his Department; and (ii) by its agencies, who currently earn less than the living wage.

(AQW 39137/11-15)

Mr Durkan: No employee in my Department or Agencies, paid on either the Industrial or Non Industrial pay scales, is paid below the current UK Living Wage as published by the Living Wage Foundation of £7.85 per hour. This is based using net hours per week figures.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment what communication he has had with other Departments to identify further work for surplus staff at the Driver and Vehicle Agency offices in Coleraine; and to detail the work which he has been able to identify.

(AQW 39173/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Following the unjustified and unwarranted decision by the Department for Transport (DfT) to centralise all vehicle registration and licensing services in Swansea, I took a number of immediate steps to identify alternative employment for the staff affected.

In conjunction with the Minister for Finance and Personnel, I asked every department to introduce vacancy controls so that suitable permanent and temporary posts were offered in the first instance to surplus DVA staff.

I asked each department to identify any functions that could be relocated to Coleraine. Unfortunately, other than in my own department, no department identified any permanent work to transfer to Coleraine.

In negotiations with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea, I was able to secure a small number of posts to carry out residual vehicle licensing functions. I also asked the Secretary of State to trawl all departments in Britain for back-office work that could be carried out here, however, no such work was identified.

A number of temporary opportunities within my Department were made available to surplus staff, as an interim measure, to provide additional time to find permanent posts for the affected staff. In addition, the Minister for Social Development provided temporary work in Coleraine for the remaining surplus staff, for a time bound exercise to last until the end of this year. Subsequent correspondence with Minister Storey has confirmed there are no further opportunities to extend this work or transfer either permanent or temporary jobs to Coleraine.

You will be aware that in June 2014, in conjunction with the DFP Minister, I sought approval to run a 'restricted' NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme. The purpose of the scheme, which has been restricted to a defined geographical area, is to generate suitable additional vacancies into which the surplus staff in Coleraine can be redeployed. The Scheme was launched on 19 November and is open to some 1,700 eligible staff. Staff have until 3 December to express an interest.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 38468/11-15 and in relation to what he has been advised in the absence of seeing the email, for his assessment of the impact it would have on the Driver and Vehicle Agency and his Department should it become discoverable.

(AQW 39185/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I would refer the member to my response to AQW 38142/11-15.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, to detail the content, or place a copy in the Assembly Library, of all emails and/or correspondence between his Deputy Principal Officer of Road Transport Licensing Division or any other name by which it was known, and the Head of Enforcement regarding taxi and associated issues at Ravenhill Stadium between February and September 2013.

(AQW 39186/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Emails and correspondence between senior Licensing staff and the Head of Enforcement regarding issues at Ravenhill Stadium were part of an investigatory process and as such it is necessary to limit the disclosure of this information to protect the integrity of this and other investigatory processes.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department engages in the sharing of knowledge and experience on the delivery of road safety measures with Ministerial colleagues in the other devolved regions of the UK.

(AQW 39296/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My officials work closely with colleagues across the UK to ensure the sharing of knowledge and experience on road safety matters.

The Director of Road Safety and Vehicle Regulation is a member of the DfT-chaired Road Safety Delivery Group which meets on average three times a year. This Group includes representatives of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as well as Transport for London and British local authorities. The group considers key road safety themes, inviting additional participants as necessary.

My officials work closely with colleagues in the Department for Transport and in Scotland and Wales on specific issues. These issues currently include the proposals for lower drink drive limits here and in Scotland; our plans for graduated driver licensing (in which Scottish officials and politicians are very interested); and motorcycle safety which is a current focus for the Welsh Assembly Government and for British local authorities as well as for us. Where appropriate, we work closely with colleagues across the UK in the transposition of EU Directives. In addition, we have forged close links with Transport for London (for instance on their cycle safety system for HGVs and cyclists), and with the Isle of Man.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of fines issued for dog fouling, broken down by council, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 39489/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to the Member for South Belfast on 31 October 2014 to AQW 37969/11-15.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the benefits of a reduced rate of VAT for the hospitality industry, particularly in geographical areas that attract high numbers of tourists.

(AQW 37641/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I believe a reduced VAT rate for the hospitality industry would bring a much needed boost not only to the hospitality industry, but also the wider tourism sector as a whole. That is why I brought a Motion to the NI Assembly in September 2012 that called on the Executive to pursue a separate VAT rate for the tourism/hospitality sector in Northern Ireland with HM Treasury. The previous Minister of Finance and Personnel subsequently raised this issue with the former Exchequer Secretary, David Gauke MP. The then Exchequer Secretary responded that any reduction in VAT would need to apply across the United Kingdom as a whole and that, in his view, the cost of lowering the rate of VAT for the hospitality sector would be too high. I have no indication that the Treasury position on this has changed.

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much public money is paid to Trade Unions on an annual basis, broken down by Department.

(AQW 38871/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: In 2013-14 no public money was paid directly to Trade Union organisations by my Department. However, the Department paid £116k in salary costs in respect of Trade Union Representatives and their administrative support staff.

This response is provided for the Department of Finance and Personnel only as the information for all departments is not held centrally. The Member should contact individual departments for their information.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 37952/11-15, how the Minister for Social Development's response to AQW 33121/11-15 compares with the interpretation of the Commission on Disposals of Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 provided by Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office (Lord Lyell) in the HL Deb 22 April 1986 vol 473 cc1144-6 1144 when the then Minister introduced the legislation and stated, "It (the Order) will bring to an end the current practice in Northern Ireland whereby on the grant of a lease or letting of land the landlord may oblige his tenant to pay for his (the landlord's) agent's professional services".

(AQW 38995/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Minister for Social Development confirmed, pursuant to AQW 37952/11-15, that he was not in a position to give a view on the interpretation of the Commission on Disposals of Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 ("the Order").

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment had earlier confirmed, pursuant to AQW 33121/11-15, that the Order makes void a requirement that the tenant be liable for any commissions which are charged by letting agents for rent reviews or extensions/renewals of lettings.

I agree with the assessment of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. However, I would add that Article 3(1) of the Order also makes void a requirement, when a disposal of land occurs, that a person acquiring the land be liable for any commissions which are charged by an agent acting for the person disposing of the land. Article 3(7) of the Order confirms that "disposal" includes a lease or letting of land.

Accordingly, on the grant of a lease or letting of land a landlord cannot oblige his tenant to pay any commission charged by the landlord's agent. "Commission" is defined in the Order as including fees, charges, disbursements, expenses and remuneration.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the economic inactivity rate for people aged 16 to 65, broken down by district council area.

(AQW 39081/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Estimates of the numbers of economically inactive by Northern Ireland District Council Area (DCA) are sourced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), with the most recent data available for July to September 2014. These estimates are based on the residency of an individual.

The requested breakdown of economic inactivity by DCA is shown in the attached table.

Table: Number of Economically Inactive by District Council Area (age 16-64)

	July - September 2014	Margin of Error
Antrim	7,000	+/- 4,000
Ards	12,000	+/- 4,000
Armagh	9,000	+/- 3,000
Ballymena	11,000	+/- 4,000
Ballymoney	6,000	+/- 3,000
Banbridge	9,000	+/- 3,000
Belfast	46,000	+/- 9,000
Carrickfergus	*	*
Castlereagh	12,000	+/- 4,000
Coleraine	8,000	+/- 4,000
Cookstown	8,000	+/- 3,000
Craigavon	15,000	+/- 5,000
Derry	29,000	+/- 6,000
Down	8,000	+/- 3,000
Dungannon	8,000	+/- 3,000
Fermanagh	13,000	+/- 4,000
Larne	6,000	+/- 3,000
Limavady	6,000	+/- 3,000
Lisburn	28,000	+/- 6,000
Magherafelt	6,000	+/- 3,000

	July - September 2014	Margin of Error
Moyle	*	*
Newry and Mourne	16,000	+/- 5,000
Newtownabbey	14,000	+/- 5,000
North Down	8,000	+/- 4,000
Omagh	9,000	+/- 3,000
Strabane	9,000	+/- 3,000
Northern Ireland	312,000	+/- 21,000

Source: Economic and Labour Market Statistics Branch, Labour Force Survey, July – September 2014

* Estimate is suppressed due to sample size.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the ratio of success to failure of new business start-ups in the Foyle constituency in the last three years.

(AQW 39082/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: This data is not currently available from the Office for National Statistics for Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA). However, the requested information is provided overleaf for the Derry Local Government District (LGD), which contains the Foyle PCA, for the most recent three years available.

Table: Number of business births and survival¹ rates (2009-2011)

Derry LGD2	2009	2010	2011
New business births ³	215	235	175
One year survival	86.0%	83.0%	88.6%
Two year survival	69.8%	70.2%	..
Three year survival	53.5%

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS), Business Demography 2012

- 1 A business is deemed to have survived if having been a birth in year t or having survived to year t; it is active in terms of employment and/or turnover in any part of t+1.
- 2 Derry LGD contains the entire Foyle PCA and an additional 2 wards (Banagher and Claudy) from East Londonderry PCA.
- 3 A birth is identified as a business that was present in year t, but did not exist in year t-1 or t-2.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the application of the Barnett consequentials for 2014 across each budget centre.

(AQW 39084/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Funding received through the Barnett formula is not hypothecated to particular programmes in Northern Ireland, meaning it simply increases the overall level of funding available to the Executive. As a consequence, it is not possible to link funding received through the Barnett formula to specific Executive allocations.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the estimated budget exchange figures for the end of the current financial year.

(AQW 39085/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Budget Exchange caps cannot be determined until final HM Treasury Budget Control Totals for 2014-15 are agreed later in the year.

Whilst the caps place a limit on the carry forward of funding, the actual amount carried forward will be influenced by spending performance this year and in particular the level of underspend across departments.

The significant constraints on non ring-fenced Resource DEL in 2014-15 mean the amount of funding available for carry forward under the Budget Exchange Scheme is likely to be significantly below the Budget Exchange cap.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the current amount of arrears outstanding for (i) domestic; and (ii) commercial rates.

(AQW 39136/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The level of outstanding (i) domestic; and (ii) non-domestic debt is only available for the last financial year and is provided in the table below.

	Domestic Debt	Non-Domestic Debt
31st March 2014*	£80,097,027	£82,664,895

*2013/14 figures subject to audit assurance.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, following Rate Revaluation from April 2015, what mechanisms are in place to ensure that businesses currently eligible for small business rate relief are awarded.

(AQW 39178/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Small Business Rate Relief Scheme was recently evaluated by the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy and I am currently considering their report and its findings.

However, you should note that in the draft Budget statement I announced my intention that the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme should continue for 2015/16 rating year.

While I intend for the eligibility criteria to remain the same next year it is likely that as a natural result of the revaluation exercise some businesses will see relief removed or reduced level of relief, whereas others will receive relief for the first time or will see an increase in the level of their relief.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, considering the unexpected increase in tax revenue generated in the UK in the first six months of 2014 including £8.8bn in compliance, what percentage of the overall revenue has been derived from Northern Ireland.

(AQW 39230/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: A regional breakdown of tax revenue for the first six months of 2014 is not currently available from HMRC.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on accommodation negotiations regarding the relocation of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Fisheries Office to Downshire Civic Centre.

(AQW 39254/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My officials are continuing to work with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to progress the relocation of Fisheries Division to Downpatrick.

A draft lease has been approved by Down District Council Policy and Resources Committee and also by the Finance and Resources Committee of the Shadow Council.

The relocation is wholly funded by DARD and we are currently awaiting approval of the DARD Business Case. When this is complete, the Council and Shadow Council will be required to give formal approval to lease and a lease can then be perfected.

The target date for the Fisheries Division move remains June 2015.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what percentage of total contracts awarded for work in Derry was to companies based in Derry, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39299/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Central Procurement Directorate monitors the level of participation and success of local Northern Ireland businesses in public procurement contracts awarded by Centres of Procurement Expertise. However, these data cannot be broken down by geographical location.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail how district rates spending (i) relates to Department Expenditure Limit; (ii) is dealt with in the out turn; and (iii) is dealt with in the net fiscal balance report.

(AQW 39385/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: District rates fund spending that is incurred by district councils and therefore do not form part of the Executive's DEL budget or outturn.

In the Net Fiscal Balance Report analysis, District and Regional Rates are combined to provide a total figure for rates revenue in Northern Ireland. A Domestic and Non-Domestic breakdown estimate is then provided in the report.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 38482/11-15, for each year since 2010/11, including plans for 2014/15, to detail (i) capital Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL); (ii) financial transactions capital; (iii) capital DEL with financial transactions capital removed; (iv) the adjustment to real term prices of capital spend with financial

transactions capital removed for each year from 2010/11 using Treasury GDP deflators for 2012/13; and (v) the real terms and cumulative reduction for each year from 2010/11 to 2014/15 based on 2012/13 prices.

(AQW 39394/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The table overleaf shows Final Outturn reported for 2010-11 to 2012-13, Provisional Outturn for 2013-14 and October Monitoring plans for 2014-15 for Capital DEL.

£million	2010-11 Final Outturn	2011-12 Final Outturn	2012-13 Final Outturn	2013-14 Provisional Outturn	2014-15 October Monitoring
Total Capital DEL	1,193.0	1,000.4	968.9	930.8	1,056.0
Financial Transactions Capital	-	-	11.8	40.9	33.4
Capital DEL excluding FTC	1,193.0	1,000.4	957.1	889.9	1,022.7
Real Terms Capital DEL (exc. FTC)*	1,234.6	1,017.1	957.1	873.8	982.5
Difference	41.6	16.7	0.0	-16.1	-40.1
*2012-13 prices			Cumulative difference:		2.0

Figures may not add due to roundings

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, for each year since 2010/11, including plans for 2014/15, to detail (i) resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL); (ii) Annual Managed Expenditure (AME) to DEL; (iii) resource DEL adjusted for AME to DEL recategorisation; (iv) the adjustment to real term prices of resource DEL with the figures adjusted for AME to DEL recategorisation for each year from 2010/11 using Treasury GDP deflators for 2012/13; and (v) the real terms and cumulative reduction for each year from 2010/11 to 2014/15, based on 2012/13 prices.

(AQW 39395/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The attached table shows Final Outturn reported for 2010-11 to 2012-13, Provisional Outturn for 2013-14 and the October Monitoring position for 2014-15 for Resource DEL.

£million	2010-11 Final Outturn	2011-12 Final Outturn	2012-13 Final Outturn	2013-14 Provisional Outturn	2014-15 October Monitoring
Total Resource DEL	9,963.6	9,856.2	10,035.6	10,160.9	10,157.7
AME/DEL Reclassification				131.0	143.8
Adjusted Resource DEL	9,963.6	9856.2	10,035.6	10,029.9	10,013.9
Adjusted Resource DEL (Real Terms*)	10,310.9	10,020.5	10,035.6	9,848.3	9,621.0
Difference	347.4	164.3	0.0	-181.5	-392.9
*2012-13 prices			Cumulative difference:		-62.8

Figures may not add up due to roundings.

Mr Milne asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the Review of Fiscal Powers.

(AQO 7207/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Although the priority remains the devolution of Corporation Tax, as part of the June 2013 Economic Pact document, a commitment was made to consider the devolution of other taxes including Income Tax, VAT and Fuel Duty.

I am currently considering the draft assessments in respect of each of the main taxes and will shortly be putting recommendations to Executive colleagues on this matter.

The key deciding factor will be whether the benefits to the people of Northern Ireland from devolving a tax, and moving from the national system of rates or allowances, will be sufficient to clearly outweigh any costs.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on departmental sectoral engagement on the draft Budget 2015/16.

(AQO 7208/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I announced the draft Budget on 3rd November and am now in the process of meeting with each Minister on their outcome for their department.

My officials are meeting with key consultation stakeholders including NICVA, CBI, trade unions and various groups representing different sectors within Northern Ireland. I have also commissioned focus groups that will gauge the opinions of a cross section of our community.

It is for individual departmental Ministers to decide on how to engage in their own consultation process. However, my Department has issued guidance outlining what departments might consider when publishing information as part of the consultation process.

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much has been borrowed under the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative to date.

(AQO 7209/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Up to the beginning of December 2014 the Executive has drawn down loans of £1.7 billion, from the National Loans Fund, under the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative.

In addition some £0.6 billion has been used for on-balance sheet PFI projects. This reduces the total interest cost to the Executive.

Full details of RRI borrowing are included in the draft Budget 2015-16 document.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much of the Financial Transactions Capital remains unused.

(AQO 7210/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Following the October Monitoring Round, £35.2 million of Financial Transactions Capital remains unallocated in the 2014-15 year.

Of course Financial Transactions Capital can only be used for making loans to, or equity investments in, the private sector. This restricts the type of projects which can benefit from this source of finance.

In the context of the October Monitoring round, I expressed my concern to Executive colleagues that such a significant tranche of this funding has not been allocated at this stage of the year and asked that they come forward with projects that can use this funding.

While a number of potential projects are currently being considered I would still urge all Ministers to come forward with proposals.

I will provide a further update as part of the January Monitoring round.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the impact of the non-domestic rates revaluation.

(AQO 7211/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Firstly, I welcome the timely completion by Land & Property Services of the draft valuations of all 73,000 non domestic rateable properties in Northern Ireland with early access to the individual valuations on-line. Secondly, although the valuations are now available and can be compared to the existing valuations, in many ways the impact of the revaluation cannot be fully understood until new District and Regional rate poundages are known in February next year.

There are a number of impacts, however, that can be observed even at this stage. The results at a Northern Ireland level show modest growth of 8% in the total value of the new Valuation List when compared to the current List, which is based on 2001 values. I must stress that this growth will not cause a corresponding overall increase in rate bills – a revaluation is a revenue neutral exercise.

The positive impact of the revaluation is that the amount needing to be raised will now be shared out between non-domestic ratepayers on a fairer basis using up to date rental values. Initial analysis shows that some 49% of properties show a change in value less than the overall Northern Ireland average of 8%. In other words this means that if these new values had been used in 2014/15, 49% of ratepayers would have seen a decrease or at least paid the same in rates.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action he will take to change the practice of departments submitting bids during monitoring rounds for inescapable pressures which were foreseeable when setting their annual budgets.

(AQO 7212/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I share the Member's concern on this issue. All departments must treat the allocations set through the Budget process as ceilings, and should seek to manage their activities to contain spending within those ceilings taking account of all foreseeable pressures.

The guidance issued by my Department is quite clear on this matter.

Whilst it is difficult to prevent departments submitting bids through the in-year monitoring process, given the constraints facing the Executive's budget, there should be no expectation that bids will be met.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the process by which the departmental baselines in the draft 2015/16 Budget were constructed.

(AQO 7213/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: In terms of Resource DEL, the nature of the expenditure and the construction of a one year Resource DEL Budget favoured an incremental approach. This was reinforced by comments from pre-consultation stakeholders. Therefore, rather than seeking to establish departmental resource budgets from a zero base, the 2015-16 Budget baseline was established based on a substantive roll forward from the 2014-15 Opening Monitoring position but removing time-bound allocations.

Capital budgets were not based on 2014-15 budgets but were constructed from a zero base in recognition that the Capital budget is not iterative.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to public sector reform, what is meant by slimmed down government.

(AQO 7214/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The fiscal constraints facing Northern Ireland are unprecedented and require bold moves to ensure we continue to deliver quality public services going forward.

Public Sector Reform needs to deliver a radical transformation of our public sector to deal with diminishing resources whilst continuing to meet the ever increasing expectations of our citizens.

We need a reform plan that streamlines government and which will result in a robust and resilient governing structure capable of facing the budget challenges and economic opportunities to be faced in the coming years.

Slimmed down government will produce a more joined up and collaborative structure which will increase the effectiveness of government and remove many of the barriers that currently inhibit responsiveness to our citizens' demands and needs.

Public Sector Reform Division (PSRD) is engaged in building informed and skilled capacity to facilitate the progress of public sector reform and improvement in Northern Ireland and encourage innovation in future service delivery and policy development.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made on the devolution of corporation tax powers.

(AQO 7215/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Government will make an announcement on its decision on the devolution of corporation tax no later than the Autumn Statement, which will take place on 3 December.

The Government has also previously indicated that if it did decide to devolve responsibility for the rate of corporation tax, then a stand-alone Bill would be introduced in the normal way with the aim of it becoming law before the prorogation of Parliament prior to the 2015 General Election.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients treated in the Minor Injuries Unit at Bangor Community Hospital in each of the last five years.

(AQW 38569/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Information on attendances (new, unplanned and planned reviews) at emergency care departments is published on an annual basis, and available to view / download from:

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/hospital/emergency-care/emergency-care-activity.htm>

The number of new, unplanned and planned review attendances at each Minor Injury Unit (MIU) is detailed in the table below, for each of the last five years (2009/10 – 2013/14) (AQW 38569/11-15 & AQW 38570/11-15).

Department1	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Whiteabbey2	20,084	10,446	9,419	9,256	9,580
Mid Ulster2	18,444	7,981	6,471	7,487	8,307
Ards	9,660	9,520	9,438	9,405	10,281
Bangor	12,208	13,278	13,108	10,616	12,288
South Tyrone	17,137	18,791	20,320	21,401	23,152
Armagh Community	5,992	6,431	6,842	7,367	7,416

Department1	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Mullinure3	2,488	2,396	2,168	875	
Tyrone County	14,696	15,779	17,002	17,259	17,537
Total	100,709	84,622	84,768	83,666	88,561

Source: KH09(ii) Information Return

- 1 Excludes information for the Downe emergency care department, which has opened as a MIU at weekends from 1st March 2014.
- 2 Whiteabbey and Mid Ulster emergency care departments were reconfigured as MIU on 24th May 2010, having previously provided Type 2 services.
- 3 Mullinure MIU closed on 3rd September 2012

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the process by which outpatient appointments are allocated; and (ii) whether hospital staff are advised to take into account where patients live in relation to the hospital, their age, and their ability to arrange travel to their appointments.

(AQW 38576/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i) Outpatient appointments are allocated on the basis of the patient's clinical priority with urgent patients seen and treated first. Patients with the same clinical priority are treated in chronological order. The Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts operate partial booking systems which allow patients to arrange their outpatient appointments for a date and time that suit them. Six weeks prior to appointment, patients are issued with a letter inviting them to contact the relevant HSC Trust to confirm or make an appointment. If a date does not suit, they are offered an alternative date and time.
- (ii) HSC Trusts will take into account any specific needs for patients as far as possible and where these are known to the Trust, for example arranging a time, day or location to suit travelling distance and transport arrangements. However some specialities only hold clinics on certain sites so it is not always possible to give patients appointments at a location close to their home. In some cases, patients may be offered an appointment at a more distant site because it has shorter waiting times.

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions are being taken by the personnel department in the South Eastern Health and Social Trust to identify and recruit middle-grade doctors to staff Downe Hospital.

(AQW 38584/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust) advertised in February 2014 and May 2014 for middle grade doctors to cover the Emergency Department for Downe Hospital; unfortunately no applicants applied. The two posts concerned have been vacant for over 12 months.

The Trust advertised in April 2014 for a Specialty Doctor, Old Age Psychiatry, for Downe Hospital, and no appointment was made. This was to fill a newly created post.

The Medical HR Department is continuing to work with recruitment agencies to identify potential applicants, and will go out through HSC e-Locums and the marketplace to recruit as appropriate.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to monitor the impact on individuals who are currently in receipt of the Independent Living Fund when it closes in June 2015.

(AQW 38600/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department's comprehensive public consultation on the future support of Independent Living Fund (ILF) users in Northern Ireland ends on 30 November 2014. Following the closure of this exercise, I will carefully consider how best to support ILF users in Northern Ireland on the basis of all the responses received. This will include the important matter the member has raised in this question, and indeed on earlier occasions. I plan to announce my decision in early 2015.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many intermediate patients transferred from (i) acute hospitals to Dalriada Hospital; (ii) Dalriada Hospital to acute hospitals; and (iii) to detail the average stay in both and associated costs in each of the last four years.

(AQW 38635/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is not possible to identify the number of intermediate care patients treated within Dalriada Hospital. However, Tables 1, 2 and 3 identify the number of transfers for all patients from (i) acute hospitals to Dalriada Hospital; (ii) Dalriada Hospital to acute hospitals; or (iii) to detail the average length of stay in both and associated costs.

Table 1 below details the total number of transfers from acute hospitals to Dalriada Hospital and the total number of transfers from Dalriada Hospital to acute hospitals.

Table 1: Transfers between acute hospitals and Dalriada Hospital

Year	Transfers from Dalriada Hospital to acute hospitals	Transfers from acute hospitals to Dalriada Hospital
2010/11	14	110
2011/12	30	159
2012/13	26	163
2013/14	29	176

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Table 2 below details the average length of stay of admissions where the patient was transferred to Dalriada Hospital from acute hospitals and transferred from Dalriada to acute hospitals.

Table 2: Average length of stay of transfers between acute hospitals and Dalriada Hospital

Year	ALOS of transfers from Dalriada Hospital to acute hospitals		ALOS of transfers from acute hospitals to Dalriada Hospital	
	Dalriada Hospital	Acute Hospital	Dalriada Hospital	Acute Hospital
2010/11	32.2	27.8	39.2	30.1
2011/12	12.6	15.9	22.4	11.3
2012/13	15.1	19.7	26.3	12.7
2013/14	14.7	12.6	24.5	11.7

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Table 3 below provides detail on the associated costs of admissions where transfers were made between acute hospitals and Dalriada Hospital. These are estimated average costs using the relevant year's HRG reference costs, derived from annual Trust costing returns.

Table 3: Cost of hospital activity where a transfer between Dalriada Hospital and acute hospitals took place

Year	Cost (£) of admissions with a transfer from Dalriada Hospital to an acute hospital	Cost (£) of admissions with a transfer from an acute hospital to Dalriada Hospital
2010/11	80,038	270,100
2011/12	87,944	473,670
2012/13	88,051	588,337
2013/14*	104,873	650,794

Source: HRG reference costs

* Costs for 2013/14 have been approximated using 2012/13 Northern Ireland average cost financial information.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the hospitals that provide bed admissions for patients, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 38653/11-15)

Mr Wells: Hospitals providing bed admissions for patients during 2013/14 are tabled by constituency below.

Constituency	Hospital
Belfast North	Mater Infirmorum
	Whiteabbey

Constituency	Hospital
Belfast South	Beechcroft
	Belfast City
	Knockbracken
	Musgrave Park
	NI Cancer Centre
	Windsor House
Belfast West	RBHSC
	Royal Maternity
	Royal Victoria
	School of Dentistry
East Antrim	Moyle
East Londonderry	Causeway
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	South Tyrone
	South West Acute
Foyle	Altnagelvin
	Grangewood
	Lakeview
	Waterside
Lagan Valley	Lagan Valley
	Lagan Valley PNU
Mid Ulster	Mid Ulster
Newry & Armagh	Daisy Hill
	Longstone
	St Luke's
North Antrim	Dalriada
	Robinson Memorial
North Down	Bangor
South Antrim	Antrim
	Holywell
	Muckamore Abbey
South Down	Downe
	Downshire
Strangford	Ards
	Thompson House
	Ulster
	Ulster MHU
Upper Bann	Banbridge
	Bluestone
	Craigavon Area
	Lurgan
West Tyrone	Tyrone & Fermanagh
	Tyrone County

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on Bangor Community Hospital, broken down by area of cost, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 38706/11-15)

Mr Wells: Expenditure incurred on Bangor Community Hospital, broken down by area of cost in each of the last four years is shown below. It is not possible to provide the 2009/10 information.

Revenue Costs	2013/14 £	2012/13 £	2011/12 £	2010/11 £
Pay (Nursing/Midwifery/Medical/ Dental/Administration)	1,152,326	1,117,862	1,137,060	1,052,504
Supplies and Services	121,701	140,647	139,296	120,419
Premises	18,340	25,450	27,357	8,561
Miscellaneous Expenditure	78,192	74,784	71,874	71,479
Total Revenue Costs	1,370,559	1,358,743	1,375,587	1,252,963
Capital Costs	567,528	669,920	338,460	197,423

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average cost of a bed night stay for a patient in a ward of a community hospital.

(AQW 38744/11-15)

Mr Wells: There is no absolute definition of a community hospital. Rather, as 'smaller' hospitals would typically have fewer acute specialties, the average cost of an overnight stay in a smaller hospital in 2012/13 was £405 (latest information available and includes treatment and procedures).

Such averages do not take account of the complexity of the case or the level or extent of treatment delivered, hence they can vary greatly between clinical specialties and between smaller hospital sites.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the timescale for the implementation of the recommendations within the Rare Disease Implementation Plan.

(AQW 38771/11-15)

Mr Wells: The UK Strategy for Rare Diseases was published in November 2013. It contains 51 commitments to ensure that people living with a rare disease have access to the best care and treatment that health and social services and relevant partners can provide.

All four countries of the UK agreed to achieve the commitments by 2020. The draft Northern Ireland Implementation Plan sets out the proposed approach to delivering these 51 commitments within the required timeframe, subject to the availability of required funding and legislative changes. The draft Implementation Plan was launched for consultation on 27 October and the consultation will end on 19 January 2015.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) temporary; and (ii) permanent bank staff who are working in respite care, broken down by each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 38814/11-15)

Mr Wells: Staff with bank contracts are employed on an 'as and when required' basis. It is important to note that many staff with bank contracts also have a substantive permanent or temporary contract but hold a bank contract as a way of working additional hours.

HSC Trusts have supplied below the number of staff with bank contracts that they are currently using in respite care.

HSC Trust	Headcount
Belfast	0
Northern	11
South Eastern	33
Southern	26
Western	92

Notes: i) The Western Trust response includes staff in Children's Services and Learning Disability Services, but excludes Primary Care, Older People's Services and Mental Health. It was not possible for the Trust to provide figures for these services, as they did not have bank staff dedicated to providing only respite care.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the staff sickness levels cost his Department £50m in the last six months, what action is being taken to ensure this issue is rectified.

(AQW 38815/11-15)

Mr Wells: For the period from April to September 2014, total staff sick absence across the Health and Social Care Sector (including both full-time and part-time staff) equates to an estimated cost of £50m, which would represent around 4 – 5% of the total staff pay bill.

Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts have targets in place for sickness absence, which are reported to my Department through the arms-length body governance mechanism. HSC Trusts recognise the significant cost associated with sickness absence and make continuous efforts to drive absence levels down. As compassionate employers Trusts proactively address sickness absence through a range of measures, such as training for managers, early referrals to Occupational Health Service, stress management training, resilience training and management of unacceptable absence using trigger points.

Health and social care employees often do difficult jobs, both physically and emotionally, I understand the demands placed on staff and the toll it may take on their health. It is therefore important to be realistic that a level of sickness absence will always remain.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safe how his Department communicate with The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority to ensure correct staffing ratios in private care homes.

(AQW 38829/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department has published minimum care standards for residential and nursing homes, which include a requirement to have sufficient staff on duty at all times to meet the assessed needs of residents.

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority inspect care homes in both the statutory and private sectors against the minimum care standards.

Where RQIA identify any facility which is not compliant with any aspect of the minimum standards, they can issue a Failure to Comply Notice in respect of individual standards. My Department is provided with a copy of these notices.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the staffing support provided by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust to pupils at Ceara School and Donard Special School has not increased in line with increases in pupil numbers.

(AQW 38845/11-15)

Mr Wells: When considering increasing pupil capacity in Ceara and Donard Schools, the Southern Education and Library Board did not consult with or advise the Health & Social Care Board (HSCB) and/or the Southern Local Commissioning Group (SLCG) of its intention to do so. The HSCB therefore did not commission additional therapy staff for the schools within the area.

The HSCB/SLCG await the outcome of the review currently being carried out, led by the Public Health Agency, into Allied Health Professional support for pupils in Special Schools and will be guided by that as to future commissioning intent for services for these vulnerable young people.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) percentage of agency staff employed in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 38856/11-15)

Mr Wells: Due to the highly flexible nature of agency employment, agency staff are not routinely held on the Trusts' Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence system (HRPTS). As working hours can vary enormously from week to week, it is not possible to record a whole-time equivalent (WTE) figure to assess level of contribution. However, the level of use of agency staff is routinely recorded in terms of cost. A table showing agency staff costs, total staff costs, and agency costs as a proportion of total staff costs for each Trust in the 2013/14 financial year is shown below.

	Belfast HSC Trust	Northern HSC Trust	South Eastern HSC Trust	Southern HSC Trust	Western HSC Trust	Total
Total Agency Staff Costs (£)	13,903,794	12,329,331	7,502,721	3,863,389	12,282,891	50,502,659
Total Staff Costs (£)	734,156,050	380,322,326	329,355,485	339,785,237	328,678,495	2,161,750,757
Agency Staff Costs as % of Total Staff Costs	1.9%	3.2%	2.3%	1.1%	3.7%	2.3%

Source: Trust Financial Returns (TFR E&S), 2013/14

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of cases in the Minor Injury Units in (i) Bangor Community Hospital; and (ii) Ards Community Hospital in each of the last five years.

(AQW 38860/11-15)

Mr Wells: I refer the Member to my response to AQW 38570/11-15.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether written commitments were provided during this year as to the retention of Dalriada Hospital; and if so, to detail (i) when; and (ii) why these commitments are not being kept. **(AQW 38879/11-15)**

Mr Wells: My priorities are to ensure the services provided by Health and Social Care are safe and effective; and to ensure that my Department achieves financial balance, as is required of all Ministers. To achieve these aims, Health and Social Care Trusts have produced contingency plans to secure financial breakeven. Any commitments that were given about services at Dalriada Hospital would have been made in good faith at the time. However, it is simply not possible to maintain current levels of service provision from within existing budget allocations this financial year. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has affirmed that it will endeavour to minimise the impact of temporary closures on front line patient care.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on upgrading and maintaining Dalriada Hospital in each of the last five years. **(AQW 38880/11-15)**

Mr Wells: The costs for upgrading and maintaining the complete Dalriada Hospital site in each of the last 5 years is set out below.

Period	Costs
2010/11	£29,588.11
2011/12	£20,872.61
2012/13	£308,618.61
2013/14	£28,764.91
2014/15	£12,500
Total	£400,344.24

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact of the inaugural all-island Palliative Care Week; and how he intends to use the momentum to support the provision of Palliative Care in Northern Ireland. **(AQW 38892/11-15)**

Mr Wells: The inaugural all-island Palliative Care Week was held between 6 and 11 October 2014 and led by the All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care. My Department, together with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Health and Social Care Trusts supported Palliative Care Week by contributing to the content and message of the "Making the Most of Life" media campaign and through facilitating the co-ordination of publicity and information events in Northern Ireland.

The momentum gained from Palliative Care Week will support the on-going work being taken forward by the HSCB and PHA as part of the implementation of my Department's regional strategy for palliative and end of life care for adults: "Living Matters: Dying Matters". It will also support the Transforming Your Palliative and End of Life Care initiative currently being taken forward by the HSCB and PHA in conjunction with Marie Curie. This initiative has identified eight work-streams which seek to improve how palliative and end of life care is delivered, including support for patients and carers, enhanced access to care services at home and identification and planning for people with palliative care needs.

The "Living Matters:Dying Matters" Strategy, includes a recommendation to promote and encourage open discussion about palliative and end of life care through media, education and awareness programmes aimed at the public and the health and social care sector. A survey carried out directly after the campaign found that 26% of a weighted population sample of adults in Northern Ireland identified raised awareness around Palliative Care Week, with 63% of those aware of the campaign reporting that it had made a positive difference to their understanding of palliative care.

During Palliative Care Week, the All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care, supported by the PHA in Northern Ireland and the Health Service Executive in the Republic of Ireland, published the results of the first phase of the 'Let's Talk About ...' survey, which sought to capture the experiences of patients at end of life and their carers. The second phase of the survey, aimed at assessing changes in attitudes towards palliative care, was also launched during the campaign week. The second phase findings will be available in October 2015.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the current nature and extent of perinatal hospice care provision. **(AQW 38925/11-15)**

Mr Wells: A variety of perinatal hospice care and support services are provided by the Health and Social Care Trusts. In all Trusts, the focus is on providing the parents with care and support that is best suited to their wishes and circumstances. Depending upon the Trust, it includes counselling for the parents and family, discussions on parents' wishes for palliative and end-

of-life care, parents' rooms for nursing and family visits, and active care and support in hospital, at the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice, or through hospice care at home. Trusts also advise parents of other external organisations that can offer support.

A Children's Palliative Care Strategy is currently being finalised and this will incorporate the issue of perinatal care.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to reduce levels of wasted medicine in hospitals.

(AQW 38929/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department is currently developing a Medicines Optimisation Quality Framework. One of the key challenges which the framework seeks to address is medicines wastage and the framework will set objectives for monitoring and reducing waste across various care environments, including hospitals. It is hoped to issue the framework for consultation in the New Year.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many meetings he has had with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust following their announcement to further reduce services at Downe Hospital.

(AQW 38937/11-15)

Mr Wells: There has been ongoing dialogue between officials of my Department and the South Eastern Trust since the Trust announced its contingency plans, which includes the reduction in beds at Downe Hospital.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what will become of the equipment used for the provision of services, including transport, specifically for Multiple Sclerosis patients at Dalriada Hospital, during the temporary period of closure.

(AQW 38939/11-15)

Mr Wells: During the temporary closure period, the majority of equipment will remain on site. When an option for the re-provision of bed-based multiple sclerosis respite care has been agreed then, if required, any equipment could be loaned as necessary to the provider by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

The multiple sclerosis bus will remain on site.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he is aware of the difficulties which patients suffering Crohn's Disease are experiencing in accessing drugs, including infliximab; and for his assessment of the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence's current assessment of the cost-effectiveness of prescribing drugs which help alleviate the symptoms of Crohn's Disease.

(AQW 38952/11-15)

Mr Wells: Patients with bowel disease who meet National Institute of Health and Care Excellence criteria for biologics such as infliximab receive treatment as clinically indicated by their consultant. Treatment is available in each of the five Health and Social Care Trust localities in Northern Ireland.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust meets local demand for paediatric services in South Down.

(AQW 38969/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust provides both hospital and community paediatric services.

Acute paediatric clinics are held weekly in the Downe Hospital. These are delivered by a consultant paediatrician. The paediatrician is supported from acute services and liaises with colleagues in the Ulster Hospital should there be a need for hospital based care. Referrals are transferred across hospital sites within the Trust to ensure the shortest waiting time for patients.

Community paediatric services in South Down are provided in the Children's Centre in the Downe Hospital. Community paediatricians work in uni-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary clinics with allied health professionals and also with the community children's nursing team.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a breakdown of staff cost expenditure at the Causeway Hospital on (a) agency staff; (b) bank staff; and (c) locums in the last financial year and the estimated saving which would be achieved should these positions be filled by substantive staff.

(AQW 38970/11-15)

Mr Wells: See below a table of Causeway Hospital expenditure for 2013/14 for the relevant staff groups. The data has been provided by Northern Trust:

Staff group	Expenditure
Agency Staff	£432,799
Bank Staff	£1,754,277

Staff group	Expenditure
Locums (via agency)	£2,964,882

In relation to the second part of the question regarding estimated saving, this can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been reimbursed to families travelling outside of Northern Ireland for their child's heart surgery or treatment in the last twelve months.

(AQW 38998/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information for the last twelve months on reimbursements to families travelling outside Northern Ireland for their child's heart surgery or treatment is not readily available as the Health and Social Care Board does not routinely analyse subsistence data in this way; however, the Health and Social Care Board has recently undertaken a one-off analysis of travel claims relating to families who have travelled outside Northern Ireland for their child's heart surgery or treatment from January 2014 to October 2014.

Based on the information obtained from this one-off analysis, a total of 65 paediatric cardiology patients submitted claims between January 2014 and October 2014. The total reimbursed in respect of the 65 families was £31,488.20.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average claim for a family who has had to travel outside of Northern Ireland for their child's heart surgery or treatment in the last twelve months.

(AQW 38999/11-15)

Mr Wells: As stated in my response to AQW 38998/11-15, information is not readily available for the last twelve months as the Health and Social Care Board does not routinely analyse subsistence data in this way; however, following a one-off analysis of travel claims received by the Health and Social Care Board, information is available for the period from January 2014 to October 2014.

Based on the information obtained from this one-off analysis, the total reimbursement for the ten month period from January 2014 to October 2014 in respect of the 65 families was £31,488.20 which equates to £484.43 per family.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency will complete the current procurement process for the provision of services to address the key priorities outlined in the draft Alcohol and Drugs Commissioning Framework for Northern Ireland 2013-2016.

(AQW 39005/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency have informed me that they anticipate the current procurement process, as outlined in the draft Alcohol and Drug Commissioning Framework, will be completed by 01 April 2015.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38087/11-15, to detail (i) the number of agency staff employed by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service; and (ii) the length of time each employee has been engaged in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 39006/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i) At 21 November 2014, there are 39 agency staff engaged by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS).
- (ii) The following table shows how long each agency worker has been engaged by NIFRS, grouped by length of engagement.

Length of Engagement	No
0-1 Years	12
1-2 Years	5
2-3 Years	5
3-4 Years	4
4-5 Years	5
5-6 Years	5
6-7 Years	2
7-8 Years	1
Total	39

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the cost of engaging the services of recruitment agencies for the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service in each of the last ten years; (ii) the names of the recruitment agencies; and (iii) the frequency of tendering for these services.

(AQW 39007/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i) The table below details the expenditure incurred on recruitment agencies over the past 10 years. This expenditure excludes VAT as it is reclaimable.

Year	Agency Expenditure £ (exc VAT)
2004-05	315,014
2005-06	476,036
2006-07	432,976
2007-08	535,523
2008-09	801,779
2009-10	932,870
2010-11	1,090,455
2011-12	1,042,262
2012-13	1,222,821
2013-14	1,289,117
Total	8,138,853

- (ii) The following is a list of Recruitment Agencies used by NIFRS in the last 10 years:

- Aptus Personnel;
- Apple Recruitment;
- Ashton Recruitment;
- Blue Print Appointments;
- Brightwater Support Services Limited;
- Brook Street (UK) Limited;
- Diamond Recruitment Group;
- Epic Recruitment Limited
- Flexiskills Recruitment;
- Grafton Recruitment Limited;
- Hays Accountancy & Finance;
- Hays Construction & Property;
- Hays Montrose;
- Hays Specialist Recruitment;
- Industrial Temps Limited;
- Lynn Recruitment;
- MPA Recruitment;
- Opus Staff Recruitment;
- Premiere Employment Group Limited;
- Randstad Employment Bureau Limited;
- Reed Accountancy;
- Reed Employment plc;
- Reed Specialist;
- Sellick Partnership Group Limited;
- Spengler Fox;
- Vanrath Accountancy.

- (iii) NIFRS utilises the Procurement & Logistics Services Contract for the wider HSC Bodies. NIFRS do not have a contract in their own right for the provision of Agency Workers.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of 'white cars' operated by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service in each of the last five years; and (ii) a breakdown of the fuel costs for these vehicles.

(AQW 39008/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i) The number of white cars operated by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) in each of the last five years is as follows:

Year (as at 31 March)	Number of cars
2010	111
2011	110
2012	126
2013	135
2014	120

- (ii) NIFRS is unable to provide fuel costs prior to 2013/14 as to retrieve the information would involve extensive extraction of information which would be at a disproportionate cost.

NIFRS has advised that cars are re-fuelled by 2 methods:

- Using fuel cards at Service Stations (circa 75% of the fleet);
- By refuelling at NIFRS Fire Stations using bunkered fuel (circa 25% of fleet).

The cost of fuel purchased from Service Stations for white cars from NIFRS' electronic records is £55,380 in 2013/14. The cost of vehicles which refuel at NIFRS Fire Stations cannot be established without extensive manual extraction of information as these bunkered supplies are used by all NIFRS vehicles (Fire Appliances, Water Tenders, etc).

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency will publish the finalised Alcohol and Drugs Commissioning Framework for Northern Ireland 2013-2016. (AQW 39010/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Public Health Agency (PHA) were tasked by my Department with developing a Regional Commissioning Framework for Alcohol and Drug Services in Northern Ireland. Following a public consultation on the draft Framework, the HSCB and the PHA published an analysis of, and a response to, the issues raised during the consultation in July 2013 (available online at http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/PHA_HSCB%20response%20to%20Commissioning%20Framework%20Consultation.pdf).

Since then, the HSCB and PHA have focused on the development and implementation of a procurement plan to tender for a range of services to address the key priorities outlined in the Framework. The process of developing the tenders has taken longer than expected, however the procurement process has recently gone live, with new services now envisaged to be in place from April 2015. The HSCB and PHA anticipate that the finalised Framework will be published once the procurement process currently underway has been completed.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38422/11-15, for his assessment of (i) whether the current Individual Funding Request (IFR) system, particularly the exceptionality clause, results in cancer patients in Northern Ireland not having the same access to drugs as their counterparts in other parts of the UK; (ii) the current mechanism for determining access to non-National Institute for Health and Care Excellence approved drugs; and (iii) given that, 95 per cent of all IFRs are approved, only 5 per cent of patients are considered for an IFR. (AQW 39018/11-15)

Mr Wells: An evaluation of the existing Individual Funding Request (IFR) process is underway. This will provide an assessment of the current mechanism for determining access to non-NICE approved drugs. The evaluation will be completed by the end of the year.

I expect the evaluation exercise to address all aspects of the present IFR process including the number of patients applying, the role of the exceptionality clause, processes in other UK jurisdictions, and will engage with patients and the charity organisations that support them and other stakeholders. My officials have already met with a number of charities, patients and other stakeholders and will continue to do so.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38422/11-15, whether he will commit to ensuring that (i) any rebate received under the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS, 2014-2019) will be ring-fenced for the purpose of funding new drugs, along with the required associated infrastructure and costs of molecular testing; and (ii) during the period of the existing PPRS, that his Department will work with colleagues in other UK nations to develop sustainable funding for new, specialist treatment for cancer patients which will offer equity of access. (AQW 39019/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme is a UK wide scheme and the quarterly payments made under the provisions of the scheme are received by the Department of Health (London) in the first instance and are then allocated to each of the devolved administrations. The PPRS does not specify how the rebates are to be used and it is a matter for the devolved administrations to decide how to use it to meet their policy and operational requirements.

The payments are based on industry sales data at a UK-wide level and ABPI has confirmed that separate sales data cannot be provided at individual country level.

My Department is currently considering how the financial risk of allowing increased usage of new drugs in the absence of a Northern Ireland specific sales-based PPRS payment can be managed.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Western Health and Social Care Trust's consultation on the proposed redesign of older people's mental health inpatient and day care services in the southern sector does not allow responses from (i) service users; (ii) political representatives; and (iii) the general public. (AQW 39025/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust has advised me that this present proposal primarily impacts on staff and that there are no implications for current in-patients in Ash Villa, as patients will remain there until they are medically fit for discharge. A staff consultation process is on-going and will close on 3rd December 2014.

Current service users in day care and their carers will be consulted with on an individual basis.

The Trust has also advised me that they completed an equality screening exercise in line with Trust policy on the proposed redesign which concluded that the proposal did not require a full Equality Impact Assessment.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency will complete the current procurement process for the provision of services to address the key priorities outlined in the draft Alcohol and Drugs Commissioning Framework for Northern Ireland 2013-2016.

(AQW 39035/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency have informed me that they anticipate the current procurement process, as outlined in the draft Alcohol and Drug Commissioning Framework, will be completed by 01 April 2015.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the procedures utilised in relation to the recruitment of nursing auxiliaries; and (ii) whether a list of candidates exists; and if so (a) how it is compiled; (b) how a person can add their name to the list; and (c) whether names remain on the list until they are recruited or a person removes their name.

(AQW 39036/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i) The procedures used to recruit nursing auxiliaries are administered by the various Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts.

Every Trust advertises nursing auxiliary vacancies in the press and on the HSC Recruitment Website and shortlisted applicants are subsequently invited to undertake a written occupational assessment.

Three Trusts - Belfast, Western and Northern - invite candidates who pass this assessment to interview. Candidates who pass the interview are placed on a waiting list in merit order.

In the remaining two Trusts - Southern and South Eastern - candidates are placed on the waiting list in accordance with the score achieved at the written occupational assessment.

- (ii) Normally, the waiting list within each Trust remains in place for up to 12 months, or until it has been exhausted, whichever occurs sooner. A candidate can withdraw his or her name from the waiting list at any time.

All offers of employment are conditional and subject to a range of pre-employment checks.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to confirm that the draft Alcohol and Drugs Commissioning Framework for Northern Ireland 2013-2016 Regional Commissioning Priorities include delivering early identification and brief advice programmes to 10 per cent of the population at risk annually of hazardous or harmful alcohol consumption; and b) to detail the target date for achieving this.

(AQW 39041/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i) I can confirm that delivering early identification and brief advice programmes to 10% of the population annually at risk of hazardous or harmful alcohol consumption is a regional priority within the draft Alcohol and Drugs Commissioning Framework developed by the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency.

- (ii) The draft Commissioning Framework document estimates that about 170,000 adults in Northern Ireland drink at hazardous levels or harmful level. The PHA and the HSCB have informed me that this will be an annual target and progress against this will therefore be monitored on annual basis.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37302/11-15, to provide a copy of his Department's policy on car parking provision and management in the Health and Social Care sector.

(AQW 39045/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Department's policy on car parking provision and management in the Health and Social Care (HSC) sector for Northern Ireland was published on 27th June 2012 and can be found on the DHSSPSNI website through the following link <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/car-parking-provision.pdf>

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) number; and (ii) value of charitable donations received by the Health Service in each of the last three years; and to outline how each donation was utilised.

(AQW 39049/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table below sets out the income received as a consequence of charitable donations in each year, as reported in the published Charitable Trust Fund Annual Accounts for each Health and Social Care organisation.

Detail in respect of the numbers of donations received and their utilisation can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Health & Social Care Organisation	2013/14 £'000s	2012/13 £'000s	2011/12 £'000s
Belfast Health & Social Care Trust			
Donations from individuals	400	567	621
Corporate donations	11	83	140
Legacies	403	1,083	487
Other	38	35	62
Investment income	1,060	992	929
BHSCT Total	1,912	2,760	2,239
Western Health & Social Care Trust			
Donations from individuals	349	345	450
Legacies	85	143	210
Investment income	85	101	101
WHST Total	519	589	761
Southern Health & Social Care Trust			
Donations from individuals	224	277	281
Corporate donations	82	53	209
Legacies	26		
Other	37	54	96
Investment income	93	101	102
SHSCT Total	462	485	688
Northern Health & Social Care Trust			
Donations from individuals	354	372	357
Corporate donations	60	723	
Legacies			66
Grants			2
Investment income	105	128	158
NHSCT Total	519	1223	583
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust			
Donations from individuals	203	215	224
Legacies	6	167	156
Investment income	189	194	180
SEHSCT Total	398	576	560
NI Ambulance Service Health & Social Care Trust			
Donations from individuals	2	1	2
NIAS Total	2	1	2
NI Blood Transfusion Service			
Donations from individuals	0	4	
Investment income	6	4	0
NIBTS Total	6	8	0
HSC Total	3,818	5,642	2,833

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the costs to his Department of his proposals for an 'All Ireland' service for children's congenital cardiac services; and how this compares to the historical costs of operating the service based in Belfast.

(AQW 39050/11-15)

Mr Wells: As part of the process for preparing for implementation of the all island congenital cardiac service recommended by the International Working Group, which is subject to a period of public consultation, the detail of such a model and the associated costs will be agreed respective commissioners in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. I will announce details of this once I have made my final decision following the consultation exercise. At this stage, my understanding is that in moving to such a model the current need to transfer the majority of surgery and interventional cardiology cases to centres in England would be reduced over time as the proposed model is implemented, with most surgery and interventional cardiology instead taking place in Dublin. In doing so, the funding that is currently required to operate the surgical and interventional aspect of this service – some £5m annually – would be made available to fund the reconfigured service.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of staff employed (i) directly by his Department; and (ii) by its agencies, who currently earn less than the living wage.

(AQW 39065/11-15)

Mr Wells: No DHSSPS employee earns less than the Living Wage of £7.85 per hour;

5074 (3709.3 whole-time equivalent) Health and Social Care (HSC) staff earn less than the Living Wage of £7.85 per hour.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the outstanding infrastructural funding to local charities, to list all the charities affected, including the amounts outstanding to each.

(AQW 39073/11-15)

Mr Wells: Organisations that receive support towards their core administrative costs are listed below. Further to my response to AQW 39072/11-15, I can now confirm that allocations in 2014/15 will match those of 2013/14.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Accord | ■ Include Youth |
| ■ Action Mental Health | ■ Life (NI) |
| ■ Action on Hearing Loss | ■ Lighthouse Limited |
| ■ Addiction NI | ■ MENCAP |
| ■ Adopt | ■ Meningitis Research |
| ■ Adoption UK | ■ Mindwise |
| ■ Age NI | ■ Muccopolysaccharide |
| ■ AIDS Care, Education and Training (ACET) | ■ Nexus Institute |
| ■ Alzheimer's Society | ■ NI Music Therapy Trust |
| ■ Autism NI | ■ Northern Ireland Attention Deficit & Hyperactivity Disorder |
| ■ Aware Defeat Depression | ■ Northern Ireland Childminding Association |
| ■ British Association for Adoption and Fostering NI | ■ Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation |
| ■ British Red Cross | ■ Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health |
| ■ Carafriend | ■ Northern Ireland Hospice |
| ■ Carers NI | ■ Northern Ireland Retirement Fellowship |
| ■ CAUSE | ■ Northlands |
| ■ Childline | ■ Parenting NI |
| ■ Children in Northern Ireland | ■ Positive Life |
| ■ Children's Law Centre | ■ Presbyterian Board of Social Witness |
| ■ Church of Ireland Board of Social Responsibility | ■ Relate NI |
| ■ Community Development and Health Network | ■ Royal National Institute for Blind People |
| ■ Contact a Family | ■ Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents |
| ■ Crossroads | ■ Samaritans |
| ■ CRUSE | ■ SENSE |
| ■ Disability Action | ■ St Vincent de Paul Society |
| ■ Down's Syndrome Association | ■ Stroke Association for Northern Ireland |
| ■ Eating Disorders Association | ■ The Cedar Foundation |
| ■ Epilepsy Action | ■ The Rainbow Project |
| ■ Family Care Society | ■ Threshold |
| ■ Family Planning Association (NI) | ■ Twins and Multiple Birth Association |
| ■ Fostering Network NI | ■ Volunteer Now |
| ■ Gingerbread | ■ VOYPIC |
| ■ Harmony Community Trust | ■ Women's Institute Northern Ireland |
| ■ Home-Start | ■ Women's Resource and Development Agency |

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of a recent incident whereby an ambulance in Coleraine was attacked by a number of individuals during a call out to a victim of assault.

(AQW 39095/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has confirmed that an ambulance came under attack while the crew was attending to an injured person in the vehicle. The vehicle was damaged and there was reduced cover in the Coleraine area for a period of approximately two hours due to the incident.

It is appalling that some members of the public should behave in this fashion and such behaviour must not be tolerated. I pay tribute to the professionalism, courage and dedication of the ambulance crew, who resumed duty a short time later.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (a) whole time; and (b) part time Fire and Rescue workers, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 39096/11-15)

Mr Wells: Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) station boundaries do not directly mirror constituency boundaries. The number of firefighters is broken down by constituency, matched as closely as possible to station areas, is detailed in the tables below.

(a) Wholetime Personnel

Constituency	Number Stationed
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	5
West Tyrone	18
Mid Ulster	6
Newry & Armagh	47
Foyle	134
East Londonderry	16
North Antrim	45
East Antrim	12
South Antrim	11
Upper Bann	51
Lagan Valley ¹	67
South Down	5
North Down	39
Strangford	13
Belfast East	65
Belfast North	115
Belfast South ²	187
Belfast West	63
Total	899

1. Figure includes Headquarters
2. Figure includes Training Centre

(b) Retained Personnel

Location	Number Stationed
East Antrim	61
East Londonderry	98
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	100
Foyle	11
Lagan Valley	29
Mid Ulster	73

Location	Number Stationed
Newry & Armagh	79
North Antrim	65
North Down	43
South Antrim	66
South Down	122
Strangford	65
Upper Bann	53
West Tyrone	98
Total	963

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) total number of staff; (ii) location of staff; (iii) numbers of each grade of staff; (iv) pay scale for each grade; and (v) total wage bill of staff employed in the Health and Social Care Board in each of the last five years.

(AQW 39103/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have recently announced a fundamental review of the administrative structures within our Health and Social Care system, to ensure that funding is not unnecessarily diverted away from front-line services.

The Health and Social Care Trusts and the HSC Board are Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) of my Department, so responses for all ALBs are included in this response. HSC staff numbers are published, along with a detailed breakdown of pay bands, demographic factors and staff groups, in the annual HSC Workforce Census at <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hscwc-march-2014.pdf>. However, detailed breakdowns of the smaller Arm's Length Bodies are not published in the Census in order to preserve confidentiality when dealing with the profiling of very small numbers of staff.

- (i) Headcount (HC) and whole-time equivalent (WTE) figures are shown in tables A-E below (also see notes at iii).
- (ii) It is not practicable to produce a list of all locations where HSC staff work. There are over 60,000 staff recorded as working in over 1,000 locations, some of which will be different facilities within a larger site. Many HSC staff also work in the community, rather than at a fixed location.
- (iii) As there are a very large number of possible grades (over 500 at March 2014), the information in tables A-E is presented at Occupational Family level. Like the HSC Workforce Census report, the figures below are as at March 31st in each year, and exclude bank staff, members of staff with a whole-time equivalent (WTE) of less than 0.03, Out of Hours GPs, members of staff on career breaks, and Chairpersons/Members of boards. Home Helps/Domiciliary Care staff have also been excluded as their recorded WTE does not accurately reflect their contributions to the service. In 2014, the Generic Occupational Family was combined into the Professional & Technical Family for statistical purposes, in order to protect the confidentiality of the small number (less than 4) of staff involved. In the tables below, headcounts of less than 4 have been replaced with a dash (-) for the same reason. Overall totals for each ALB have not been affected. The Northern Ireland Medical & Dental Agency is included in the figures for 2014, as their data became available on the new Human Resources, Payroll, Travel & Subsistence system (HRPTS).

Figures for Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service staffing in March of each of the last five years were given in AQW 38454/11-15 on the 7th of November 2014.

Tables A-E - Staff of all HSC ALBs by Occupational Family, 2010-2014

Table A

	Generic		Admin- istration & Clerical		Estates Services		Support Services		Nursing & Midwifery		Social Services (excluding Home Helps)		Professional & Technical		Medical & Dental		Ambulance		Total		
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	
31st March 2010																					
Belfast HSC Trust	39	34.0	3547	3085.7	200	200.0	2267	1688.3	7228	6169.0	1972	1719.4	2656	2349.2	1604	1503.6	0	0.0	19513	16749.2	
Northern HSC Trust	58	54.3	2032	1700.1	118	118.0	1252	898.9	3687	3101.4	1781	1567.6	1359	1153.8	555	518.5	0	0.0	10842	9112.7	
South Eastern HSC Trust	5	3.5	1548	1311.9	85	85.0	1059	787.5	3005	2544.1	1291	1108.7	984	834.0	548	498.3	0	0.0	8525	7172.9	
Southern HSC Trust	0	0.0	1861	1601.3	94	92.6	1102	770.7	3409	2837.7	1158	1020.9	1121	960.0	502	468.0	0	0.0	9247	7751.3	
Western HSC Trust	0	0.0	1700	1511.1	171	170.5	1044	783.4	3487	3152.6	1263	1136.4	980	878.1	507	468.2	0	0.0	9152	8100.4	
Health & Social Care Board	0	0.0	370	342.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	10.0	32	24.6	24	12.6	0	0.0	436	390.0	
Business Services Organisation	0	0.0	756	711.3	5	5.0	7	6.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	38	38.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	806	760.7	
NI Ambulance Service	5	5.0	98	92.6	-	-	-	-	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	-	-	1025	1014.5	1133	1117.0	
NI Blood Transfusion Service	0	0.0	63	53.6	0	0.0	15	11.8	66	55.0	0	0.0	60	56.6	-	-	0	0.0	208	180.5	
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency	0	0.0	24	20.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	38	34.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	62	55.7	
NI Practice & Education Council	0	0.0	15	13.5	0	0.0	-	-	4	4.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	21	18.4	
NI Social Care Council	0	0.0	51	46.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	6.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	58	52.8	
Patient Client Council	0	0.0	22	21.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	22	21.3	
Public Health Agency	0	0.0	163	150.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	8	6.7	0	0.0	-	-	32	27.9	0	0.0	204	185.6	
The Beeches	0	0.0	51	45.0	0	0.0	-	-	28	25.5	0	0.0	-	-	0	0.0	0	0.0	81	72.5	
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority	0	0.0	134	128.2	-	-	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	7	5.3	5	2.3	0	0.0	150	139.8	

Source: NI HSC Human Resources Management System (HRMS)

See notes at (iii)

Table B

	Generic		Admin- istration & Clerical		Estates Services		Support Services		Nursing & Midwifery		Social Services		Professional & Technical		Medical & Dental		Ambulance		Total		
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	
31st March 2011																					
Belfast HSC Trust	31	28.8	3458	2986.3	209	208.6	2340	1750.0	6952	5921.0	1969	1719.2	2687	2364.2	1578	1479.2	0	0.0	19224	16457.4	
Northern HSC Trust	42	38.8	1934	1606.6	112	112.0	1205	872.7	3573	2998.5	1727	1521.3	1357	1146.4	559	517.7	0	0.0	10509	8814.0	
South Eastern HSC Trust	4	3.4	1519	1293.6	85	84.4	1042	773.0	3002	2543.7	1254	1079.9	1007	854.9	584	526.3	0	0.0	8497	7159.3	
Southern HSC Trust	0	0.0	1678	1425.3	89	87.8	1033	735.6	3439	2855.2	1229	1086.7	1145	979.0	512	475.9	0	0.0	9125	7645.5	
Western HSC Trust	0	0.0	1650	1461.8	162	161.8	1047	792.9	3460	3100.4	1247	1123.7	979	875.1	521	492.4	0	0.0	9066	8008.2	
Health & Social Care Board	0	0.0	339	315.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	9.0	31	23.4	28	17.6	0	0.0	407	365.1	
Business Services Organisation	0	0.0	839	791.1	-	-	8	7.5	0	0.0	-	-	39	39.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	889	840.5	
NI Ambulance Service	-	-	106	101.1	-	-	-	-	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	-	-	1047	1035.8	1160	1143.9	
NI Blood Transfusion Service	0	0.0	66	55.3	0	0.0	14	10.1	65	53.0	0	0.0	61	57.8	5	4.5	0	0.0	211	180.7	
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency	0	0.0	23	20.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	39	35.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	62	55.8	
NI Practice & Education Council	0	0.0	14	12.7	0	0.0	-	-	4	3.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	20	17.3	
NI Social Care Council	0	0.0	49	45.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	4.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	53	49.0	
Patient Client Council	0	0.0	28	26.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	28	26.5	
Public Health Agency	0	0.0	182	169.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	13.3	0	0.0	-	-	36	32.1	0	0.0	235	215.7	
The Beeches	0	0.0	50	44.3	0	0.0	-	-	28	24.6	0	0.0	-	-	0	0.0	0	0.0	80	70.8	
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority	0	0.0	132	127.3	-	-	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	7	5.3	5	2.3	0	0.0	148	139.0	

Source: HRMS

See notes at (iii)

Table C

	Generic		Admin- istration & Clerical		Estates Services		Support Services		Nursing & Midwifery		Social Services		Professional & Technical		Medical & Dental		Ambulance		Total		
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	
31st March 2012																					
Belfast HSC Trust	7	6.3	3472	3001.6	206	205.8	2220	1662.9	6939	5915.7	1956	1712.7	2771	2445.2	1603	1506.3	0	0.0	19174	16456.4	
Northern HSC Trust	32	28.8	1987	1655.5	122	121.2	1183	854.4	3564	2991.6	1709	1506.8	1432	1200.1	573	523.0	0	0.0	10602	8881.5	
South Eastern HSC Trust	0	0.0	1616	1374.0	95	94.0	988	745.7	3094	2617.8	1309	1130.4	1048	891.4	578	519.0	0	0.0	8728	7372.2	
Southern HSC Trust	0	0.0	1693	1431.6	108	106.0	974	703.8	3458	2901.4	1240	1093.2	1192	1026.8	557	516.9	0	0.0	9222	7779.8	
Western HSC Trust	0	0.0	1697	1502.8	160	159.8	989	747.3	3505	3151.3	1275	1150.6	1074	967.4	529	501.2	0	0.0	9229	8180.5	
Health & Social Care Board	-	-	405	380.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	10.0	32	23.7	30	19.1	0	0.0	478	433.8	
Business Services Organisation	0	0.0	887	834.4	-	-	88	87.7	28	25.2	-	-	38	38.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1044	988.3	
NI Ambulance Service	0	0.0	90	85.7	-	-	-	-	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	-	-	1042	1030.6	1138	1122.2	
NI Blood Transfusion Service	0	0.0	62	53.0	0	0.0	14	10.5	60	50.5	0	0.0	58	54.8	5	4.5	0	0.0	199	173.3	
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency	0	0.0	23	20.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	42	38.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	65	58.9	
NI Practice & Education Council	0	0.0	13	11.5	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	18	15.4	
NI Social Care Council	0	0.0	55	51.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	4.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	60	56.0	
Patient Client Council	0	0.0	31	29.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	31	29.4	
Public Health Agency	0	0.0	255	239.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	14	12.9	0	0.0	-	-	37	34.4	0	0.0	309	288.5	
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority	0	0.0	125	120.4	-	-	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	7	5.3	5	2.3	0	0.0	141	132.0	

Source: HRMS

See notes at (iii)

Table D

	Generic		Admin- istration & Clerical		Estates Services		Support Services		Nursing & Midwifery		Social Services		Professional & Technical		Medical & Dental		Ambulance		Total		
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	
31st March 2013																					
Belfast HSC Trust	4	4.0	3505	3039.6	226	225.8	2212	1651.0	6957	5984.5	1955	1711.8	2876	2553.8	1627	1532.9	0	0.0	19362	16683.4	
Northern HSC Trust	30	26.9	1959	1636.1	124	124.0	1166	834.1	3666	3094.4	1728	1523.9	1494	1252.2	589	536.8	0	0.0	10756	9028.2	
South Eastern HSC Trust	0	0.0	1643	1400.0	93	93.0	1027	769.7	3232	2753.8	1307	1139.7	1101	938.1	604	541.0	0	0.0	9007	7635.2	
Southern HSC Trust	0	0.0	1802	1512.9	99	98.3	921	670.3	3548	2992.1	1230	1077.7	1257	1070.1	558	520.4	0	0.0	9415	7941.8	
Western HSC Trust	0	0.0	1740	1547.0	146	145.8	1074	797.8	3538	3177.1	1290	1148.5	1094	984.7	546	520.9	0	0.0	9428	8321.8	
HSC Board	-	-	400	377.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	8	8.0	47	37.4	41	21.3	0	0.0	497	444.6	
Business Services Organisation	0	0.0	982	933.6	4	4.0	97	95.5	30	27.3	-	-	-	-	0	0.0	0	0.0	1115	1062.4	
NI Ambulance Service	0	0.0	95	90.9	-	-	-	-	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	-	-	1098	1084.8	1199	1181.8	
NI Blood Transfusion Service	0	0.0	61	52.0	0	0.0	13	9.6	58	48.8	0	0.0	59	56.5	5	4.5	0	0.0	196	171.4	
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency	0	0.0	24	22.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	45	41.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	69	64.0	
Northern Ireland Practice & Education Council	0	0.0	16	14.5	0	0.0	-	-	4	4.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	22	19.4	
Northern Ireland Social Care Council	0	0.0	60	55.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	60	55.7	
Patient Client Council	0	0.0	27	24.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	27	24.9	
Public Health Agency	0	0.0	254	239.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	14.1	0	0.0	-	-	38	36.2	0	0.0	310	292.2	
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority	0	0.0	132	128.3	-	-	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	6	4.8	5	2.4	0	0.0	147	139.5	

Source: HRMS, NI HSC Human Resources, Payroll, Travel & Subsistence (HRPTS)

See notes at (iii)

Table E

	Admin & Clerical		Estates Services		Support Services		Nursing & Midwifery		Social Services		Professional & Technical		Medical & Dental		Ambulance		Total		
	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	HC	WTE	
31st March 2014																			
Belfast HSC Trust	3460	3002.5	226	225.4	2333	1713.6	7185	6177.4	1927	1692.1	2972	2626.9	1673	1577.5	0	0.0	19776	17015.4	
Northern HSC Trust	1906	1589.0	135	134.2	1127	815.9	3673	3119.2	1714	1528.7	1533	1283.3	607	563.0	0	0.0	10695	9033.3	
South Eastern HSC Trust	1619	1375.4	90	90.0	1022	771.1	3314	2828.6	1343	1165.0	1159	991.3	599	538.4	0	0.0	9146	7759.7	
Southern HSC Trust	1729	1427.3	98	97.4	853	623.1	3501	2938.6	1263	1115.4	1330	1106.7	571	533.6	0	0.0	9345	7842.1	
Western HSC Trust	1701	1511.8	141	140.8	1075	799.8	3611	3248.3	1310	1183.0	1159	1034.3	528	504.2	0	0.0	9525	8422.1	
Health & Social Care Board	472	446.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	8	8.0	59	46.8	39	24.1	0	0.0	578	525.4	
Business Services Organisation	1088	1032.2	-	-	110	108.5	30	27.6	-	-	37	37.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1269	1209.3	
NI Ambulance Service	93	88.2	-	-	-	-	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	5.0	1079	1062.2	1181	1159.5	
NI Blood Transfusion Service	65	53.8	0	0.0	11	7.6	60	50.3	0	0.0	60	57.9	6	5.5	0	0.0	202	175.1	
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency	25	23.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	45	41.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	70	65.6	
NI Medical and Dental Training Agency	43	39.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	198	123.7	0	0.0	241	163.3	
NI Practice & Education Council	15	13.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	4.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	19	17.9	
NI Social Care Council	58	54.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	58	54.4	
Patient Client Council	27	25.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	27	25.5	
Public Health Agency	262	246.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	18	17.1	0	0.0	8	6.7	39	36.1	0	0.0	327	306.8	
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority	130	123.5	-	-	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	6	4.8	-	-	0	0.0	144	135.4	

Source: HRMS, HRPTS

See notes at (iii)

- (iv) Details of pay scales are published in annual Pay Circulars. These can be found on the DHSSPS website at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hrd/guidance_circulars.htm
- (v) Total wage bills for each ALB for the last five financial years are shown in the tables below.

Table F- Wage Bills for DHSSPSNI ALBs, 2009-10 to 2013-14

	09-10 £000	10-11 £000	11-12 £000	12-13 £000	13-14 £000
Belfast HSC Trust	687,410	693,156	694,057	711,611	734,156
Northern HSC Trust	370,053	370,441	360,896	372,007	380,322
Southern HSC Trust	303,291	316,207	315,184	333,811	339,786
South Eastern HSC Trust	288,021	297,350	303,828	319,847	329,356
Western HSC Trust	298,586	310,088	319,447	322,031	328,678
NI Ambulance Service Trust	44,253	40,557	47,939	47,858	49,453
NI Practice & Education Council	865	878	831	957	820
NI Social Care Council	1,950	2,036	1,834	1,877	1,961
NI Blood Transfusion Service	6,086	6,094	6,338	5,995	6,077
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority	5,427	5,961	5,823	6,074	6,167
NI Guardian ad Litem Agency	2,641	2,724	2,851	2,994	3,248
NI Fire & Rescue Service	64,998	60,273	59,910	60,128	61,629
NI Medical & Dental Training Agency	4,455	4,430	4,228	4,292	4,629
Health & Social Care Board	26,635	23,316	21,411	23,572	25,721
Public Health Agency	12,988	12,580	14,894	16,035	17,022
Patient Client Council	928	1,094	1,460	1,271	1,143
Business Services Organisation	34,568	32,127	33,892	35,919	39,325
Total	2,153,155	2,179,312	2,194,823	2,266,279	2,329,493

Source: ALB annual accounts- total staff costs reported in Statement of Comprehensive Expenditure

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) total number of staff; (ii) location of staff; (iii) numbers of each grade of staff; (iv) pay scale for each grade; and (v) total wage bill of staff employed by his Department in each of the last five years.

(AQW 39105/11-15)

Mr Wells: The (i) total number of staff, (iii) numbers of each grade, (iv) pay scale for each grade and (v) total wage bill of staff employed by my Department in each of the last five years is detailed in the attached table.

In relation to (ii) location of posts in my Department over the last five years, two posts have been located in Londonderry with the remaining posts located in the Stormont Estate.

DHSSPS Staff (including Analogous grades)	AA	AO	EO2	EO1	SO	DP	G7	G6	SCS G5	SCS G3	SCS Perm Sec	Total Staff (FTE)	Total Wage Bill
FTE at 31 Mar 2010	54.7	55.7	81.9	62.1	135.7	147.5	88.7	14.0	25.0	4.0	1.0	670.3	£32,742,936
Pay Scales Min	£14,131	£16,312	£20,285	£21,826	£25,278	£31,663	£41,661	£48,527	£57,300	£81,600	£98,059		
Max	£17,533	£22,180	£23,250	£26,086	£30,520	£38,893	£50,796	£62,407	£116,000	£160,000	£205,000		
FTE at 31 Mar 2011	46.1	52.6	66.5	60.3	127.0	135.1	81.8	13.0	20.6	2.0	1.0	606.0	£26,470,195
Pay Scales Min	£14,981	£17,348	£20,860	£22,581	£26,197	£32,913	£43,228	£50,327	£57,300	£81,600	£98,059		
Max	£17,533	£22,180	£23,250	£26,086	£30,520	£38,893	£50,796	£62,407	£116,000	£160,000	£205,000		
FTE at 31 Mar 2012	41.7	53.5	67.9	53.7	120.7	134.3	78.4	14.0	21.6	3.0	1.0	589.8	£25,466,463
Pay Scales Min	£15,619	£18,038	£21,392	£23,336	£27,115	£34,163	£44,796	£52,127	£57,300	£81,600	£98,059		
Max	£17,533	£22,180	£23,250	£26,086	£30,520	£38,893	£50,796	£62,407	£116,000	£160,000	£205,000		
FTE at 31 Mar 2013	42.6	51.0	65.0	49.7	117.4	128.3	78.5	14.0	17.6	4.0	1.0	569.1	£25,399,117
Pay Scales Min	£15,849	£18,298	£23,124	£25,438	£27,835	£34,847	£45,694	£53,407	£63,360	£81,600	£103,700		
Max	£17,533	£22,180	£23,999	£26,638	£30,825	£39,282	£51,304	£62,407	£77,500	£99,100	£130,700		
FTE at 31 Mar 2014	38.0	50.7	60.7	50.5	106.0	129.7	84.8	11.86	18.5	3.0	1.0	554.7	£24,847,972
Pay Scales Min	£16,300	£18,964	£23,428	£25,871	£28,500	£35,190	£46,141	£53,939	£63,994	£82,416	£104,737		
Max	£17,620	£22,291	£24,728	£27,271	£31,135	£39,675	£51,818	£62,719	£78,275	£100,091	£132,007		

Note: Figures exclude staff on career break, staff seconded into DHSSPS and DFP NISRA staff on loan into DHSSPS
Wage bill figure does not include employers costs in respect of national insurance and pension contributions

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current pressures on the paediatric endocrine service.

(AQW 39113/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust is receiving more referrals to this service than the Trust currently has capacity and this is impacting on waiting times. I understand that the Trust is presently advertising for a third consultant paediatrician for this team. It is expected that this appointment will reduce the capacity gap in this service and lessen the waiting time for patients.

Referrals to the paediatric endocrine service that are triaged as urgent are, on average, offered an appointment within six weeks. The current longest waiting patient, triaged as routine, without a date for first outpatient appointment is waiting 55 weeks.

With regard to the medical risk for patients awaiting an outpatient appointment; patients remain under the care of the referring consultant paediatrician until, at least, the first endocrinology appointment. Should a consultant consider a need to change the clinical urgency for their patients this may be communicated to the service. In addition, there is a 24/7 paediatric telephone advice service to all NI consultant paediatricians for any urgent queries.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of annual referrals to the paediatric endocrine service in each of the last five years; and how this compared to capacity at the time.

(AQW 39115/11-15)

Mr Wells: Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust provides a regional specialized Paediatric Endocrine service based in the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children. Whilst other Trusts may provide a local service for children and young people with diabetes or other endocrine disorders, this answer relates to patients referred to the regional Paediatric Endocrine service.

Belfast HSC Trust has advised that prior to 2012/13, all referrals for the Paediatric Endocrine service were recorded under the Paediatric Medicine specialty, and, as such, it is not possible to accurately identify prior to 2012/13 referrals for the sub specialty of Paediatric Endocrinology.

The table below details the annual referrals to the Paediatric Endocrine service since 2012/2013, broken down by referring HSC Trust.

Referring HSC Trust	Number of referrals in each financial year to the regional Paediatric Endocrine Service			Total Referrals
	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	
Belfast	44	89	38	171
Northern	43	82	42	167
South Eastern	30	86	34	150
Southern	31	80	35	146
Western	20	47	30	97
Not recorded	-	5	-	5
Northern Ireland	168	389	179	736

Source: Belfast HSC Trust

*Please note 2014/15 includes figures up until week commencing 22nd November 2014.

Until January 2011, Belfast HSC Trust had 0.5 whole time equivalent (WTE) Consultant Paediatrician, who provided endocrine, diabetic and general medical clinics. Following their retirement, Belfast HSC Trust was unable to recruit a suitable candidate into this vacant post and therefore utilised locum Paediatricians when available.

However in October 2013, Belfast HSC Trust permanently appointed 1 WTE Consultant Paediatric Endocrinologist who also delivers diabetes services. In June 2013, Belfast Trust appointed an additional 1 WTE locum Consultant Paediatrician with special interest in Endocrinology and Diabetes. The Trust expects this post to be filled by a permanent member of staff in April 2015.

The Trust is currently advertising for a third consultant paediatrician for this team with a special interest in endocrinology and diabetes.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Memorandum of Understanding between Contact and the Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 39124/11-15)

Mr Wells: The agreement of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the organisation Contact NI and each of the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) is a matter between each of the seven organisations involved (i.e. Contact NI and the six HSC Trusts).

On a more specific level, the Public Health Agency has been exploring the opportunity for developing a MOU between the six HSC Trusts and Contact NI in relation to Contact NI's role as the service provider of the Lifeline Crisis Response Service. The development of a MOU for this specific service cannot proceed until all the parties concerned are content that the necessary clinical and governance arrangements in place have been fully assessed and agreed. At present the HSC Trusts are not satisfied that the current provider of the Lifeline Service can provide them with the assurances necessary to allow agreement to be reached on a MOU.

In the interim, the PHA have contacted the six HSC Trusts to ascertain the level of engagement at which they can operate within the context of the current Lifeline service model. The PHA will continue to work with the current Lifeline service provider to put in place the necessary clinical and governance arrangements that will ensure a MOU can be developed.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been referred by each Health and Social Care Trust to the private medical sector for treatment in each of the last eighteen months; and to detail the types of treatment.

(AQW 39133/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of patient referrals made by the Health Service to Independent Sector providers is not available.

However information on the number of outpatient attendances and inpatient admissions to Independent Sector providers is collected on a quarterly basis. This information is detailed in Tables 1-5 for each quarter of the last 18 months, broken down by transferring Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust and specialty of attendance/treatment.

Table 1: Number of outpatient attendances and inpatient admissions carried out in the Independent Sector that were transferred by Belfast HSC Trust: QE June 2013 – QE September 2014

Specialty	Outpatient Attendances						Inpatient Admissions					
	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P
General Surgery	58	39	95	36	208	167	73	168	76	126	73	215
Urology	47	265	143	<5	<5	26	48	24	84	48	48	6
T & O Surgery	6,541	7,661	7,248	7,351	8,168	5,610	1,377	1,514	1,349	1,012	1,178	1,616
ENT	317	1,731	222	880	424	957	66	177	179	108	66	149
Ophthalmology	803	1,727	618	667	1,015	2,210	300	737	324	146	301	550
Oral Surgery	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	10	14	10	8	7
Restorative Dentistry	313	164	73	181	85	52	0	0	0	0	0	0
Neurosurgery	8	132	64	162	39	170	5	7	20	8	5	20
Plastic Surgery	<5	<5	6	8	0	7	<5	<5	0	<5	<5	11
Cardiac Surgery	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	28	30	17	8	42
Paediatric Surgery	10	16	27	23	20	21	47	101	39	99	47	13
Thoracic Surgery	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	38	14	0	0	0
Anaesthetics	0	0	0	0	59	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pain Management	174	224	371	228	108	187	54	159	120	159	54	135
General Medicine	0	0	0	0	0	0	<5	0	<5	<5	0	0
Gastroenterology	0	0	0	0	0	0	<5	183	5	0	0	12
Cardiology	0	118	29	98	17	142	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dermatology	326	457	61	22	<5	0	0	<5	0	0	0	0
Neurology	0	0	<5	<5	0	0	0	0	<5	5	0	0
Clinical Neuro-Physiology	337	1,624	43	896	7	<5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rheumatology	48	186	18	334	258	136	0	0	0	0	0	0

Specialty	Outpatient Attendances						Inpatient Admissions					
	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P
Paediatrics	45	27	26	8	<5	0	19	9	12	0	19	0
Paediatric Neurology	11	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gynaecology	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	33	33	8	0	0

Source: Departmental Returns IS1 Parts 1 and 2

Note: Cell sizes less than 5 have been masked to protect patient confidentiality

P Data is provisional
Table 2: Number of outpatient attendances and inpatient admissions carried out in the Independent Sector that were transferred by Northern HSC Trust: QE June 2013 – QE September 2014

Specialty	Outpatient Attendances						Inpatient Admissions					
	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P
General Surgery	638	414	388	200	258	240	390	391	165	142	390	186
Urology	<5	0	0	0	<5	124	0	0	0	0	0	26
ENT	459	372	334	414	246	963	109	48	52	49	109	70
Pain Management	301	337	338	345	263	459	161	115	129	130	161	171
Gastroenterology	307	221	77	730	299	743	249	219	42	<5	249	237
Endocrinology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0
Cardiology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<5	0	0	6
Dermatology	25	945	390	417	41	8	0	<5	16	25	0	5
Neurology	146	233	156	41	129	190	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rheumatology	59	86	<5	193	215	345	0	0	0	0	0	6
Gynaecology	380	261	380	116	274	365	91	212	105	72	91	178

Source: Departmental Returns IS1 Parts 1 and 2

Note: Cell sizes less than 5 have been masked to protect patient confidentiality

P Data is provisional

Table 3: Number of outpatient attendances and inpatient admissions carried out in the Independent Sector that were transferred by South Eastern HSC Trust: QE June 2013 – QE September 2014

Specialty	Outpatient Attendances						Inpatient Admissions					
	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P
General Surgery	<5	0	0	0	0	0	0	<5	<5	0	0	0
Urology	15	98	43	<5	0	0	69	44	27	48	69	24
T & O Surgery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<5	0	0
ENT	113	569	370	307	202	26	25	138	109	42	25	37
Ophthalmology	0	0	0	0	0	271	<5	0	0	0	0	0
Oral Surgery	632	536	276	39	31	20	252	159	119	71	252	17
Plastic Surgery	1,295	1,465	1,385	1,122	962	808	952	575	602	415	951	381
Thoracic Surgery	97	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pain Management	41	24	22	<5	0	0	15	7	<5	0	15	0
General Medicine	965	809	604	498	756	809	309	337	461	577	<5	195
Dermatology	703	774	666	657	409	59	247	251	167	110	247	19

Specialty	Outpatient Attendances						Inpatient Admissions					
	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P
Thoracic Medicine	0	199	39	9	7	116	0	0	0	0	0	0
Neurology	424	197	303	271	365	281	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rheumatology	313	358	405	395	371	218	45	59	86	94	45	42
Paediatrics	121	75	76	38	40	38	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gynaecology	255	917	669	768	768	402	187	261	276	250	187	180

Source: Departmental Returns IS1 Parts 1 and 2

Note: Cell sizes less than 5 have been masked to protect patient confidentiality

P Data is provisional

Table 4: Number of outpatient attendances and inpatient admissions carried out in the Independent Sector that were transferred by Southern HSC Trust: QE June 2013 – QE September 2014

Specialty	Outpatient Attendances						Inpatient Admissions					
	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P
General Surgery	<5	789	326	266	212	368	178	451	329	269	46	419
Urology	11	<5	<5	0	0	0	<5	0	0	0	0	0
T & O Surgery	354	414	274	174	139	70	168	142	107	56	36	21
ENT	0	143	137	82	0	0	0	0	31	25	0	0
Ophthalmology	750	631	613	744	240	113	386	261	146	65	164	51
Oral Surgery	<5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pain Management	7	27	45	27	10	18	5	51	25	14	27	10
Gastroenterology	0	0	0	0	0	0	<5	108	7	30	7	0
Paediatrics	0	0	0	24	<5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gynaecology	14	10	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Departmental Returns IS1 Parts 1 and 2

Note: Cell sizes less than 5 have been masked to protect patient confidentiality

PData is provisional

Table 5: Number of outpatient attendances and inpatient admissions carried out in the Independent Sector that were transferred by Western HSC Trust: QE June 2013 – QE September 2014

Specialty	Outpatient Attendances						Inpatient Admissions					
	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P
General Surgery	144	314	314	350	207	309	29	162	174	146	152	213
Urology	<5	<5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T & O Surgery	1,565	1,222	1,325	1,330	1,046	794	458	536	481	475	341	347
ENT	87	102	170	113	103	90	88	183	68	109	86	52
Ophthalmology	177	275	250	178	82	26	81	91	91	42	43	12
Oral Surgery	132	315	236	178	266	223	91	189	147	107	121	119
General Medicine	24	379	286	266	132	60	6	188	135	69	69	35
Neurology	388	326	305	296	244	149	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rheumatology	80	31	59	158	80	121	0	0	0	0	0	0

Specialty	Outpatient Attendances						Inpatient Admissions					
	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P	June '13	Sept '13	Dec '13	Mar '14	June '14P	Sept '14P
Gynaecology	186	337	317	237	122	62	44	85	80	89	48	32

Source: Departmental Returns IS1 Parts 1 and 2

Note: Cell sizes less than 5 have been masked to protect patient confidentiality

PData is provisional

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current number of patients in each Health and Care Trust that have been awaiting treatment for longer than (i) three; (ii) six; (iii) nine; and (iv) twelve months. **(AQW 39135/11-15)**

Mr Wells: The number of patients in each Health and Care Trust that have been awaiting treatment for longer than (i) three; (ii) six; (iii) nine; and (iv) twelve months, at 30th September 2014, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, is shown in the table below.

Number of patients waiting longer than (i) three; (ii) six; (iii) nine; and (iv) twelve months for inpatient treatment, at 30th September 2014, by HSC Trust

HSC Trust	Number of patients waiting*			
	Waiting longer than 3 months	Waiting longer than 6 months	Waiting longer than 9 months	Waiting longer than 12 months
Belfast	13,016	4,765	1,629	641
Northern	1,029	193	9	0
South Eastern	1,402	337	98	26
Southern	2,263	654	224	120
Western	2,372	570	153	24
Northern Ireland	20,082	6,519	2,113	811

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

* As patients can be included in more than one of the time bands used in this answer, the figures in the table should not be added.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many occasions, since November 2012, each Health and Social Care Trust has written to, or corresponded with, media outlets after monitoring reports/articles on deaths by suicide, attempted suicide or contemplated suicides, based on the Samaritans Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide.

(AQW 39139/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland do not have a role in monitoring reports/articles on deaths by suicide, attempted suicide or contemplated suicides.

In line with "Protect Life", the Northern Ireland suicide prevention strategy, the Public Health Agency has established a media monitoring system to monitor suicide and mental health media reporting. Figures are available from 1 March 2014 – 31 October 2014 and show that 5,310 news articles were read, analysed, weighted and recorded. During this period, the Agency contacted news organisations on 24 occasions highlighting issues of concern such as details given in articles about the method of suicide, prominence of articles and inappropriate use of photography.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37760/11-15, to outline his strategic plans for the delivery of a regional lipreading support service to maximise the skills of the twelve new lipreading teachers due to qualify next year and ensure that everyone who requires this form of support receives it.

(AQW 39140/11-15)

Mr Wells: As advised in my response to AQW 37760/11-15, the Regional Strategy Implementation Group has allocated non-recurrent funding to ensure that a pilot lip-reading training course is provided. The training commenced earlier this month and its effectiveness will be assessed in due course by the Regional Social Services Training Manager's Group whose responsibility it is to assess the training needs of Trust staff and commission appropriate training to meet identified need.

I understand that this pilot model of lip-reading training is such that those individuals who complete the necessary training would be competent to teach the skill of lip-reading to service users rather than train other members of staff to be lip-reading teachers.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of alcohol misuse to the Health Service in each of the last five financial years.

(AQW 39142/11-15)

Mr Wells: Information is not available in the format requested. In 2010 my Department published The Social Costs of Alcohol Misuse in Northern Ireland – this research report estimated that alcohol misuse costs our society as a whole up to £900 million every year, with almost £250 million of this borne by the Health and Social Care Sector annually. More detailed information on the estimated costs of alcohol misuse can be found on the Department's website at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/social_costs_of_alcohol_misuse_200809.pdf

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why services are not in place outside the Western and Southern Health and Social Care Trusts catchment areas to support children and young people who have been subject to sexual abuse.

(AQW 39143/11-15)

Mr Wells: Each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT) provides a range of services, both therapeutic and supportive, for children and young people who have been subject to sexual abuse. Some services such as Family Centres, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Counselling Centres and Trauma Centres are provided on a Trust basis. Other services, such as the Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre, the Barnardo's NI Safe Choices Service and the Child Care Centre in Belfast have region-wide reach.

Some services are provided directly by the HSCT whilst others are provided in partnership with other agencies in the voluntary or community sectors, including NSPCC.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will safeguard funding for specialist counselling services for people in need of support during and following instances of child sexual exploitation.

(AQW 39145/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department currently provides the regional Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) with £450,000 per year to provide specialist services in the aftermath of a sexual assault, rape or an incident involving childhood sexual abuse. The SARC offers a comprehensive range of services, including 24 hour access to crisis support, forensic examinations, screening and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, emergency contraception and emotional support. The SARC also offers a 24-hour advice and information line. In addition, Nexus NI has secured a Health and Social Care Board contract to deliver counselling to survivors of sexual abuse across the five Health and Social Care Trusts. My department also provides grant funding to Nexus to cover its administration costs.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to establish adequate services and structures to address the projected increase reporting of individuals following a public awareness campaign on child sexual exploitation.

(AQW 39146/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board continuously monitors service demands and escalates pressures to the Department where necessary. An additional investment of £3,000,000 was made in this financial year to respond to the additional pressures in family and childcare services across all five Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs), associated with increasing numbers of looked after children. It is likely that a public awareness campaign linked to child sexual exploitation will lead to greater demands on HSCT family and childcare services. This will be kept under review.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to provide counselling provision for children and young people who have been sexually abused.

(AQW 39147/11-15)

Mr Wells: Children and young people who have been sexually abused can also avail of counselling provision through existing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Psychological Therapies Services and the Family Trauma Centre.

My Department currently provides the regional Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) with £450,000 per year to provide specialist services in the aftermath of a sexual assault, rape or an incident involving childhood sexual abuse. The SARC offers a comprehensive range of services, which include emotional support for victims of sexual abuse and a 24-hour advice and information line.

In addition, counselling support is also available to children and young people who have been victims of abuse, through a range of community and voluntary sector organisations including Barnardo's, NSPCC and Nexus NI.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that training is provided to health workers in each Health and Social Care Trust in relation to detecting, reporting and identifying instances of child sexual exploitation, whether this training is compulsory or voluntary.

(AQW 39148/11-15)

Mr Wells: DHSSPS has categorized child sexual exploitation as a form of child sexual abuse since 1996.

Safeguarding children against sexual exploitation is the responsibility of all staff and hence is included in the mandatory induction programme provided to all new members of the HSC.

This issue is also addressed through various aspects of the mandatory training provided to HSC staff according to their professional roles and responsibilities.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any plans for changes to staffing arrangements at Slievemore Nursing Unit in Derry.

(AQW 39150/11-15)

Mr Wells: My predecessor asked the Western Trust to engage in a mediation process with the families of Slievemore Nursing Unit patients in April 2014 following a proposal to close the facility as part of the Trust's redesign of older people's mental health services.

This mediation process remains on-going. I understand that the Trust will make a statement about the outcome of this process in due course.

Staffing arrangements will be reviewed pending the conclusion of the mediation process and the Trust's HR policies will be applied.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the Health Service support available for recovering alcoholics.

(AQW 39170/11-15)

Mr Wells: Through my Department's New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2, the Health & Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency commission a full range of addiction services, aimed at addressing both alcohol and drug misuse, from education and prevention through to treatment and support.

Details of the full range of addiction services available to people living in all five Health and Social Care Trust areas and currently provided by both the Statutory and the Voluntary/Community sectors across Northern Ireland can be found by accessing the following link: <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/drug-and-alcohol-directories-services>

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the success rate of Health Service delivered programmes for alcoholism.

(AQW 39171/11-15)

Mr Wells: Determining the success of programmes or initiatives aimed at reducing the harm related to alcohol misuse remains problematic, but I believe it is vital that we at least attempt to utilise information to demonstrate that funding towards such aims is having a real and quantifiable impact on the population of Northern Ireland, and to provide an evidence base in order to inform future investment decisions, so that we can continue to have a positive impact on the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

My Department is committed to the outcome-based approach outlined in the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase Two (NSD Phase 2), and to this end the Regional Impact Measurement Tool (RIMT) has been developed to measure progress and achievement against these outcomes and to assess the effectiveness of services funded in support of the NSD.

An extract from the 2013/14 RIMT evaluation report shows that:

- of the clients included in the RIMT evaluations, almost half (47%) on average experienced a positive change in their situation between their initial assessment and their latest review across the following domains: personal responsibility, social contact/networks, managing physical health, mental and emotional health, daily lifestyle, relationships, alcohol consumption/dependency and drug use/dependency; and
- of all the clients seen for alcohol consumption/dependency, over half (54%) saw a positive impact following interaction with an Adult Treatment/Aftercare service.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been treated for stroke rehabilitation in the inpatient bed facility of Bangor Community Hospital in each of the last three years; and to detail the average number of beds available for stroke rehabilitation.

(AQW 39188/11-15)

Mr Wells: Within Bangor Community Hospital there are up to 10 beds available on the GP ward which are used for stroke rehabilitation. The number of patients in receipt of stroke rehabilitation within Bangor Community Hospital in each of the last 3 years is shown in the table below.

Year	Number of stroke rehabilitation patients
2011/12	63
2012/13	51
2013/14	66

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the incidence and prevalence of medicine wastage at each hospitals.

(AQW 39236/11-15)

Mr Wells: It would not be possible to provide a breakdown of the incidence and prevalence of medicines wastage at each hospital. My Department is currently developing a Medicines Optimisation Quality Framework. One of the key challenges which the framework seeks to address is medicines wastage and the framework will set objectives for monitoring and reducing waste across various care environments, including hospitals. It is hoped to issue the framework for consultation in the New Year.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of proposed budget reductions, whether he can provide an assurance that training and equipment provided to firefighters will be monitored to ensure both firefighter and public safety.

(AQW 39238/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has been asked as part of the Department's planning process for 2015/16 to develop a range of savings proposals that could deliver the best possible outcomes under three scenarios, 5%, 10% and 15% reductions.

NIFRS will be required to risk assess and prioritise these proposals on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery. Firefighter and public safety are key elements in the consideration of service delivery by NIFRS.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of proposed budget reductions, whether he can provide an assurance that there will be continued cover provided and service levels maintained by the fire service in Cushendall and Carnlough.

(AQW 39239/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has been asked as part of the Department's planning process for 2015/16 to develop a range of savings proposals that could deliver the best possible outcomes under three scenarios, 5%, 10% and 15% reductions.

NIFRS will be required to risk assess and prioritise these proposals on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery.

Any decisions on changes to the location or status of Fire Stations are a matter for the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS). Such decisions are taken in the context of the ongoing assessment of risk and other relevant factors, including budgets. Any proposed change is subject to public consultation.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps available to concerned members of staff, and the public, who wish to complain about standards of care not being met within private nursing homes.

(AQW 39255/11-15)

Mr Wells: The HSC Complaints Procedure applies equally to statutory residential care and nursing homes and independent residential care and nursing homes where the placement is paid for by an HSC Trust. All providers must operate a complaints procedure that meets the requirements of applicable Regulations, relevant Minimum Standards and the HSC Complaints Procedure.

Regulation 23 of the Nursing Homes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 requires the registered home provider/manager to make arrangements to enable staff to inform the provider /manager, the RQIA and the relevant HSC Trust, in confidence of their views regarding any matter relating to the conduct of the nursing home so far as it may affect the health or welfare of patients.

The Minimum Standards for Nursing Homes expand on the provisions in the Regulations and require providers to have arrangements in place to receive complaints and concerns about the quality of care delivered in the home. These include requirements for mechanisms to, recognise, investigate and report back on formal complaints; having effective arrangements for engaging and involving residents and their families and carers in the running of the home as well as decisions about an individual's care; and the requirement to have in place a whistleblowing policy for staff to raise concerns about standards of care.

The RQIA has a duty to assess and report on how the HSC and the regulated sector handle complaints in light of the standards and regulations. RQIA will assess the effectiveness of local procedures and will use information from complaints to identify wider issues for the purposes of raising awareness.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has been made aware of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's concerns regarding the standard of care in Clifton Nursing Home, Belfast.

(AQW 39258/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Belfast Trust has advised me that the Trust's Quality team recently undertook a review of some areas of practice with Clifton Nursing Home, as a response to issues identified by the RQIA through inspection visits.

This work was intended to support the nursing home in meeting care standards, and to help prevent potential concerns developing. The home welcomed the Trust involvement and the Trust is satisfied, following its review, that the care environment is safe and compliant with relevant care standards.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of permanent residents in (i) nursing; and (ii) residential care homes, broken down by (a) statutory; and (b) private providers, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 39269/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information is not collected centrally and was requested from the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board.

Table 1 below details the number of permanent residents in statutory and independent nursing and residential care homes, as at 31 March in each of the last five years.

Table 1

Type of Care Home	Provider	Number of Permanent Residents (All Programmes of Care)				
		at 31 March 2010	at 31 March 2011	at 31 March 2012	at 31 March 2013	at 31 March 2014
Nursing	Statutory	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Independent *	8,205	8,353	8,390	8,348	8,391
Residential	Statutory	858	823	766	623	523
	Independent *	2,807	2,966	2,977	2,933	3,050

* Includes private and voluntary providers.

Source: HSC Board

It should be noted that residential and nursing home care are part of a much wider range of services provided by the HSC to support people in the community and in their own homes where possible. These services include domiciliary care, community meals, supported living and day care.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average number of patients treated daily in the Minor Injuries Unit at Whiteabbey Hospital in the last twelve months.

(AQW 39274/11-15)

Mr Wells: During the last 12 months (October 2013 to September 2014), there was an average of 40 attendances (new, unplanned and planned reviews) each day at Whiteabbey Minor Injuries Unit. This average is based on the department being open Monday to Friday each week.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust autism spectrum disorder service, to detail (i) the number of staff employed; (ii) the job descriptions of staff; (iii) when the service is available; (iv) how many families the service supports; and (v) the number of staff currently absent due to (a) long term illness; (b) maternity leave; and (c) secondment; and what effect this has on service provision.

(AQW 39276/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table in the attached Annex provides the detail requested in relation to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust's Autism Spectrum Disorder Service.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children living in South Antrim have been diagnosed with an autism spectrum condition or are currently being assessed, or awaiting assessment, for a diagnosis.

(AQW 39277/11-15)

Mr Wells: This information is not held centrally and was requested from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. The Trust was unable to provide a figure for the number of children in South Antrim with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). They were also unable to supply an overall figure for the Northern Trust.

Data used to produce the publication 'The Prevalence of Autism (including Aspergers syndrome) in School Age Children in Northern Ireland 2014' show that during the 2013/14 school year, there were 1,280 children of compulsory school age (aged

5–15 years old) identified as autistic in the Northern HSC Trust. This publication is available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/asd-children-ni-2014.pdf>

The Northern Trust was unable to provide figures for the number of children in South Antrim undergoing an assessment or waiting for an assessment for ASD. However they advised that Trustwide at 25th November 2014, 319 children were waiting an ASD assessment. This figure has not been validated by the Department.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current waiting times for review appointments for patients with Multiple Sclerosis in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 39294/11-15)

Mr Wells: A review appointment is different from a first appointment in that it is scheduled for a 'clinically appropriate' time, which can range from weeks to years depending on the patient's individual case. As such 'waiting times' for review appointments are not meaningful as the time between successive appointments will include both the 'clinically appropriate' wait and any additional time spent waiting past the intended review date.

Information on the length of time Multiple Sclerosis patients have waited over their intended review date is not readily available for each individual Trust and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The Department however does collect waiting times information for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment. Quarterly data relating to outpatient waiting times are published on the DHSSPS website at the following link:

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/hospital/waitingtimes/waitingtimes-outpatient.htm>

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has sought assurances from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust that any additional funds would go immediately and directly to protecting the services at Bangor Community Hospital.
(AQW 39314/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, working in tandem with the Health and Social Care Board, to provide health and social care services most suited to the needs of the local community within the financial resources that are available. My Department will continue to monitor the resource position.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he is encouraging people to seek advice on minor ailments from their pharmacist in the first instance, instead of a GP or Emergency Department.
(AQW 39317/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department is promoting more responsible use of Emergency Departments, Community Pharmacies and GP Practices by encouraging patients to use the service most appropriate to their symptoms through various initiatives such as the Choose Well Campaign, the Ask the Pharmacist Week and the Self Care Week.

The Choose Well campaign aims to create a better understanding among the general public of what medical care services are available to them, how and when to access these services. The Choose Well campaign ran from November 2013 – March 2014 and will run again this year. It will again focus on self care, the advice and treatment available from community pharmacies; GP Out of Hours services; Minor Injuries Units and appropriate use of Emergency Departments. The campaign will be publicised via a wide range of media such as TV, advertising posters, distribution of leaflets across various public bodies and facilities, adverts in the press and supported with the use of NI Direct website and social media.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how has been spent on (i) maintenance; and (ii) the cleaning and hygiene regime of Pinewood Residential Care Home in (a) 2013/14; and (b) 2014/15.
(AQW 39327/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust have provided the following figures for (i) maintenance and (ii) cleaning and hygiene spent on Pinewood Residential Home in 2013/14 and 2014/15.

(i)	Maintenance	
	2013/14	£17,364.80
	2014/15 (YTD)	£6,592.94
(ii)	Cleaning and hygiene*	
	2013/14	£169,917
	April 2014 - October 2014	£71,901

* The Trust have also advised me that there are additional costs incurred by the Trust rapid response cleaning teams and time spent by care assistants on these regimes which are difficult to determine, but are estimated to be an average of approximately £25,000 per year.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether additional resources can be found within his budget to sustain Railway Street Addiction Services in Ballymena which will no longer receive funding from the Department of Justice.

(AQW 39377/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am disappointed by the decision of the Department of Justice (DoJ) to remove funding from Railway Street Community Addiction Service, which for over 14 years has been a successful partnership between the Community Safety Unit of the DoJ and the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHST), and has been independently assessed as a model of best practice across the UK in harm reduction services for injecting drug users.

The NHST have informed me that the withdrawal of two thirds of the funding for the scheme means that it cannot be sustained in its present form and the Trust is currently reviewing the way in which a significantly reduced service can be provided in the future. Following a meeting between the NHST and DoJ, funding has been provided to extend the service until the end of February 2015 to facilitate the work with staff and service users in managing this change.

The withdrawal of funding will undoubtedly have implications for the total level of community (i.e. Tier 3) alcohol and drug services provided in the area. I understand that NHST recently met with officials from the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency to discuss and review further the implications of DoJ's decision. The Northern Trust has also written to all current service users advising them of the change and assuring them of its commitment to continue to support them as much as possible.

The HSCB has informed me that it has no additional resources within its budget which can be used to maintain the level of funding prior to the DoJ reduction of funding. HSCB/PHA will continue to work with NHST to assess and minimise the negative consequences of the DoJ withdrawal of funding.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the decision to close beds in Dalriada Hospital will be subject to any rural proofing prior the end of the eight week consultation.

(AQW 39392/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Trust's consultation document will contain a question specifically addressing the impact of the decision on rural areas.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether, together with the relevant Western Health and Social Care Trust Director, he will visit Ash Villa at Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital urgently, in order to meet staff and properly inform himself as to the negative impacts which will result from the decision to close Ash Villa in respect of the care of dementia patients.

(AQW 39396/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust is currently engaged in a period of consultation with staff regarding the proposed remodeling of service provided in Ash Villa. During this time, staff have met with senior managers from the Trust on a number of occasions to discuss their concerns. A consultation report will subsequently be prepared for consideration by Directors and the Trust's Chief Executive.

In this context, I believe that the most effective approach is for engagement to take place within the framework of the ongoing Trust consultation process.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the consultation being carried out by the Western Health and Social Care Trust regarding the closure of Ash Villa at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital is internal and relates only to staff members who are deployed at Ash Villa.

(AQW 39397/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social Care Trust's proposal to reconfigure inpatient mental health services for older people in the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital does not mean that Ash Villa will close. Rather, it involves a redesign of services provided at Ash Villa in order to meet the changing needs of people with dementia in a more effective and efficient way.

The Trust has advised that as this proposal has no impact on the current inpatients at Ash Villa, who will remain there until they are medically fit for discharge, but primarily impacts on staff, the current consultation process relates to staff only.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety where patients with challenging behaviour will be admitted in a crisis situation if the dementia unit at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital is full; and whether a cell in Omagh police station is considered to be one of the possibilities.

(AQW 39398/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust has advised that the community-based challenging behaviour service will provide an immediate response to any crisis situations in the first instance. The capacity of the challenging behaviour service to support people at home has been evidenced in the progressively reduced demand for inpatient beds in Ash Villa. The Trust proposes to recruit additional nursing staff for the community-based service to enhance and develop the current front-line service to patients.

In addition, planned changes to older people's inpatient mental health services in the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital will see the number of dementia assessment beds increase from 10 to 12. Inpatient bed availability and capacity will be monitored on a daily basis.

Where all treatment options have been explored within the service user's current environment and assessments indicate that the individual requires inpatient care, this will be facilitated as soon as possible. If there are no immediately available beds in the dementia assessment ward in the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital, the patient may be transferred following medical consultation to the nearest dementia assessment ward. The Western Trust does not consider a cell in Omagh police station an appropriate alternative to hospital admission for a dementia patient with challenging behaviour.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the rationale for the Western Health and Social Care Trust's decision to close Ash Villa when there are currently six in-patients with challenging behaviour and none of these patients are ready for discharge.

(AQW 39399/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust has advised that it is not closing Ash Villa. As part of the reform and modernisation of Older People's Mental Health Services, the Trust is remodeling the care provided in Ash Villa to make best use of the facility in light of reduced demand for in-patient beds.

The Trust has confirmed that any patient who is not ready for discharge at the time of transition will continue to receive ongoing support in Ash Villa.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38896/11-15, whether (i) he will check the accuracy of his figures for the occupancy rate in the inpatient dementia challenging behaviour facility Ash Villa at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital relating to Tuesday 14 October 2014, given that there has not been any less than five patients being cared at the facility; and (ii) the reduction in occupancy rate is a direct consequence of the Western Health and Social Care Trust's decision to block admissions to Ash Villa since the beginning of 2014.

(AQW 39400/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Trust has confirmed that, at 14th October 2014 there were four in-patients at Ash Villa, one of whom was medically fit for discharge. One other patient was on leave to a nursing home.

The Trust has also advised that admissions to Ash Villa have not been blocked and that the reason behind the low occupancy rate in Ash Villa is the success of the Trust's community-based challenging behavior service in supporting people in their own home.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what affect the closure of Stewart Memorial House will have on care beds in North Down.

(AQW 39407/11-15)

Mr Wells: I understand that the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled (NIID), which is the independent organisation whose decision it was to close the facility, has advised the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust that it will work with the Trust to ensure that the closure of Stewart Memorial House is done in a timescale that allows individuals to be placed in alternative suitable accommodation. Further individual meetings will be held with individuals and their families to identify their preferences for an alternative placement which it is anticipated can be identified from within the existing nursing home stock within the North Down area.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the pending closure of the Stewart Memorial House in Bangor, to provide a breakdown of the cost of any proposed alternative arrangements for patients.

(AQW 39415/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is engaged in ongoing discussions with service users and their families to identify alternative arrangements to meet their assessed needs. At this stage, it is not possible to provide a breakdown of costs in respect of such alternative arrangements.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39051/11-15, who the Western Health and Social Care Trust has consulted in this process.

(AQW 39429/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that, as the proposed changes to Older People's Mental Health Services have no impact on the current inpatients at Ash Villa, who will remain there until they are medically fit for discharge, but primarily impacts on staff, the current consultation process relates to staff only.

The Trust outlined the proposal to local MLAs at a briefing held on 7 November 2014, as part of the discussions on the Trust's proposed financial savings plan for 2014/15. A staff consultation paper was presented at a meeting on 12 November 2014. The Trust has also shared the staff consultation paper with the Alzheimer's Society as it provides an advocacy service for patients within the service.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the services provided by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service are 'front line services'.

(AQW 39452/11-15)

Mr Wells: The draft Budget for 2015/16, endorsed by the NI Executive, states that frontline health and social care elements of the DHSSPS budget are protected from reductions. NIFRS, similar to other frontline services such as the PSNI, is not afforded the same protection.

The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has been asked, as part of the Department's planning process for 2015/16, to develop a range of savings proposals that could deliver the best possible outcomes under three scenarios, 5%, 10% and 15% reductions.

NIFRS will be required to risk assess and prioritise savings proposals on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery before submission to the DHSSPS.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the actions the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust will take to facilitate patients who will be displaced by the closure of Stewart Memorial House, Bangor.

(AQW 39457/11-15)

Mr Wells: I understand that the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled (NIID), which is the independent organisation whose decision it was to close the facility, has advised the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) that it will work with the Trust to ensure that the closure of Stewart Memorial House is done in a timescale that allows individuals to be placed in alternative suitable accommodation.

The NIID has also advised the Trust that they will not close the home until every resident has an appropriate placement elsewhere. The Trust will work with those residents and their families to ascertain their preferences and source appropriate alternative placements. The SEHSCT has also established a project group to manage the closure of the home and the Trust is conducting a scoping exercise to identify current provision in the North Down and Ards area, and further afield where appropriate.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of agency staff contracted by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, expressed as full time equivalents, (i) currently; (ii) the last 12 months; and (iii) the last 24 months, broken down by (a) medical; and (b) non-medical staff.

(AQW 39459/11-15)

Mr Wells: Due to the highly flexible nature of agency employment, agency staff are not routinely held on the Trusts' Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence system (HRPTS). As working hours can vary enormously from week to week, it is not possible to record a whole-time equivalent (WTE) figure to assess level of contribution. However, the level of use of agency staff is routinely recorded in terms of cost. A table showing agency staff costs for the South Eastern Trust for the last two full financial years, and the current financial year, starting 1st April 2014, to date, at 2nd December 2014, appears below.

Year	Medical & Dental Agency Staff Expenditure (£)	Other Agency Staff Expenditure (£)
2012/13	5,247,699	7,982,828
2013/14	4,046,006	7,544,899
2014/15 to date (at 2nd Dec)	2,039,022	3,800,645

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the total level of capital receipts generated by his Department in each year since 2011; (ii) each individual asset; (iii) its location; (iv) when it was sold; (v) by whom it was purchased; and (vi) for how much it was sold.

(AQW 39498/11-15)

Mr Wells: Listed below are the details of my Department's capital receipts delivered from 2011/12 to date. I am unable to include the details of purchasers of the properties listed due to the commercial sensitivity of this information.

Property	Date Sold	Sale Receipt (£)
42 Dennet Gardens, Londonderry	24/02/12	37,000
Loch Cuan, 2 Dakota Avenue, Ards	23/03/12	124,000
Plot 2 Frederick Street, Ards	31/03/12	70,000
704 Shore Road, Belfast	03/05/12	74,000
58 Main Street, Larne	06/06/12	49,000
Woodlawn Houses, 18-21 Woodlawn Park, Dungannon	01/09/12	82,500

Property	Date Sold	Sale Receipt (£)
149-151 Falls Road, Belfast	26/09/12	175,000
Bayview, 165 Groomsport Road	22/11/12	1,037,500
92 University Street, Belfast	23/11/12	88,000
Plot 13 Crevenagh Road, Omagh	28/03/13	400,000
Wards 1-10 Downshire Hospital	01/03/13	1,000,000
Glasvey Ex School, Ballykelly	26/04/13	60,000
Ballyhornan Road, Downpatrick	13/06/13	3,500
Market Street, Downpatrick	20/07/13	20,000
2 Gilnahirk Rise, Belfast	30/08/13	123,750
29a Annadale Avenue, Belfast	10/10/13	275,000
1-4 Minnowburn Terrace, Belfast	11/11/13	180,000
449 Antrim Road, Belfast	11/12/13	167,000
Belvoir Clinic, 27 Drumart Square, Belfast	13/03/14	104,000
137-141 Ormeau Road, Belfast	11/04/14	210,000
Belvoir Park Hospital	14/05/14	4,550,000
414 Ormeau Road, Belfast	04/06/14	280,000
44a Tempo Rd, Enniskillen	27/06/14	79,500
Greyabbey Health Centre, 17 Main Street, Greyabbey	27/06/14	27,000
Victoria Day Centre, 25 Tamar St, Belfast	13/08/14	117,000
89 Durham Street, Belfast	18/08/14	275,000
Shaftsbury Square Hospital, Belfast	10/10/14	295,000
	Total Receipts	£9,903,750

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the location of the specialist centre for pancreatic cancer.

(AQW 39526/11-15)

Mr Wells: Surgery for cancer of the pancreas is carried out in the Mater Infirmorum Hospital. Systemic anti-cancer treatments are provided by 2 oncologists within Belfast Cancer Centre.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to the Assembly debate on 25 November 2014, whether he can provide an assurance that the (i) consultation regarding Dalriada Hospital will be independent; and (ii) outcome will not be predetermined by the Health and Social Care Trust or his Department.

(AQW 39532/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Trust will consult over an 8 week period from 2 December 2014 until 27 January 2015.

The Trust wishes to consult extensively on this document and, in addition to making the consultation document widely available, intends to hold targeted consultation workshops with affected and interested parties. This targeted consultation will take place during the eight week consultation period and will include engagement with service users, representative organisations and Trust staff. To ensure that consultees have every opportunity to provide comprehensive feedback, an independent facilitator will be engaged to facilitate the workshops.

I would refer the member to my closing comments in my speech in the Assembly on 25 November 2014 when I said: "Can I make it absolutely certain that we are taking this consultation extremely seriously? The community now has time to put forward its views on what it feels are the defects of this decision and to provide suggestions for an alternative. This will be taken seriously; the Member has my commitment on that".

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to ensure that older carers are made aware of the support structures available to help them; and that they are offered a carer's assessment.

(AQW 39545/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts have a statutory duty under the Carers and Direct Payments Act (NI) 2002 to make information regarding a carer's right to an assessment widely available and to inform individuals of all ages directly of that right, where it appears to the Trust that an individual is carrying out that role. In doing so, all HSC Trusts have been able to demonstrate to my Department that information packs are made available to people who appear to the Trust to be carrying out a caring role.

You may also be aware that my Department collects figures on the number of carers' assessments that are offered, and subsequently declined or completed, across the HSC on a quarterly basis. My officials use this data to analyse the performance across all HSC Trusts. With a view to driving improvements in this area, a new target was established in the Commissioning Plan Direction for 2014/15, requiring HSC Trusts to secure by 31 March 2015 a 10% increase in the number of carers' assessments offered, as compared to the previous year.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38396/11-15, whether the £3m allocated to the community and voluntary sector and family fund is additional.
(AQW 39546/11-15)

Mr Wells: The £3m allocated to the community and voluntary sector and family will provide funding for grants to voluntary and community sector bodies and the Family Fund in 2014/15.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can give that Stewart Memorial House will not be closed until alternative provision can be found for its current residents.
(AQW 39564/11-15)

Mr Wells: I understand that the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled (NIID), which is the independent organisation whose decision it was to close the facility, has advised the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) that it will work with the Trust to ensure that the closure of Stewart Memorial House is done in a timescale that allows individuals to be placed in alternative suitable accommodation.

The NIID has also advised the Trust that they will not close the home until every resident has an appropriate placement elsewhere. The Trust will work with those residents and their families to ascertain their preferences and source appropriate alternative placements. The SEHSCT has also established a project group to manage the closure of the home and the Trust is conducting a scoping exercise to identify current provision in the North Down and Ards area, and further afield where appropriate.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the differences in the rationale used to keep Bangor Minor Injuries Unit open after the recommended closure and the rationale he used to close Dalriada MS respite and intermediate care beds.
(AQW 39575/11-15)

Mr Wells: I would refer the Member to the Assembly's Official Report of my speech on 25 November 2014, concerning Dalriada Hospital's MS Respite Unit and intermediate care beds, and my Department's news release dated 28 November 2014, available on the DHSSPS website, concerning Bangor Hospital's Minor Injuries Unit.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the rationale behind ending inpatient services at Lurgan Hospital.
(AQW 39591/11-15)

Mr Wells: Consolidating all in-patient care in the Southern Trust area at Daisy Hill and Craigavon Area Hospitals will ensure equal access to specialist services, better and earlier access to experts, larger pools of medical staff to improve sustainability, 24 hour medical cover and more time for patient care with enhanced services for frail older people.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the urgent issues around Health Service cuts, to explain the implications of the recent announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer of an extra £2 billion pounds for the NHS and its potential impact on the Health Service in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 39612/11-15)

Mr Wells: The amount of additional funding to be allocated to Northern Ireland as a result of this announcement has yet to be confirmed by HM Treasury. Any allocation to my Department from these additional funds is a matter for the Executive to determine.

Clearly, I will want to access as much funding as possible to help alleviate some of the difficult financial restraints being placed on the health service and to help meet the increasing demands on health and social care services.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration has been given to the possibility of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust taking over the management of Stewart Memorial House or any other options which would prevent closure.
(AQW 39628/11-15)

Mr Wells: Health and Social Care Trusts are not providers of nursing home accommodation; this is provided by the private and voluntary sector. The Southern Eastern Health and Social Care Trust contracts with many nursing homes and it will continue to work closely with individuals and their families to identify suitable alternative provision that will meet their needs.

Department of Justice

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to Lee McCausland, (i) why he was permitted to have a mobile phone whilst in custody in the cells of Dungannon Court House from where he took a photograph of himself which was later posted on social media; (ii) whether he was a remanded prisoner when an additional photograph was taken of the courtroom and if this was taken from the dock, or on the way to or from the cells; and (iii) whether he will be charged with contempt of court or any similar offence in respect of the taking of these images; and to detail whether current searching techniques for prisoners leaving custody to travel to court and on their return, as well as before entering courtrooms, particularly the dock, will be reviewed.

(AQW 33101/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I am writing to correct an error contained in my answer of 15 May 2014 to an Assembly question which you tabled in relation to Lee McCausland, which asked why he was permitted to have a mobile phone whilst in custody and if he would be charged with contempt of court in respect of images taken at Dungannon Court House, namely AQW/33101/11-15.

My response referred to the fact that Court Service would not be taking further action. This should have stated that the matter had been reported to the PSNI by the court Service on 16 April 2014.

Please accept my apologies for this error.

I am copying this letter to the Editor of Debates and the Business Office.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 33101/11-15, whether the Courts Service's decision not to take any further action, has been reviewed; and if so, (i) when the review took place; (ii) who undertook the review; and (iii) for what reason.

(AQW 38837/11-15)

Mr Ford: In preparing the answer to this question it was discovered that section (iii) of your previous question (AQW/33101/11-15) was incorrectly answered by stating the 'Court Service does not intend to take any further action'. The Court Service had reported the matter to the PSNI when it first became known that photographs had been posted on social media.

The PSNI investigated the matter and passed a file to the Public Prosecution Service resulting in a summons being issued.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many committal warrants have been issued in each court division for non-payment of fines since the figure of over £14million in outstanding fines was published earlier this year, broken down by magistrates or crown courts.

(AQW 38850/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details how many committal warrants, broken down by court division, have been issued for non-payment of fines since the figure of over £14million in outstanding fines was published in April 2014.

County Court Division	Crown	Magistrates'	Total
Antrim	16	261	277
Ards	3	148	151
Armagh & South Down	3	222	225
Belfast	10	591	601
Craigavon	3	105	108
Fermanagh & Tyrone	6	337	343
Londonderry	3	218	221
Grand Total	44	1,882	1,926

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what was the overall cost of legal aid paid in civil cases in (i) 2012/13; and (ii) 2013/14.

(AQW 38906/11-15)

Mr Ford: In cash terms, legal aid expenditure in civil cases was £48.4m in 2012/13 and £54.7m in 2013/14 (figures include contributions made by legally assisted persons).

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37880/11-15 and AQW 37755/11-15, why these answers have been blocked under Data Protection legislation when similar information was requested and released in relation to a separate case in answers AQW 17146/11-15 and AQW17943/11-15; and to outline the difference in Data Protection legislation applied in each case.

(AQW 38907/11-15)

Mr Ford: The answers to AQW/17146/11-15 and AQW/17943/11-15 were provided in error. The disclosure of such information is subject to the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38321/11-15, (i) whether the drugs issue in this case was delayed due to a backlog in forensic testing; if so, (ii) whether this returns the matter to his departmental remit; and (iii) for an update on the number of cases affected by the backlog.

(AQW 38908/11-15)

Mr Ford: There has not been any delay in the analysis of drugs related to the case referred to.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38027/11-15, (i) what are the rules or protocols for jurors in cases such as this in relation to leaving the courthouse; (ii) whether this is explained routinely when a jury panel is selected; (iii) was this done in this instance; and (iv) given the extensive costs of this aborted trial, what action can be taken against the jurors in question.

(AQW 38910/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) Article 20 (1) of the The Juries (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 allows the judge to permit the jury to separate at any time during the course of a trial. If a juror requests to leave the court building at any stage, the jury keepers must ensure that the matter is brought to the attention of the judge.
- (ii) All jury panel members are routinely advised by the jury clerk, when they first attend for jury service to speak to the jury keepers if they have any queries or difficulties. Comprehensive information on what to expect if selected to serve on a jury, which includes reference to restrictions on leaving the court building, is published on the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) and NI Direct websites and also available on request from NICTS Customer Service Centre.
- (iii) Yes, an Information Sheet accompanies all jury summonses issued referring those summonsed to the NI Direct website or Customer Service Centre for further information relating to jury service. In addition, jury panel members are shown a video explaining what they can expect when serving on a jury.
- (iv) In this instance the jury keepers failed to refer the jurors request to the judge as required and allowed the individual jurors to leave the court building unaccompanied. This issue is being addressed with G4S who provide a jury keeping service for NICTS.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to outline the process for an application by a prisoner in the Republic of Ireland to transfer to a prison in Northern Ireland; and who decides whether such an application is successful.

(AQW 38916/11-15)

Mr Ford: Under the Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons and the Repatriation of Prisoners Act 1984 the Government of the United Kingdom has reciprocal Prisoner Transfer Agreements in place with a number of other countries throughout the world including the Republic of Ireland. These agreements apply to Scotland and Northern Ireland under the devolution settlements. A prisoner may make an application for repatriation at any time following sentencing. However, in order to be considered for repatriation an applicant must be able to demonstrate they are a national of the receiving state; or have had residency status in that state some time prior to arrest and conviction; or that they have close family ties in that state. In addition they must have been convicted of an offence that is an offence in the receiving state; the sentence imposed is final i.e. any appeal process has been exhausted; and they have at least six months of their sentence left to serve. All such repatriations require the consent of the applicant, the sentencing state and the receiving administration. In all cases the final decision rests with the receiving state. Decisions are made on the basis of all the conditions for repatriation being met.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38145/11-15, whether bench or arrest warrants are active for all those who remain unlawfully at large; and if, how many of these people in each court division are subject to warrants.

(AQW 38987/11-15)

Mr Ford: Court records show that on 6 November 2014, 971 defendants currently have an active arrest or bench warrant.

The table below details the number of defendants in each court division who are subject to warrants.

Court Divison	Number of outstanding arrest or bench warrants ¹
Belfast	272

Court Divison	Number of outstanding arrest or bench warrants ¹
Londonderry	57
Antrim	87
Fermanagh and Tyrone	210
Armagh and South Down	200
Ards	40
Craigavon	105
Total	971

Source: Integrated Court Operations System

1 At 06 November 2014

It should be noted that the execution of warrants is a matter for Police. The conduct of any prosecution is a matter for the Public Prosecution Service (PPS).

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice, in instances where a prisoner transfers from a prison in the Republic of Ireland to a Northern Ireland prison, under which jurisdiction is their rate of remission determined.

(AQW 38990/11-15)

Mr Ford: If remission is applicable the rate will be determined by the Northern Ireland Prison Service. This information will be shared with the Republic of Ireland authorities prior to repatriation taking place. This mirrors the arrangements that are followed with all inter-jurisdictional repatriations that take place under the terms of various Prisoner Transfer Agreements that the United Kingdom has with other signatory countries to the Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how rates of remission on sentences varies between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 38991/11-15)

Mr Ford: Rule 30 of the Prison & Young Offender Centre Rules (Northern Ireland) 1995 contains the provisions relating to remission in Northern Ireland. This rule states that remission, when applicable, shall not exceed half the total term (including any time spent in custody on remand in prison or in police custody). However, I am not in a position to describe how the Republic of Ireland differs from Northern Ireland in this regard.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice which custody suites are scheduled to be temporarily and permanently closed in F District, under departmental budgetary cutbacks; and which custody suites will be retained and the catchment area expected of each.

(AQW 39015/11-15)

Mr Ford: The issues that you raise are operational policing matters which are outside my remit as Justice Minister. These are primarily for the Chief Constable to address and I am sure you will appreciate the need for me to respect his operational independence.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice (i) what formula is utilised to establish the ratio of prison officers to prisoners; (ii) how this is applied in each prisoner category at Maghaberry Prison; and (iii) how current staffing and prisoner levels compare to the formula.

(AQW 39037/11-15)

Mr Ford: A formula is not used to establish the specific ratio of prison officers to prisoners from residential areas in prisons in Northern Ireland. To have a set ratio would disregard the significant differences in respect of a range of factors, including the type of accommodation and the prisoners being held there.

Ongoing reviews and updating of the shift patterns and profiles are a normal part of prison operations and reflect changing needs and the requirements for regime delivery.

When profiling or re-profiling a residential area the Northern Ireland Prison Service take into account the number of prisoners, the category of prisoner, the layout of the accommodation as well as looking at any physical security measures in place (cameras, alarms etc.).

Work Area Risk Assessments and Regime Delivery Quotas are also in place and kept under review for all areas. Regime Delivery Quotas give guidance on the type of regime that can be delivered should there not be a full complement of staff on duty.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice what facilities and procedures are in place at Maghaberry Prison to deal with injuries sustained by prison officers; and whether on site medical staff provide treatment to prison staff as well as inmates. (AQW 39038/11-15)

Mr Ford: Trained Northern Ireland Prison Service first aiders will offer assistance to a member of staff in the event of a member of staff becoming ill or injured.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust nursing staff, within the boundaries of individual competency and experience, may provide emergency first aid.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice how prison staff are advised of the medical condition of the inmates for which they are responsible. (AQW 39039/11-15)

Mr Ford: Medical markers for all inmates are recorded on the management information system used by NIPS. Staff in residential landings can access this information.

If there are specific concerns about an individual inmate, healthcare staff from the South Eastern Trust will advise residential staff on duty.

Specific medical information would not be routinely available to prison staff due to patient medical confidentiality.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, following the publication of the Marshall Report on child sexual exploitation, what consideration is being given to civil injunctions similar to those granted by Mr Justice Keehan at Birmingham High Court against a number of men believed to be sexually exploiting a child but where there is currently insufficient evidence to secure criminal convictions at this time; and whether he will discuss this with the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. (AQW 39043/11-15)

Mr Ford: I understand that in the case referred to the Council made use of existing powers to apply to the civil courts for an injunction to prevent a number of men coming into contact with children. It is my understanding that it is already open to Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland to apply for this type of injunction and courts would consider each case on its merits.

The Inquiry Report into Child Sexual Exploitation chaired by Professor Marshall contained 17 key recommendations and 60 supporting recommendations. Responsibility for taking forward the Recommendations crosses a number of Departments and agencies, including the Department of Justice. I, along with colleagues within the Justice System, will now consider carefully the Report and those Recommendations and will respond to the Inquiry with our plans for taking any actions forward.

In tackling child sexual exploitation, the Department of Justice will continue to liaise with the DHSSPS and the Safeguarding Board in their roles in the protection of children to ensure that where such crimes occur, agencies work together to protect and support victims and bring perpetrators to justice.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice why he is legally prohibited in providing statistics on legal aid paid in civil cases, given that this is publically funded and therefore accountable to the public; and what action can be taken to amend this position in the interests of transparency and accountability. (AQW 39060/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have released statistical information on the overall quantum of spend on civil legal aid. However, Article 24 of the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (NI) Order 1981 precludes the release of information in relation to specific persons seeking or receiving legal aid for civil cases. The provisions relating to 'Disclosure of Information' for legally aided cases, in both the civil and criminal courts, are currently being reviewed as part of the work to implement provisions of the Legal Aid and Coroners' Courts Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38323/11-15, what is the cost, or estimated cost, of these delays broken down by agency or individual expenditure. (AQW 39116/11-15)

Mr Ford: The estimated cost of the case to date in respect of the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service is £1,066.

The Public Prosecution Service does not charge investigating agencies for work undertaken and has no business need to maintain detailed records of the time spent on a particular case. No costs have been incurred by the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

The defendant has not applied for Legal Aid.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37422/11-15, what was the total cost in legal aid for each of the two years for these cases broken down by (i) law firm; (ii) junior counsel; and (iii) senior counsel; and for an estimate of any costs that have yet to be finalised. (AQW 39118/11-15)

Mr Ford: To obtain the information requested would require a manual search of Prison Service records. This information would then be provided to the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission who, in turn, would need to manually extract the information from each bill received. The information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38779/11-15, (i) whether his Department (a) has been made aware of concerns raised by members of the public in Dromore, County Down after alleged sightings of John McDermott in the area; (b) is aware of the verbal denial of John McDermott's presence by departmental agencies, who informed the public, the press and elected representatives it was a case of mistaken identity, but declined to issue an official clarification in writing; and (c) will issue an official clarification in writing that this was a case of mistaken identity; and (ii) whether he will order an immediate inquiry into the handling of this matter.

(AQW 39125/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department is aware that concerns have been raised by members of the public in Dromore following comments posted via social media. As outlined in my previous answers to AQW/38144/11-15 and AQW/38779/11-15 the Probation Board for Northern Ireland does not provide information on an individual's location post-release.

Individuals subject to post-release supervision have their risk managed appropriately in the community through the relevant agency and/or through the multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland.

I am satisfied that no inquiry is necessary into the handling of this matter. The agencies involved in public protection would be happy to facilitate a meeting with public representatives to discuss local concerns raised.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the recent publication of the Marshall Report regarding Child Sexual Exploitation, to detail any dialogue which has taken place with the authorities in the Republic of Ireland to establish greater transparency on Gardai vetting and Access NI, to ensure that perpetrators who cross the border are not in close contact with vulnerable children.

(AQW 39127/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Report of the Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation, chaired by Professor Marshall, contained 17 key recommendations and 60 supporting recommendations. Responsibility for taking forward the recommendations crosses a number of Departments and agencies, including the Department of Justice. My Department will work with others in considering the recommendations, including DHSSPS and the Safeguarding Board as well as justice agencies.

In relation to AccessNI specifically, where an individual seeks to work with children or adults in vulnerable circumstances, an application is usually made for an enhanced criminal record check. If the individual either lives in the Republic of Ireland or has lived there in the previous five years, AccessNI will refer the application to Police Service of Northern Ireland. In turn PSNI will liaise with An Garda Síochána, using existing cross border arrangements for the exchange of police information and request any relevant information on the applicant. Where relevant information is available and provided to PSNI, this will be included within the enhanced disclosure certificate.

In addition, the Home Office recently agreed with the Irish Government to transfer details of a number of individuals with serious criminal convictions in that jurisdiction, but believed to be living in the United Kingdom, to the Police National Computer (PNC). This database is searched by AccessNI for every application made. The exchange of criminal information between countries is a reserved matter for the Home Office.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice what consultation was carried out, or is planned, on the decision to remove funding from Railway Street Addiction Services.

(AQW 39190/11-15)

Mr Ford: No formal consultation was carried out prior to the Northern Trust being informed that my Department could no longer provide funding for the Railway Street initiative. Since the Northern Trust was advised of this decision, discussions have been held and further discussions are planned with their senior officials.

My Department contributed to the Executive's Draft Budget for 2015-16 which was issued for public consultation on 3 November. In turn, my Department's draft Budget for 2015-16 has been published for public consultation, which will run until 29 December. I will consider the responses carefully in further decisions regarding funding.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many complaints his Department has received from police offices objecting to pension changes.

(AQW 39194/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department has received over 290 template letters of complaint to date from individuals, some of whom are believed to be police officers. These set out objections to the consultation process on the draft police pension regulations.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38475/11-15, what was the total amount of legal aid (i) paid; and (ii) claimed in this case.

(AQW 39309/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total amount claimed and paid in this case was £312.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37879/11-15, what was the total cost of the courthouse palm scanners, including installation and maintenance.

(AQW 39338/11-15)

Mr Ford: The palm scanners at Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service premises were purchased, installed and are maintained by G4S Secure Solutions (UK) Ltd. Should any repairs be required the associated cost would be met by G4S. Repair costs would not be met from public funds. G4S has advised the NICTS that no repairs have been required and that issues across the NICTS estate have been related to internet connectivity.

All courthouses have experienced internet connectivity issues. G4S is considering installing static Internet Protocol addresses at all sites across the NICTS estate which should resolve any connectivity issues. This cost will be met by G4S.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37879/11-15, what is the estimated cost of repair in these instances; and what assurances he can give that this cost will not be met by public funds.

(AQW 39339/11-15)

Mr Ford: The palm scanners at Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service premises were purchased, installed and are maintained by G4S Secure Solutions (UK) Ltd. Should any repairs be required the associated cost would be met by G4S. Repair costs would not be met from public funds. G4S has advised the NICTS that no repairs have been required and that issues across the NICTS estate have been related to internet connectivity.

All courthouses have experienced internet connectivity issues. G4S is considering installing static Internet Protocol addresses at all sites across the NICTS estate which should resolve any connectivity issues. This cost will be met by G4S.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 37879/11-15, to list the courthouses affected by this issue.

(AQW 39340/11-15)

Mr Ford: The palm scanners at Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service premises were purchased, installed and are maintained by G4S Secure Solutions (UK) Ltd. Should any repairs be required the associated cost would be met by G4S. Repair costs would not be met from public funds. G4S has advised the NICTS that no repairs have been required and that issues across the NICTS estate have been related to internet connectivity.

All courthouses have experienced internet connectivity issues. G4S is considering installing static Internet Protocol addresses at all sites across the NICTS estate which should resolve any connectivity issues. This cost will be met by G4S.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the effectiveness of the Railway Street Addiction Services, Ballymena in preventing crime and reoffending since it was established.

(AQW 39410/11-15)

Mr Ford: The principal aim of the funding provided by my Department was to maintain the provision of a voluntary criminal justice pathway to addiction services for those offenders with substance misuse issues.

A Project Steering Group was established as part of the governance arrangements for Railway Street, with membership drawn from my Department, the Northern Trust, the Police Service and the Probation Board. This Group oversaw the implementation of a number of important initiatives aimed at demonstrating the impact of the Service, including enhancement of existing management information, the implementation of Treatment Outcome Profiles and a Service User Questionnaire, PSNI Case Studies and PBNI risk assessments.

Work was undertaken on the development of an Information Sharing Agreement between the Northern Trust and the PSNI, in consultation with service users, to further explore the link between the treatment provided and offending behaviour.

Overall trends in recorded crime in the Ballymena area since 2010 are broadly reflective of the trends across Northern Ireland. The impact of the service on overall crime rates was, and has remained, difficult to establish definitively, given the many factors which influence local crime rates.

However, the initial results of the developments outlined above pointed towards a positive impact of treatment on the offending behaviour of those engaged with the service.

While I remain supportive of preventative approaches such as this, the financial pressures now faced by my Department mean that I can no longer protect front line services.

Department for Regional Development

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will consider the introduction of parking restrictions in Ulster Street, Brownlow Terrace and Victoria Street areas of Lurgan, to alleviate traffic flow difficulties which are compounded by train passengers parking their cars in these areas.

(AQW 37190/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I am aware of the concerns of residents in this area regarding difficulties finding parking spaces as a consequence of parking associated with Lurgan Train station. Efforts have been made to alleviate this problem, in particular with the provision of an additional 70 car parking spaces at the nearby Wesley Place car park in 2011 and there are additional proposals being brought forward to provide additional parking for the train station.

I also understand that proposals to introduce waiting restrictions in the area to alleviate the problems you have identified are currently being developed and a consultation exercise with local residents has recently taken place and is ongoing.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) whether his Department maintains that permitting taxis in bus lanes will result in an estimated total of 2,000 taxis using the bus lanes; (ii) why his Department's estimates do not correlate with the Department of the Environment's estimate in the report "Review of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis in N Ireland" which estimated that 3,900 taxis were operating in the greater Belfast area; and (iii) whether any assessment has been made of the impact on (a) the success of metro bus and rapid transit; and (b) cycling with eight times the number of taxis using the bus lanes.

(AQW 38359/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In the consultation document "Taxis in Bus Lanes", my Department included figures provided by the Department of the Environment for the number of taxis licensed in Northern Ireland by licence type. With respect to taxis permitted to operate in Belfast, there were 506 public hire, 219 taxi buses and 1532 private hire. Outside of Belfast there were 7629 public hire. In the consultation document, reference was made to an earlier study carried out in 2008 on the six main traffic corridors with bus lanes into Belfast city centre. This study found that the average number of taxis (all licence types) travelling on the routes during the morning peak was 20 per hour – similar to the number of buses.

The Department of the Environment report "Review of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis in Northern Ireland; Table 3-2; Breakdown of taxi vehicles operating in Northern Ireland" details the numbers of taxi by type and registered address and not where they operate. The figures will not therefore correlate. The 3994 figure from Table 3-2, the figure to which I assume you are alluding, is the total of three types of taxi that is, Belfast Public Hire Taxis; Private Hire Taxis; and Public Hire Taxis Outside of Belfast, that are registered to a postal address in the Belfast Metropolitan Area. The figure will therefore include a significant number of taxis that will primarily operate in the Lisburn, Castlereagh, North Down, Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus areas and will not impact on the day-to-day operation of bus lanes. The consultation document focussed on surveyed numbers of taxis using routes with bus lanes rather than overall numbers of different taxi type as not all taxis are licensed to operate in Belfast, and those that are, are not all on the road at one time, with most firms operating shift systems.

In terms of impact, the consultation document acknowledged the 2008 study which collated and assessed data from six main traffic corridors with bus lanes, and compared this data with the findings of a previous assessment undertaken by the University of Ulster in 2005. The study found that bus lanes were then underperforming against targets set by the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, and to allow additional vehicles in the bus lane at that stage would probably contribute to further reduced bus journey speeds. The 2012 consultation document acknowledged this potential impact.

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the projected spend on (i) roads, including improved cycling infrastructure; and (ii) public transport in 2014/15.

(AQW 38390/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Following the outcome of October Monitoring, my Department has some £120 million of resource and some £209 million of capital funding, to spend on road infrastructure.

January Monitoring has yet to be commissioned by the Department for Finance and Personnel, and my Department will submit bids for additional allocations in this exercise.

The current projected spend on Public Transport in 2014/15 is almost £78 million for Resource including accessible transport and over £34 million for Capital spend. My Department also expects to receive almost £2 million in European Union support towards the Translink bus purchase programme and continues to explore options for further European Union support for various transport projects in this financial year and beyond.

In addition, my Department has set aside, in 2014/15, £1million for infrastructure works around schools to promote and encourage active travel to school.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what percentage of Departmental Expenditure Limits is spent on salaries; and (ii) how he intends to reduce this spend in order to make efficiency savings.

(AQW 38739/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In 2013-14 my Department spent 23.7% of its gross non ring fenced Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (cash) and 5% of its gross Capital Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit on salaries and wages.

My Department has already introduced a range of Admin and other savings measures to meet the 4.4% (£15 million) budget reduction agreed by the Executive in 2014-15 and to manage inescapable in year pressures. Measures include a stay on filling all but business critical posts, reductions in agency staff and reductions in overtime, travel and other general administrative expenditure.

Going forward whilst a significant reduction in staff costs will be necessary, staff savings cannot be realised quickly. The rate at which staff reductions can be made will be dependent on the commencement and rate of progress of the voluntary exit scheme which is being taken forward by the Department of Finance and Personnel. My officials will continue to engage with the Department of Finance and Personnel on the development and roll out of voluntary exit / voluntary severance schemes.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development for a breakdown of the work carried out by Enterprise Managed Services Ltd on behalf of NI Water in (i) 2006/07; (ii) 2007/08; and (iii) 2009/10 including the amount paid for each element of the contract.

(AQW 38793/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The contract awarded to Enterprise Managed Services Ltd in January 2007 related to survey and meter installation work. The work commenced in April 2007 following a mobilisation period. Details of the work carried out and the amount paid during each of the years is provided in the table below. The amount paid to the contractor in 2006/07 relates to mobilisation activities.

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
No of Surveys	Nil	15,451	32,977	4,501
No of Meters Installed	Nil	5,341	12,438	4,620
Amount paid	£77k	£608k	£2,505k	£827k

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development for a breakdown of the work carried out by KPL Contracts on behalf of NI Water on the Phase 2 non-domestic metering contract in (i) 2005/06; and (ii) 2006/07, including the amount paid for each element of the contract.

(AQW 38794/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: During the Phase 2 Non-Domestic Metering Contract KPL Contracts completed a total of 53,365 surveys and installed a total of 3,444 meters at an overall cost of £1,668,535.

The specific data, in the form requested, is not held on system and would require a considerable manual exercise to produce and would only be possible at disproportionate cost.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development for (i) a breakdown of the number of new non-domestic customers added to the billing system as a result of the Phase 2 non-domestic water metering contract carried out by KPL Contracts on behalf of NI Water in (a) 2005/06; and (b) 2006/07; and (ii) the number of new non-domestic customers and new-build properties added to the billing system as a result of the Phase 3 Metering contract carried out by Enterprise Managed Services Ltd on behalf of NI Water in (a) 2006/07; (b) 2007/08; (c) 2008/09; and (d) 2009/10.

(AQW 38798/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has advised that the Phase 2 Non-Domestic Metering Contract undertaken by KPL during 2005/06 and 2006/07 is not directly comparable with the Phase 3 Metering Contract undertaken by Enterprise Managed Services Ltd during 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10.

- (i) The purpose of the Phase 2 contract was to identify non-domestic properties and quantify the consumption according to loading units related to the water using fittings and appliances within the property. Meters were then installed at all properties with a loading score above a defined threshold. It is NIW's assessment that all of the 3,444 meters installed by KPL Contracts during 2005/06 and 2006/07 translated into new non-domestic customers on the billing system.
- (ii) The data requested is not held in a manner which allows NIW to differentiate between new non-domestic customers added to the billing system through unmeasured charges, introduced from 1 April 2007, (with subsequent transfer to measured charging) and those new non-domestic customers added to the billing system solely as a result of metering activities undertaken by Enterprise Managed Services Ltd during the years of interest.

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department has taken to clean Londonderry directional road signs that have been vandalised; and how many Londonderry signs have been vandalised.

(AQW 38875/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My officials carry out regular inspections of all public roads and footways so that essential maintenance needs are identified and remedial work can be completed as necessary. During these inspections, all defects are noted, including defective or vandalised signs, in addition to those signs needing cleaning to improve visibility. My Department will then arrange for appropriate action to be taken on a priority basis.

My Department does not hold specific information in relation to the number of Londonderry directional signs that have been vandalised, or the action taken to clean these signs.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development why the Drumlister Road, Sixmilecross has been impassable for almost two weeks; and what action his Department is taking to prevent future flooding of this road and to remedy structural defects in the road.

(AQW 38945/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Drumlister Road is a lightly trafficked rural road which flooded periodically between 6 November 2014 and 18 November 2014.

Following extensive investigatory work by my Department, the cause of the flooding was established as a blockage in a section of piped drain in private property adjacent to the road. While landowners are generally responsible for the maintenance of drains within their property, in this instance the landowner confirmed he was not prepared to take the necessary action. Given the impact on the Drumlister Road, my officials made the decision to undertake the works on the landowner's behalf to resolve the problem, with the intention being to recover the costs of the works from the landowner.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development when the new bus shelter contract is scheduled to commence in 2015.

(AQW 38947/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The existing Bus Shelter Contract with Adshel expires on 31 December 2015. Work is currently underway to have a new contract in place for 1 January 2016.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development why it is necessary for his Department to retain ownership of the Corporation Street Car Park for the development of the York Street Interchange; and whether the 124 car park spaces will be retained as part of this development.

(AQW 39016/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Corporation Street car park is being retained as the land is required to facilitate the construction of the York Street Interchange Scheme, which is at an advanced stage of development. It is expected that the vesting of land for the project will commence early in 2015.

However, my Department will be making temporary arrangements that will allow Belfast City Council to operate the car park until it is required for the scheme. Upon completion of the scheme, any surplus area will be reviewed and, if considered viable, will be offered to Belfast City Council for car parking purposes.

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development how many gully emptying vehicles are based in the Limavady Borough Council area; and whether they are being used to their full capacity.

(AQW 39017/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Transport NI's Operations & Maintenance unit has two vehicles that are available to empty gullies in the Limavady area. One vehicle is a vacuum tanker and the other is a dual-function vehicle, which is generally used as a road sweeper but can also be used for gully cleaning. The vehicles are also used in the Coleraine area and are currently being used to their full capacity.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the recent £5million investment in the Translink fleet, which will update the Coleraine Town service, will also allow surrounding rural areas to receive improved public transport provision.

(AQW 39029/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: All of the buses used to provide town services in Coleraine will be replaced with seven new buses, to provide a smoother, quieter, more fuel efficient and more environmentally-friendly service for the passenger. Currently six of the seven vehicles are in operation in Coleraine, with the seventh expected to enter service shortly. These vehicles were replacements for existing life-expired buses within the current fleet, and are not additional vehicles. They will be used predominately on existing Town Service routes.

My Department currently provides support to Translink from the Rural Transport Fund to provide rural services which would otherwise be uneconomic to run but deemed socially necessary in the Coleraine area. These services are the Causeway Rambler and the Ballycastle to Coleraine service.

My Department also fund the North Coast Community Transport Partnership (NCCTP), and it provides Dial-A-Lift services in rural areas within the Coleraine Council area to members.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of staff employed (i) directly by his Department; and (ii) by it's agencies, who currently earn less than the living wage.

(AQW 39032/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: At present, a total of 440 industrial staff are employed within my Department's TransportNI and earn a basic rate of pay which is marginally less than the current Living Wage figure of £7.85 per hour. An ongoing review of the pay and grading arrangements for NI Civil Service industrial staff is currently considering the rates of pay received by these staff.

In addition to the basic rate of pay, TransportNI operates an incentive bonus scheme allowing many industrial staff to earn bonus payments depending on work satisfactorily completed. Overtime may also be earned if there is a business need to complete certain work e.g. winter maintenance duties, outside of normal hours.

I am advised by Northern Ireland Water that, at present, 17 of its employees earn a rate of pay which is less than £7.85 per hour. All of these staff are employed through a recognised apprenticeship programme and will move to an hourly rate above £7.85 upon successful completion of this programme.

Within Translink, a total of 158 employees currently earn a basic rate of pay which is less than £7.85 per hour, although many of these benefit from holiday and attendance bonuses which technically take them above this Living Wage rate. The figure of 158 includes 14 staff who currently receive the training rates of pay for their respective grades, as well as 13 apprentices.

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to increase the number of train services from Belfast to Newry after 6 pm.

(AQW 39040/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are currently no plans to increase the number of Belfast-Newry services in the short term. However, Translink does recognise the growth potential on the Belfast-Dublin service and has long term plans to increase the frequency of the Belfast-Dublin Enterprise service to an hourly service pattern, subject to the necessary funding being available. Newry will continue to be a key station on Belfast-Dublin services and will therefore benefit from such service enhancements both before and after 6.00pm.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 37402/11-15, to detail (i) the total number of customers who have received additional water, sewerage or trade effluent charges as a result of being undercharged; (ii) the total amount of charges; (iii) the amount of outstanding charges NI Water has written off in that period; and (iv) the percentage of bills that were accurate in each year.

(AQW 39044/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: (i) Between 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2014, 2,767 accounts have received additional water, sewerage or trade effluent charges; (ii) the total amount of additional water, sewerage or trade effluent charges raised during that period was £4.5 million; (iii) the amount of outstanding charges NI Water has written off in that same period for undercharged accounts is £136k; and (iv) 96% of bills were accurate in each year.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an updated breakdown of the costs, or estimated costs, incurred in the recent and continuing rebranding for the establishment of Transport NI.

(AQW 39046/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm no money has been spent on the rebranding of Roads Service to TransportNI, nor are there plans to provide a budget for the rebranding exercise. Changes have been made to electronic templates at no cost, and signage and other changes have been phased in as old stocks have run out and been replaced, or when vehicles are being serviced. Branding of new plant and equipment is already included in the purchase price.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department intends to improve communication between Transport NI and MLAs with regards to proposed capital and resource works in constituencies.

(AQW 39047/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be fully aware that I, as the Minister for Regional Development, am at the despatch box in the House on a regular basis communicating the work of TransportNI across Northern Ireland. In addition, both my officials and I communicate with the Committee for Regional Development on all aspects of TransportNI's work.

Officials also give local councils detailed briefings on programmes twice a year. I have asked for copies of these reports to be placed in the Assembly library on an ongoing basis to ensure that MLAs have the opportunity to view the work of TransportNI.

In addition, my officials are available to deal with enquiries, either verbal or written, from MLAs on such matters.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to introduce new measures to alleviate traffic congestion on the M1, particularly during peak hours.

(AQW 39059/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is very aware of the traffic congestion on the M1 motorway during peak hours. My Department's Traffic Information and Control Centre (TICC) uses a network of CCTV cameras to monitor traffic flow and to work in co-operation with other agencies to ensure any incidents are managed as effectively as possible.

In terms of new measures to alleviate the congestion, my Department has a proposed scheme which would provide a high standard link between the M1 motorway and the A1. However, due to budgetary constraints there is insufficient funding to allow development work on this scheme to proceed at present.

Another measure my Department has been investigating is the possibility of using the motorway hard shoulder as a running lane for traffic. Progress on this, to date, is that a consultant's feasibility report has been received and is currently being considered by my officials.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQO 6893/11-15, to list the projects and their value, which make up the outlined planned capital investment.

(AQW 39120/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My response to AQO 6893/11-15 provided expenditure details in relation to planned capital investment in Fermanagh for the current financial year as set out below.

	2014-15 £'million
Department	3.5
NI Water	12.9
Translink	Nil
Total	16.4

The Department's planned expenditure is summarised below.

Department	2014-15 £'million
Roads major works	0.6
Roads structural maintenance	2.2
Structures	0.1
Local Transport and Safety Measures	0.4
Street Lighting	0.2
Total	3.5

Further detail by project can be found on the report officials presented to Fermanagh Council in November 2013 which can be accessed at the link below:

<http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-details.htm?docid=9387>,

Northern Ireland Water's planned expenditure is summarised below.

Northern Ireland Water	2014-15 £'million
Water Main Rehabilitation-South / South East Zonal Study South East Phase 1 Work Packages	2.705
Water Main Rehabilitation-South / South East Zonal Study South Phase 1 Work Packages	1.964
Garrison Waste Water Treatment Works	0.007
Killyhevlin Water Treatment Works Filter Upgrade	3.397
Clabby Waste Water Treatment Works Upgrade	0.030
Lisnarrick Waste Water Treatment Works	0.615
Killyhevlin Water Treatment Works Improvements to Sludge Settlement System	0.104
Lisnaskea Waste Water Treatment Works Base Maintenance	0.302
Dannys Mill Road Enniskillen Sewer Rehabilitation	0.279
Doochrock West Service Reservoir Rehabilitation	0.130
Drumkeeran Service Reservoir Rehabilitation	0.102
Castle Archdale Waste Water Treatment Works Upgrade	0.508
Derrylin Waste Water Treatment Works Phase 2 Base Maintenance	0.023
Rossory Waste Water Pumping Station Upgrade	0.221
Clabby Road Waste Water Pumping Station Improvements	0.013

Northern Ireland Water	2014-15 £'million
General Maintenance and Requisitions	2.500
Total	12.900

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been set aside for compensation against claims for damage caused by (i) road potholes; (ii) gullies and drains that have not been emptied; and (iii) street lighting that has not been repaired.

(AQW 39126/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not hold details of the information in the format requested.

Mr Ó Muilleoir asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he will take to ensure that families living closest to the proposed new pedestrian and cycle bridge over the River Lagan can access the bridge directly from the Markets area.

(AQW 39206/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department published a feasibility report on the proposed Lagan pedestrian and cycle bridge earlier this year, which recommended that three bridge options be considered further. All of these options span the river at the same location and each would link into the Lagan towpath near the Gas Works. This will enable access to the bridge from the Markets area via the Gasworks or via the towpath close to Central Station. My Department is considering the issue of linkages to and from the bridge on both sides of the river. We are keen to ensure that maximum use of the bridge is made for walking and cycling and will consult with communities about possible links as we develop the proposals for the bridge.

Department for Social Development

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development, on how many occasions since April 2004, when the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) first operated 'introductory' tenancy regime, have the NIHE applied to court for an order for possession in respect of the introductory tenancy, broken down by constituency; and to detail how many of these were successful.

(AQW 37347/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive generally applies to the court for an order for possession of an introductory tenancy as a result of antisocial behaviour or rent arrears. The Housing Executive has advised in respect of:

(a) Antisocial Behaviour

Since April 2004 the Housing Executive applied to the court on 14 occasions for possession of introductory tenancies on the grounds of antisocial behaviour. All 14 applications were successful. The possessions were in the following Parliamentary Constituencies as shown in Table 1 below: -

Table 1: Possessions (Introductory Tenancies) - Antisocial Behaviour

Parliamentary Constituency	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14
East Londonderry		1								
Foyle		1								1
Newry and Armagh			1							1
Upper Bann				1					1	
Belfast North				1		1	1			
Strangford						1				
Belfast East							1	1		
Fermanagh & South Tyrone							1			
Total	0	2	1	2	0	2	3	1	1	2

(b) Rent Arrears

The Housing Executive has advised that figures regarding possessions of introductory tenancies as a result of rent arrears are only available from 2011 because of the introduction of their new Housing Management System. Prior to

that their system was unable to separate introductory and secure tenancy orders obtained. The figures are set out in Table 2 below: -

Table 2: Possessions (Introductory Tenancies) – Rent Arrears

Parliamentary Constituency	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		April 2014 to date	
	Orders obtained	Possession obtained	Orders obtained	Possession obtained	Orders Obtained	Possession obtained	Orders obtained	Possession obtained
West Belfast	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	1
East Belfast	0	0	2	2	4	3	4	0
South Belfast	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
North Belfast	0	0	1	1	5	2	4	1
Lagan Valley	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Strangford	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	0
North Down	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Upper Bann	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Newry & Armagh	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
South Down	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
East Antrim	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Antrim	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
South Antrim	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Mid Ulster	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
East Londonderry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
West Tyrone	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	6	2	10	6	21	10	16	2

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

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development, on how many occasions since 2003, have the Northern Ireland Housing Executive applied to court for an order for possession to a secure tenant; and of these, how many were successful, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 37348/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive generally applies to the court for an order for possession of an introductory tenancy as a result of antisocial behaviour or rent arrears. The Housing Executive has advised in respect of: -

Antisocial Behaviour

Since April 2004 the Housing Executive applied to the court on 14 occasions for possession of introductory tenancies on the grounds of antisocial behaviour. All 14 applications were successful. The possessions were in the following Parliamentary Constituencies as shown in Table 1 below: -

Table 1: Possessions (Introductory Tenancies) - Antisocial Behaviour

Parliamentary Constituency	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14
East Londonderry		1								
Foyle		1								1
Newry and Armagh			1							1

Parliamentary Constituency	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14
Upper Bann				1					1	
Belfast North				1		1	1			
Strangford						1				
Belfast East							1	1		
Fermanagh & South Tyrone							1			
Total	0	2	1	2	0	2	3	1	1	2

Rent Arrears

The Housing Executive has advised that figures regarding possessions of introductory tenancies as a result of rent arrears are only available from 2011 because of the introduction of their new Housing Management System. Prior to that their system was unable to separate introductory and secure tenancy orders obtained. The figures are set out in Table 2 below: -

Table 2: Possessions (Introductory Tenancies) – Rent Arrears

Parliamentary Constituency	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		April 2014 to date	
	Orders obtained	Possession obtained	Orders obtained	Possession obtained	Orders Obtained	Possession obtained	Orders obtained	Possession obtained
West Belfast	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	1
East Belfast	0	0	2	2	4	3	4	0
South Belfast	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
North Belfast	0	0	1	1	5	2	4	1
Lagan Valley	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Strangford	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	0
North Down	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Upper Bann	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Newry & Armagh	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
South Down	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
East Antrim	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Antrim	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
South Antrim	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Mid Ulster	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
East Londonderry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
West Tyrone	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	6	2	10	6	21	10	16	2

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Mr Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Housing Executive properties included in Land and Property Service figures of 31 March 2014 that show 5,103 vacant domestic dwellings in the Belfast Council area; and to provide a breakdown of the properties by Housing Executive District Office area.

(AQW 37490/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that at 31 March 2014 they had 565 vacant properties in the Belfast Council area as follows:

NIHE District Office	Total
North Belfast	177
South & East	134
West Belfast	66
Shankill	188
Belfast Region Total	565

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Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the most up to date information on the number of people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance in each of the last ten years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 37681/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information requested is provided in the table below.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Belfast East	8,120	8,310	8,400	8,400	8,500	8,730	8,900	9,070	9,270	9,430
Belfast North	13,530	13,770	13,880	13,800	14,100	14,610	14,840	15,050	15,330	15,650
Belfast South	7,780	7,940	8,010	8,000	8,160	8,310	8,400	8,550	8,720	8,860
Belfast West	16,610	16,790	16,860	16,870	17,210	17,630	17,750	17,960	18,160	18,450
East Antrim	6,220	6,490	6,660	6,800	6,950	7,190	7,260	7,510	7,710	7,910
East Londonderry	7,180	7,370	7,550	7,660	7,860	8,160	8,320	8,580	8,930	9,290
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	8,410	8,750	8,830	8,990	9,320	9,670	9,770	10,000	10,260	10,550
Foyle	12,850	12,990	13,070	13,220	13,350	13,600	13,660	13,920	14,180	14,490
Lagan Valley	6,460	6,720	6,880	6,970	7,130	7,390	7,510	7,640	7,820	8,090
Mid Ulster	8,880	9,030	9,240	9,450	9,700	10,060	10,210	10,450	10,710	11,040
Newry and Armagh	11,080	11,400	11,460	11,520	11,760	11,970	12,160	12,460	12,700	12,860
North Antrim	7,100	7,360	7,620	7,740	8,000	8,270	8,420	8,700	8,940	9,290
North Down	5,260	5,510	5,680	5,780	5,920	6,100	6,240	6,430	6,600	6,750
South Antrim	6,670	6,910	7,120	7,270	7,510	7,790	7,950	8,290	8,500	8,640
South Down	9,520	9,910	10,060	10,220	10,470	10,760	10,960	11,270	11,610	11,860
Strangford	6,270	6,530	6,690	6,810	6,960	7,220	7,440	7,720	7,880	8,040
Upper Bann	11,230	11,610	11,740	11,960	12,270	12,670	12,750	12,990	13,110	13,360
West Tyrone	11,450	11,780	11,900	12,060	12,390	12,660	12,800	13,070	13,280	13,560
Missing**	1,490	1,460	1,320	1,190	1,010	920	850	810	790	710
Total	166,110	170,630	172,970	174,710	178,570	183,710	186,190	190,470	194,500	198,830

Figures have been rounded to the nearest ten.

** Missing are those records that cannot be correctly allocated to an Assembly Area based on their postcode

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

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development detail the number of homeless families living in temporary accommodation, broken down by Housing Executive District Office, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 38669/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has provided the table below detailing the number of households newly placed in temporary accommodation over the course of the last five years. The figures show all households, including singles and couples.

NIHE Local Office	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14
Antrim Housing	79	73	87	77	55
Armagh Housing	21	23	21	17	31
Ballycastle Housing	19	22	15	6	11
Ballymena DO Housing	127	130	119	121	99
Ballymoney Housing	10	10	20	18	21
Banbridge Housing	29	24	26	18	17
Bangor Housing	89	67	63	77	90
Carrickfergus Housing	52	44	41	35	39
Castlereagh Housing	75	99	75	99	63
Coleraine Housing	172	127	121	106	46
Collon Terrace Housing	146	133	142	146	182
Cookstown Housing	19	11	29	19	11
Craigavon Lurgan Housing	33	27	22	32	33
Craigavon Portadown Housing	25	25	23	18	28
Downpatrick Housing	107	63	72	95	90
Dungannon Housing	132	85	51	63	54
East Belfast Housing	56	71	39	57	103
Fermanagh Housing	117	74	99	87	84
Homelessness Service Unit	247	230	418	340	269
Larne Housing	9	9	10	14	17
Limavady Housing	19	27	19	26	20
Lisburn AS Housing	208	210	171	209	239
Lisburn Dairy Farm Housing	126	108	105	133	112
Magherafelt Housing	14	11	20	10	14
Newry Housing	97	106	104	77	73
Newtownabbey 1 Housing	14	20	12	19	26
Newtownabbey 2 Housing	43	33	33	24	23
Newtownards Housing	72	82	93	103	116
North Belfast Housing	227	151	118	167	167
Omagh District Housing	12	22	17	16	14
Shankill Housing	19	32	20	24	29
South Belfast Housing	169	155	99	138	127
Strabane Housing	19	16	9	9	15
Waterloo Place Housing	105	118	133	141	176
Waterside Housing	50	57	74	89	143
West Belfast Housing	253	264	218	281	352
Total	3011	2759	2738	2911	2989

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Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number applicants who have been assessed under homeless legislation and to whom Full Duty Applicant status applies, broken down by Housing Executive District Office, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 38670/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has provided the table below which details the number of applicants who have presented as homeless and those who were awarded Full Duty Applicant status over the last five years broken down by Housing Executive District office.

NIHE District	2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
	Presented	Awarded FDA								
Belfast West	1,040	431	1,086	501	1,045	529	986	516	912	447
Belfast East	852	386	814	367	797	343	742	352	1276	560
Belfast North	1,146	673	1,117	632	1,212	719	1,395	813	1254	769
Shankill	392	284	471	285	522	304	550	309	529	310
Belfast South	948	546	945	556	984	464	926	446	438	239
Homelessness Service Unit	965	387	1,111	425	725	134	728	179	830	181
Bangor	698	418	804	425	689	337	782	384	735	433
Newtownards	743	490	726	455	695	396	676	447	695	421
Castlereagh	651	368	715	434	714	335	652	366	483	273
Lisburn	1,118	606	1189	644	1,227	583	1,259	586	1348	687
Dairyfarm	450	282	374	218	434	231	420	209	357	206
Downpatrick	525	267	609	299	574	204	528	259	523	283
Banbridge	303	127	345	145	310	120	316	156	324	156
Newry	742	343	770	324	805	322	761	402	767	402
Armagh	223	100	278	122	300	133	259	126	252	127
Brownlow	476	150	533	185	545	160	483	119	461	125
Portadown	316	138	335	122	276	91	282	113	293	106
Dungannon	547	264	611	322	561	271	469	256	449	251
Fermanagh	409	187	475	159	407	87	361	153	374	175
Antrim	539	338	600	388	541	284	615	383	494	276
Ballymena	358	194	904	498	497	203	750	414	405	198
N'abbey 1	763	490	492	245	806	359	456	222	695	385
N'abbey 2	600	349	565	311	628	291	650	358	563	307
Carrick	450	214	500	260	466	193	463	251	456	216
Larne	236	101	291	128	293	120	252	114	266	123
Moyle	112	82	137	100	124	62	121	94	138	110
Ballymoney	156	96	172	102	209	103	185	117	143	97
Coleraine	545	294	586	347	536	267	529	295	533	321
Waterloo Place	461	261	507	270	456	270	576	301	619	368
Waterside	397	246	426	292	571	349	525	333	556	289
Collon Terrace	536	318	590	370	628	373	570	334	600	332
Limavady	282	159	219	130	276	108	295	139	270	127
Magherafelt	163	107	191	121	190	82	204	119	196	99

NIHE District	2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
	Presented	Awarded FDA	Presented	Awarded FDA	Presented	Awarded FDA	Presented	Awarded FDA	Presented	Awarded FDA
Strabane	165	77	204	84	265	85	209	96	236	131
Omagh	119	24	219	92	249	49	206	63	188	56
Cookstown	238	117	247	85	180	60	173	54	204	63
Total	18,664	9,914	20,158	10,443	19,737	9,021	19,354	9,878	18,862	9,649

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Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the areas in which demand for social housing is currently at its highest rate.

(AQW 38800/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department publishes the Northern Ireland Housing Statistics on the website which provides this information by District Council area over the last ten years: -

http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/northern_ireland_housing_statistics_2013-14.pdf

The data shows that the number of people who have applied for a social home (the level of demand) declined in 2013/14, and the number considered to be in need of a social home (those in housing stress) also declined. In contrast, the number of social homes allocated increased.

The areas in which demand for social housing is currently highest are those areas with the highest levels of population, namely Belfast, Londonderry, Lisburn and Newry and Mourne. Demand, as measured by the waiting list, declined in Belfast and Lisburn in 2013/14, and increased slightly in Londonderry and Newry and Mourne.

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Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 38372/11–15, to detail the planned maintenance schemes for Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in Abbeyville Park, Newtownabbey, which are currently included in the Stock Transfer Scheme.

(AQW 38848/11-15)

Mr Storey: It is not possible at this stage to confirm the position regarding this issue. My Department has received a paper from the Housing Executive on their Interim Investment Priorities Plan which is currently being considered.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) what communication his Department have had with Community Technical Aid (CTA); and (ii) the role of CTA, including any current work, within communities in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 38940/11-15)

Mr Storey:

- (i) The Department for Social Development has communicated with Community Technical Aid (CTA) (now known as Community Places) in 2012 in relation to a review of the Regional Infrastructure Programme; between 2009 and 2011 as the lead partner in a consortium to assist DSD in the development of a Strategy and Policy Framework for Urban Regeneration and Community Development in Northern Ireland; and in 2007 when CTA was appointed as an intermediary body to deliver the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme.

In 2012 DSD responded to concerns raised in connection with their unsuccessful expression of interest as lead partner of a consortium bidding to deliver generic support services to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) across NI.

In 2007 CTA was part of a consortium appointed as the intermediary body responsible for the administration of the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme. CTA's role as part of this consortium was to supply technical advice to successful applicants of the funding programme.

- (ii) My Department is not presently in communication with Community Places.

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development how projects currently receiving match funding from Neighbourhood Renewal for current European Social Fund (ESF) projects will be considered for this support in the new ESF programme.

(AQW 38954/11-15)

Mr Storey: The current ESF programme comes to an end on 31 March 2015 and the Department of Employment and Learning has advised that it is currently in the process of taking forward an open call for new applications under a new ESF programme.

All NI Government Departments are facing tight budgetary pressures in 2015-16. My Department will not be able to make any funding commitments until the Executive's final Budget position for 2015-16 has been agreed.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for Breezemount and Ashfield Estate in Donaghadee in the next three financial years.

(AQW 38971/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information regarding Breezemount Estate, Bangor was provided in my response to AQW 38912/11-15. Therefore, I assume that the Member means Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee.

The Housing Executive has advised that the maintenance schemes planned for Beechfield and Ashfield estates in the next three financial years are as follows: -

Year	Scheme	Number of dwellings
2015/16	Kitchens	128
2016/17	-	Nil
2017/18	External Cyclical Maintenance	114

The Housing Executive has also advised that all its properties in these estates have either gas or oil heating.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for Housing Executive properties in Millisle village in the next three financial years.

(AQW 38972/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the maintenance schemes planned for Millisle in the next three financial years are as follows:-

Year	Scheme	Number of dwellings
2015/16	Kitchens	42
2016/17	External Cyclical Maintenance	140
	Kitchens	35
2017/18	-	Nil

The Housing Executive has also advised that all its properties in Millisle have either gas or oil heating apart from refusals from previous schemes.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in Kilcooley Estate, Bangor, have yet to have double glazing installed.

(AQW 38973/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there are 144 dwellings in Kilcooley Estate, Bangor which still require double glazing and they are included in a scheme currently on site and due to finish by March 2015.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for the Redburn area of Holywood in the next three financial years.

(AQW 38974/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the maintenance schemes planned for Redburn Estate, Holywood in the next three financial years are as follows:-

Year	Scheme	Number of dwellings
2015/16	External Cyclical Maintenance	63
2016/17	-	Nil
2017/18	Kitchens	10

The Housing Executive has also advised that:-

- All Housing Executive properties in these estates have either gas or oil heating apart from refusals from previous schemes.

- All kitchens, apart from the 10 above, are between two and seven years old.
- All remaining double glazing is currently on site and due to be completed by March 2015.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in Whitehill Estate, Bangor, have yet to have double glazing installed.

(AQW 38975/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there are three dwellings in Whitehill estate, Bangor which require double glazing. They confirm that all three are included in a scheme which is currently on site and due to finish by March 2015.

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have lost their entitlement to Disability Living Allowance since 2011.

(AQW 38983/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information requested is not available in the format requested.

Table 1 details the number of claimants who lost their entitlement to Disability Living Allowance on application of a renewal claim, in each of the last four years.

Table 1 - Disability Living Allowance - Renewal Claim Disallowed

Year	Number of DLA renewal claims disallowed
2010/11	2,522
2011/12	2,531
2012/13	2,420
2013/14	2,070

Table 2 below details the total number of claimants who had their rate of entitlement to Disability Living Allowance maintained, reduced or disallowed following a supersession* of their award, in each of the last four years.

This data cannot be broken down any further as Department for Work and Pensions IT system used by the Social Security Agency to administer Disability Living Allowance does not capture the different outcomes by each category.

Table 2 - Disability Living Allowance- Supersessions

Year	Number of supersessions where the rate of entitlement was maintained, reduced or disallowed
2010/11	3,953
2011/12	3,874
2012/13	3,135
2013/14	2,750

* A supersession is a review of an existing award instigated by the claimant or the Department as a result of a change in a customer's circumstances.

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Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to provide the definition of a major change of circumstances and to detail any mitigating factors that may be used as a consideration when he outlines the protection for those affected by the introduction of the under-occupation penalty.

(AQW 38984/11-15)

Mr Storey: The proposals contained within the Welfare Reform Bill NI (2012) in respect of under occupancy and the potential impact on individual households here in Northern Ireland, have been the subject of much debate since I have taken up office and indeed over many months before that.

While I am supportive of a policy intent that taxpayers should not be asked to subsidise those on benefits to live in accommodation which many working families would struggle to afford, I am very conscious of the difficulties which introducing the under-occupancy provisions would have for existing tenants in our social rented sector. Given the nature of our housing stock and lack of suitable accommodation, my predecessor gave a commitment that the Executive /Assembly

would seek to protect existing tenants from what many are calling the 'bedroom tax'.

Recognising the real concerns on the impact of under occupancy (bedroom tax) here and the experience in Great Britain, I am proposing that the Executive create a separate fund of over £17 million for each of the first five years of the policy which

will be used to protect current tenants from any reduction in the Housing Benefit for their existing tenancies until a significant change in their personal circumstances or they are offered suitable alternative accommodation. At the end of the 5 year period the policy will be reviewed by the Executive. There are also proposals for new tenants to receive protection in specific circumstances.

The issue of what would be classed as a major change in circumstances which would result in the ending of discretionary protection does need further policy work. In principle, it is proposed that a significant change in circumstances would be defined as a change which makes the claim significantly different from the original application, e.g. increased dependants. My officials are continuing to refine the detailed outworkings of the policy and this will be subject to public consultation including with the Social Development Committee.

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development what procurement procedures were used to obtain the services of Vanguard Ireland Consultancy by the Housing Executive; and to detail to the cost of the services.

(AQW 38986/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the requirement was tendered through the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) using the Open Procedure. The OJEU was published on 4 April 2014 and the requirement was also advertised on the Housing Executive's website and the local press. Six bids were received and evaluated against selection, quality and cost criteria. The evaluation procedure identified Vanguard as the most economically advantageous tender.

Tender costs are regarded as commercially sensitive and therefore the Housing Executive is unable to reveal the exact costs related to the services. However, the Housing Executive has advised that the tendered cost for the service was between £200k and £300k.

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many people were reported for social security sanctions from 2007 to 2011.

(AQW 38992/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information is not available in the format requested. Information on the number of claimants who were referred for social security sanctions is only available from May 2011. For the period 1 May 2011 to 31 March 2012 a total of 21,419 claimants were referred for consideration of a sanction.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 33472/11-15 and SUB 483/2014, for a breakdown by council of the number of tenancy deposits protected and any enforcement action taken.

(AQW 38994/11-15)

Mr Storey: The table below details the total number of deposits protected from 1 April 2014 to 31 October 2014, broken down by council.

Council	No of Deposits
Antrim Borough Council	185
Ards Borough Council	515
Armagh City Council	129
Ballymena Borough Council	223
Ballymoney Borough Council	106
Banbridge District Council	232
Belfast City Council	6934
Carrickfergus Borough Council	310
Castlereagh Borough Council	263
Coleraine Borough Council	897
Cookstown District Council	140
Craigavon District Council	403
Derry City Council	667
Down District Council	293
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	106
Fermanagh District Council	146
Larne Borough Council	163

Council	No of Deposits
Limavady Borough Council	94
Lisburn City Council	319
Magherafelt District Council	123
Moyle District Council	41
Newry & Mourne District Council	219
Newtownabbey Borough Council	445
North Down Borough Council	432
Omagh District Council	172
Strabane District Council	27
Total	13,584

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many housing units in North Down are used by (i) the Housing Executive; and (ii) Housing Associations as temporary accommodation.
(AQW 39004/11-15)

Mr Storey: In relation to (i) the Housing Executive has advised there are currently 41 single let properties it has access to in North Down. If all temporary (single lets) accommodation is occupied in North Down then temporary accommodation can also be sourced in other parts of the Province through the Northern Ireland wide database.

In relation to (ii) Housing Associations have advised that they have 50 units of temporary accommodation in North Down.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development what support exists for people with a disability who are living in severe hardship, due to their Disability Living Allowance being cut, until they can prove that they are eligible for the replacement Personal Independence Payment.
(AQW 39022/11-15)

Mr Storey: No Disability Living Allowance claimants are having their benefit cut until they can prove that they are eligible for Personal Independence Payment. This is because Personal Independence Payment has not been introduced in Northern Ireland.

Subject to the Welfare Reform Bill successfully completing its passage through the Northern Ireland Assembly all existing Disability Living Allowance working age claimants (age 16-64) will be reassessed for Personal Independence Payment over a period of time. Under that reassessment process the claimant continues to receive Disability Living Allowance at the same rate until their PIP eligibility is determined.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department are addressing the delay between a claim for Personal Independence Payment and the receipt of money, which is resulting in an average waiting time of six months for people with a disability.
(AQW 39024/11-15)

Mr Storey: Personal Independence Payment has not been introduced in Northern Ireland. It is part of the Welfare Reform Bill which has not completed its passage through the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of staff employed (i) directly by his Department; and (ii) by its agencies, who currently earn less than the living wage.
(AQW 39033/11-15)

Mr Storey: No member of staff employed by the Department for Social Development (DSD) or by its Agency, the Social Security Agency, who is paid on the Non Industrial pay scales, is paid less than the living wage.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in Conlig have yet to have double glazing installed.
(AQW 39053/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there are eight dwellings in Conlig estate which still require double glazing and confirm that they are included in a scheme currently on site and due to finish by March 2015.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in the Breezemount Estate, Bangor, have yet to have double glazing installed.

(AQW 39054/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that all of their properties in Breezemount estate, Bangor already have double glazing installed.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in the Rathgill Estate, Bangor, have yet to have double glazing installed.

(AQW 39055/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there are 36 dwellings in Rathgill Estate, Bangor which still require double glazing and they confirm that these are all included in a scheme currently on site and due to finish by March 2015.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in the Loughview Estate, Holywood, have yet to have double glazing installed.

(AQW 39056/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they have 61 dwellings in the Loughview Estate, Holywood, which still require double glazing and confirm they are all included in a scheme currently on site and due to finish by March 2015.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in Bloomfield Estate, Bangor, have yet to have double glazing installed.

(AQW 39057/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that all of their properties in the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor already have double glazing installed.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current level of unoccupied social housing in North Down.
(AQW 39076/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that at 31 October 2014 the level of their unoccupied stock in North Down was 33 as detailed in the table below: -

NIHE Office	Awaiting Imminent Relet	Difficult to Let	Undergoing Major Repairs/ Improvements/ Decanting	Pending sale	Squatters / SPED
Bangor	12	12	7	1	1

Housing Associations have advised that the current level of their unoccupied stock in their ownership is as follows: -

Housing Associations	Awaiting Imminent Relet	Difficult to Let	Undergoing Major Repair/Decanting
	15	2	28

In addition, there are currently two Supported Living Unit vacancies which require the approval of an admissions panel before they can be relet.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Employment and Support Allowance claimants in each constituency.

(AQW 39080/11-15)

Mr Storey: The table below details the number of Employment and Support Allowance claimants in each constituency at May 2014.

Constituency	Claimants
Belfast East	5,020
Belfast North	8,860
Belfast South	4,990
Belfast West	8,730
East Antrim	4,330

Constituency	Claimants
East Londonderry	5,980
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	4,570
Foyle	8,100
Lagan Valley	4,030
Mid Ulster	5,400
Newry And Armagh	6,440
North Antrim	5,700
North Down	3,390
South Antrim	4,290
South Down	5,800
Strangford	3,990
Upper Bann	6,950
West Tyrone	6,110
Unknown	1,180
Total	103,860

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

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people who have (i) applied for; and (ii) been awarded a short term advance of benefit, since April 2013, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 39092/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information requested is not available. Northern Ireland legislation does not currently provide for Short Term Benefit Advances as this is included in the Welfare Reform Bill. However, under the existing Discretionary Social Fund Scheme Crisis Loan alignment payments, which will be replaced by Short Term Benefit Advances, are made to people awaiting their first payment of benefit, which is paid in arrears. Crisis Loan payments made in these circumstances are intended to cover the day to day living expenses until the first benefit payday, following which full payment of benefit can be made. The number of Crisis Loan alignment payments applied for and awarded from April 2013 until 30 June 2014, broken down by constituency is shown in the Table below:

Constituency Area	01/04/2013 – 31/03/2014		01/04/2014 – 30/06/2014 ***	
	Applications *	Awards *	Applications *	Awards *
Belfast East	470	410	100	90
Belfast North	1640	1450	330	270
Belfast South	550	500	100	90
Belfast West	1,350	1,270	250	220
East Antrim	750	610	140	120
East Londonderry	640	560	170	150
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	320	290	100	80
Foyle	2,890	2,440	290	250
Lagan Valley	310	290	80	70
Mid Ulster	610	520	80	70
Newry And Armagh	610	520	120	100
North Antrim	760	620	140	120
North Down	410	350	70	60
South Antrim	550	470	110	100

Constituency Area	01/04/2013 – 31/03/2014		01/04/2014 – 30/06/2014 ***	
	Applications *	Awards *	Applications *	Awards *
South Down	450	390	120	100
Strangford	500	410	120	90
Upper Bann	480	430	80	70
West Tyrone	770	640	40	40
Unknown **	560	500	170	150
Total	14,610	12,660	2600	2220

* Figures rounded to the nearest 10, Total may not sum due to roundings.

** Where it was not possible to allocate Applications/awards to a Constituency they were classified as Unknown.

*** The period ending 30/06/2014 is the most up to date information available.

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Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, have yet to have double glazing installed.

(AQW 39151/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there is only one dwelling in Beechfield estate which requires double glazing and it is included in a scheme currently on site and due to finish by March 2015.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in the Ashfield Estate, Donaghadee, have yet to have double glazing installed.

(AQW 39152/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that all of their dwellings in the Ashfield estate in Donaghadee already have double glazing.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in Millisle have yet to have double glazing installed.

(AQW 39153/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they have 13 dwellings in Millisle that still require double glazing. They confirm that all 13 are included in a scheme which is currently on site and due to finish by March 2015.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in the Churchill area of Bangor have yet to have double glazing installed.

(AQW 39154/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that all of their properties in the Churchill estate in Bangor already have double glazing.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in Springwell Estate, Groomsport, have yet to have double glazing installed.

(AQW 39155/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that there are 20 dwellings in Springwell estate which require double glazing. They confirm that all 20 are included in a scheme which is currently on site and due to finish by March 2015.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development whether he intends to extend the temporary work available for surplus staff from the Driver and Vehicle Agency offices in Coleraine with the Child Maintenance Services.

(AQW 39179/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Department was able to provide the Department of the Environment with temporary work for the Driver and Vehicle Agency staff in Coleraine until December 14. This work was in preparation for Phase 2 of Child Maintenance Reform. The preparation exercise conducted in Coleraine is now in the final stages of completion and will come to a conclusion as initially anticipated at the end of December 2014.

While I sympathise with the situation faced by the Driver and Vehicle Agency staff in Coleraine, I am unfortunately not in a position to extend the temporary work beyond December 2014.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans the Housing Executive has to replace the wooden eaves and fascia of the pensioners' bungalows at Drumawhey Gardens in Kilcooley Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 39197/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the bungalows at Drumawhey Gardens, Kilcooley, Bangor, are programmed for External Cyclical Maintenance works in 2015/16, at which stage the eaves, fascias and all external elements will be surveyed and attended to as required.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the plans, including timescale, of the transfer of the pensioners' bungalows at Drumawhey Gardens in Kilcooley Estate, Bangor from the Housing Executive to a Housing Association.

(AQW 39199/11-15)

Mr Storey: It is not possible at this stage to confirm the position regarding this issue. My Department has received a paper from the Housing Executive on their Interim Investment Priorities Plan which is currently being considered. However, once a revised programme is agreed the Housing Executive will write to all of the affected tenants to clarify if they are to remain in the programme and if so, the timescale for the transfer of properties.

Additionally, given the delays in the programme to date I have agreed to planned maintenance schemes being undertaken for the properties that had been included in the original Stock Transfer Programme on the understanding and expectation that any investment is reflected in the Tenanted Market Value in any future stock transfer to ensure the appropriate use of public money.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes are estimated to have been the subject of Equity Release Schemes as of 31 December 2013.

(AQW 39295/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department does not hold statistics on the number of homes that have availed of equity release schemes, which allow households to borrow money secured against the value of their home (lifetime mortgages) or sell part or all of their home (home reversion plans). Such schemes can give households a lump sum, regular income or both.

Equity release schemes are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and the joint FCA/Bank of England Mortgage Lenders and Administrators Statistical Release for Q3 of 2013 (up to 31 December 2013) indicates that 3.4% of new lending within that quarter was for purposes other than house purchase or remortgage and includes lifetime and equity release mortgages.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

(AQW 39302/11-15)

Mr Storey: As at August 2014 there were 199,880 people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance in Northern Ireland.

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Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost of removing graffiti from Housing Executive properties in North Down in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 39303/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the cost of removing graffiti from their properties in North Down in each of the last two financial years was as follows: -

- 2012/13 £43,267.15
- 2013/14 £45,080.23

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been evicted from Housing Executive properties for anti-social behaviour, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 39304/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the number of people who have been evicted from Housing Executive properties for anti-social behaviour in each of the last two years is as follows:-

- 2012/13 – 8
- 2013/14 – 7

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been evicted from Housing Executive properties for failure to pay rent, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 39305/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that the number of people who have been evicted from Housing Executive properties for failure to pay rent, in each of the last two years is as follows:-

- 2012/13 – 58
- 2013/14 – 82

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been evicted from Housing Executive properties for not residing in the property, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 39306/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that over the last two years they recovered 417 of their properties following the service of Notices of Non-Occupation (Articles 28 and 10) and Abandonment Notices (Articles 41 and 9). The figures are broken down as follows:-

- 2012/13 203 properties
- 2013/14 214 properties

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there is a cost when transferring Housing Executive properties to housing associations.

(AQW 39354/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Stock Transfer Programme is overseen by the Housing Executive and they have advised that there are a number of costs when transferring properties to a housing association.

These include staff costs borne by the Housing Executive regarding the administration of the various stages of the stock transfer process and fees regarding:

- hiring a venue to conduct the consultation process;
- legal assistance in preparing the transfer documentation and conveyance;
- the services of an Independent Tenant Advisor; and
- the conduct of the Tenant Ballot by an independent organisation.

Following a review of the Stock Transfer Programme earlier this year, I (and the Housing Executive Board) have now endorsed a revised approach as one element of a wider programme to improve and invest in NIHE properties. In broad terms, the programme will be reconfigured into a smaller number of schemes with each scheme comprising larger bundles of properties based on locality. The smaller number of schemes will ensure the process is less resource intensive and will therefore reduce the cost of the process.

Stock Transfer is a valuable programme which reduces the Housing Executive's overall investment requirements and potentially provides a capital receipt to fund investment in other areas (subject to a tenanted market valuation of the properties to be transferred).

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are plans to install gas in Housing Executive properties in Millisle.

(AQW 39355/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they have installed gas heating in 19 of their homes in Millisle. The other Housing Executive properties in Millisle with oil heating systems will be replaced with gas as they reach the end of their useful life, currently 15 years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been prosecuted for benefit fraud in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39356/11-15)

Mr Storey: The table below shows the number of people who have been prosecuted for benefit fraud in each of the last three years and the number from 1 April 2014 to 31 October 2014.

Financial Year	Prosecuted
2011-12	527
2012-13	570
2013-14	462
2014 -15 (up to 31/10/14)	192
Total	1751

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Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Queen's Parade project, Bangor.

(AQW 39357/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department is taking the lead to progress proposals for the comprehensive development of the Queen's Parade. Over recent months good progress has been made and the Department has agreed the purchase a number of properties required to complete the proposed site boundary and negotiations to acquire the remaining property are ongoing with owners. A planning application has been submitted and the Department is aiming to attain planning approval for the Queen's Parade scheme by March 2015.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown of what was funded from the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund in respect of the award to Lurgan Golf Club; and what account was taken of the fact that driving range facilities already existed at the council owned facility at Silverwood, Lurgan.

(AQW 39382/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Lurgan Golf Club Neighbourhood Renewal Grant covered the cost of provision of a covered driving bay, lighting, and the purchase and installation of equipment.

The Silverwood facility is located outside the Neighbourhood Renewal Area and does not have the means to provide the free golf programme for young people from the Neighbourhood Renewal Area along the lines of that being provided through the Lurgan Golf Club project.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the number of landlords registered under the Landlord Registration Scheme, broken down by local council.

(AQW 39423/11-15)

Mr Storey: The table below details the number of landlords registered between February 2014 and November 2014, broken down by council area of the address provided as the permanent residence of the landlord and the address of any tenancies.

Council	Number of Landlords (Resident Postcode)	Number of Tenancies
Antrim Borough Council	324	652
Ards Borough Council	593	1,011
Armagh City Council	219	372
Ballymena Borough Council	309	589
Ballymoney Borough Council	123	254
Banbridge District Council	246	379
Belfast City Council	1,457	7,490
Carrickfergus Borough Council	254	530
Castlereagh Borough Council	424	692
Coleraine Borough Council	334	1,035
Cookstown District Council	154	303
Craigavon District Council	355	1,114
Derry City Council	316	1,079
Down District Council	433	682
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	218	377
Fermanagh District Council	190	356
Larne Borough Council	235	762
Limavady Borough Council	89	199
Lisburn City Council	739	986
Magherafelt District Council	184	279
Moyle District Council	73	140
Newry & Mourne District Council	285	444
Newtownabbey Borough Council	523	1,234

Council	Number of Landlords (Resident Postcode)	Number of Tenancies
North Down Borough Council	704	1,213
Omagh District Council	186	253
Strabane District Council Council	111	271
Outside Northern Ireland	488	-
Not Allocated	354	609
Total	9,920	23,305

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Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development whether the planned changes to gambling legislation will include the game of poker.

(AQW 39461/11-15)

Mr Storey: Under current Northern Ireland gambling law, poker is legal under certain circumstances.

My Department is currently working on new gambling legislation; I do not, however, propose to relax the current restrictions in relation to poker.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the proposed upgrades to Waterside Northern Ireland Housing Executive housing stock, to detail (i) when it will start; (ii) the expected completion date; and (iii) the number of houses in Waterside that will have the current 'retrofit' double glazing replaced by upgraded double glazed windows.

(AQW 39468/11-15)

Mr Storey: The table attached, provided by the Housing Executive, gives details of the schemes planned to improve NIHE homes in Waterside including schemes to upgrade retrofit double glazing. As with all schemes the number of properties can change as surveys are carried out and start dates are tentative and subject to available finance.

Scheme	Number of dwellings	Estimated start date	Estimated completion date
Waterside Heating Replacement	97	March 2015	July 2015
Claudy/Lettershandoney External Cyclical maintenance	155	May 2015	February 2016
Retrofit double glazing	336	June 2015	January 2016
Retrofit double glazing	338	August 2015	March 2016
Stevenson Park/Duddy Court Kitchen Replacement	185	August 2015	May 2016

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Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are plans to install gas in Housing Executive properties in Beechfield Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 39484/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they have installed gas heating in 109 of their homes in the Beechfield estate. The Housing Executive plan is that the other properties in Beechfield estate with oil heating systems, apart from a few where tenants have refused a change of heating, will be replaced with gas as they reach the end of their useful life, which is currently 15 years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are plans to install gas in Housing Executive properties in Whitehill Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 39485/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they have installed gas heating in 216 of their homes in the Whitehill estate. The Housing Executive plan is that the other properties in Whitehill estate with oil heating systems, apart from a few where tenants have refused a change of heating, will be replaced with gas as they reach the end of their useful life, which is currently 15 years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are plans to install gas in Housing Executive properties in Conlig.

(AQW 39486/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they have installed gas heating in 34 of their homes in Conlig. The Housing Executive plan is that the other properties in Conlig with oil heating systems, apart from a few where tenants have refused a change of heating, will be replaced with gas as they reach the end of their useful life, which is currently 15 years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many households are deemed to be in fuel poverty.

(AQW 39488/11-15)

Mr Storey: The 2011 Northern Ireland House Condition Survey shows that 42% (294,200) of households in Northern Ireland were in fuel poverty.

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Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) how many new social homes were built by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and housing associations in the last five years, broken down by constituency; and (ii) how many (a) older people; (b) people with a disability; and (iii) people seeking ground floor accommodation have secured any of these homes.
(AQW 39547/11-15)

Mr Storey: I understand that the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled (NIID), which is the independent organisation whose decision it was to close the facility, has advised the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) that it will work with the Trust to ensure that the closure of Stewart Memorial House is done in a timescale that allows individuals to be placed in alternative suitable accommodation.

The NIID has also advised the Trust that they will not close the home until every resident has an appropriate placement elsewhere. The Trust will work with those residents and their families to ascertain their preferences and source appropriate alternative placements. The SEHSCT has also established a project group to manage the closure of the home and the Trust is conducting a scoping exercise to identify current provision in the North Down and Ards area, and further afield where appropriate.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission what provisions are in place, where an MP is receiving rental assistance from Westminster for office accommodation, to ensure that an MLA does not receive rental assistance which would produce rental support, when combined with the Westminster payment, above the approved Assembly valuation.

(AQW 39011/11-15)

Mrs Cochrane (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The independent valuations undertaken on behalf of the Assembly Commission are solely to verify and assess the appropriateness of rental values to be claimed from Office Cost Expenditure (OCE) for Members of the Legislative Assembly. These valuations are for properties which are used by Members in performing their Assembly duties. MPs are bound by the provisions of the guidance and rules issued by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA). These are distinct from those issued by the Independent Financial Review Panel (IFRP).

The limit on the rental payments that can be made from OCE is set out in the IFRP Determination. The Determination makes no provisions for reducing or limiting the level of financial support that is available to MLAs in the circumstances where a constituency office is shared with an MP.

IPSA guidelines outline a very specific set of circumstances when an MP is required to submit a valuation in respect of the rental of a constituency office. The valuation report obtained by the Assembly Commission has no locus within the IPSA guidelines. Therefore, the amount that can be claimed from IPSA is calculated on a different basis to the support that can be claimed under the IFRP Determination by MLAs.

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission what action it will take in light of the claims made in the BBC Spotlight programme of 18 November 2014 on MLAs' expenses.

(AQW 39012/11-15)

Mrs Cochrane (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission takes all allegations of financial misconduct by Members or others very seriously. There are a number of key policies and frameworks in place to ensure that such allegations are considered and investigated appropriately. If it appears that a Member or former Member has defrauded the Assembly, then this should and will be passed to the appropriate authorities. If it is shown that fraud has been committed, appropriate action will be taken.

The Assembly Commission will review the information that has been broadcast and will seek to take the appropriate action. It will review how it delivers the framework of financial support for Members and seek to improve where possible and necessary.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 12 December 2014

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they expect to be in a position to announce progress on further uses for the former army base at Ballykelly, in addition to the relocation of the headquarters of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

(AQW 36627/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Following the conclusion of the soft market testing exercise on the Shackleton site earlier this year, when over 40 expressions of interest were received, officials have been considering future options with a view to maximising the benefits that could be provided by developments on the site.

We hope to be making a decision in relation to the site shortly.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) how much funding has been allocated to the Household Energy and Thermal Efficiency Programme; and (ii) whether a panel of technical experts has been established to advise on the nature and implementation of this programme.

(AQW 36736/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

- (i) No specific funding has been allocated for the implementation of the Household Energy and Thermal Efficiency Programme.
- (ii) Technical experts have been secured by the Strategic Investment Board through the Social Change Delivery Unit to advise on the nature and implementation of this programme.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what role the Head of the Civil Service had in initiating consideration of providing public funding for the Frampton/Martinez fight; and at whose direction or suggestion was any such action taken.

(AQW 37000/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM was approached by Cyclone Promotions regarding proposals for the Titanic Showdown. The Head of the Civil Service asked the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to meet with Cyclone Promotions and consider its proposals.

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide a breakdown of staff within the Victims and Survivor Service, including the total number of staff, broken down by job title.

(AQW 38364/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As at 10 November 2014 there are 26.08 full time equivalent posts within the Victims and Survivors Service as follows:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ Chief Executive Officer (interim) | ■ Individual Needs Programme Processor |
| ■ Client Services and Programme Manager | ■ Communications Officer |
| ■ Health and Wellbeing Officer | ■ Finance and Governance Accountant |
| ■ Programmes Officer | ■ Finance and Governance Officer |
| ■ Programmes Admin | ■ Human Resources Officer |
| ■ Client Services Officer | ■ Corporate Finance Officer |
| ■ Victims Support Officer | ■ Verification Officer |
| ■ Receptionist | ■ Procurement Officer |
| ■ Individual Needs Claims Processor | |

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much the Equality Commission has spent to date in their action against Ashers Bakery.

(AQW 38424/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Equality Commission has advised it has spent £1,137 to date assisting this case.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of whether the action brought by the Equality Commission against Ashers Bakery amounts to a prudent use of public funds.

(AQW 38425/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and, as such, is independent from Government and Ministers in respect of its operation.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the long term vision for the Shackleton site at Ballykelly; and what interest has been received from the community voluntary sector.

(AQW 38521/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Future options are being considered with a view to maximising the benefits that could be provided by development of the site. We are aware of interest in specific parts of the site from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and from NI Water. Accordingly, we have decided to look at dividing the site into lots.

A soft market testing exercise was completed earlier this year and we received several expressions of interest from local community groups. Officials have had a number of meetings with the local community association in Ballykelly.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in their Department's Equality Unit.

(AQW 38634/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The OFMDFM Equality Unit currently employs 3 full-time members of staff and a Grade 7 who allocates 30% of their time to this role costing £171,870 per annum.

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail how much has been (i) spent; and (ii) allocated to projects from the Social Investment Fund, broken down by constituency, in each month since May 2011.

(AQW 39110/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is not possible to break Social Investment Fund (SIF) expenditure or allocation into individual parliamentary constituencies as there is not a one-to-one correlation between SIF zone and constituency.

Details of funding allocated to projects within each zone can be found on the OFMDFM website.

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the accomplishments of the Social Investment Fund to date.

(AQW 39111/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: To date, 9 area plans for each of the social investment zones have been completed. The extensive assessment of the projects contained within each of the plans has resulted in the commitment of £34.4 million to 23 projects across all 9 SIF Zones. This is the main accomplishment of SIF to date and the committed expenditure will help to build pathways to employment, end dereliction, increase community services and tackle the systemic issues linked to deprivation which are the key objectives of SIF.

This work has been carried out in conjunction with the local community through the Steering Groups set up in each of the 9 SIF Zones which comprise local political, community and business representatives. A further accomplishment is that this involvement has led to increased capacity within community organisations and has enhanced working relationships with the Department.

Mr Ó Muilleoir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what proposals they have to work with the Child Poverty Alliance, in light of its recent "Beneath the Surface: Child Poverty in Northern Ireland" report.

(AQO 7104/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Child Poverty Alliance has been consulted in the development of the revised Child Poverty Strategy. Officials met with representatives of the Alliance during public consultation and since the close of the consultation. The Alliance was also invited to participate in the review of the previous Child Poverty Strategy.

The issues raised by representatives of the Alliance and other stakeholders have been taken on board in drafting the new Strategy.

OFMDFM sponsored the launch of 'Beneath the Surface: Child Poverty in Northern Ireland' Report on 3 November.

The Child Poverty Alliance's report highlights a number of key issues, including the problem of 'in-work poverty', childcare and the impact of poverty on education and calls for further dialogue about what needs to be done to tackle child poverty.

Tackling poverty and disadvantage is a priority of this Executive and we recognise that this will take a sustained and concerted action from many agencies and organisations and key stakeholders through effective partnership working.

Looking forward, it is proposed that the Child Poverty Alliance will be centrally involved in assisting in the implementation of the new Child Poverty Strategy, which we plan to publish shortly.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the two locations for the Urban Villages Projects were selected; and how they will deliver cross-community contact and reconciliation.

(AQW 39242/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Urban Villages regeneration project aims to use innovative design to create and stabilise change within communities.

In order to establish locations that have the potential to create community space, improve the area and its aesthetics and include community focus the following high level selection criteria have been used to establish need and capacity:-

- (i) Community relations issues;
- (ii) Anti-social behaviour;
- (iii) Deprivation;
- (iv) Limited commercial heart/services;
- (v) Community appetite and infrastructure for improvement.

We announced the first two locations earlier this year as Colin Town Centre and Lower Newtownards Road.

Colin has been chosen as an Urban Village because of the specific challenges it faces as a large urban area with a high population of roughly 26,000, which suffers from a distinct lack of social infrastructure.

The Lower Newtownards Road has been chosen as an Urban Village as it is a recognised area of high urban deprivation. It is an area blighted by dereliction and cross-community tension, and it is issues such as these that the Urban Village vision is designed to assist.

The aim of the commitment is to build shared culture, spaces, identity and crossover and stakeholder engagement is progressing regarding development of these locations. We are also examining opportunities to link in with existing programmes/initiatives in the areas involved so that we can maximise good relations outcomes and benefits in both locations.

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an annual breakdown of all costs incurred to date in relation to Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly.

(AQW 39270/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The annual breakdown of costs incurred to date are provided in the table below.

Shackleton Barracks - Annual Costs	11/12 (7 October 2011– 31 March 2012)	12/13	13/14	14/15 (to 31/10/14)
(i) Maintenance	£96,041	£214,715	£83,563	£21,051
(ii) Security	£139,778	£264,989	£257,497	£150,001
(iii) Utilities	£101,762	£112,429	£123,937	£51,410
(iv) Other Costs	£7,593	£5,916	£11,239	£63,224
Total	£345,174	£598,049	£476,236	£285,686

Mr Douglas asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Urban Villages Regeneration Project.

(AQO 7107/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: One of the seven core headline actions committed to within Together: Building a United Community is the development of four Urban Villages, to create and stabilise change within areas of our community.

We announced the first two Urban Villages on 20 March 2014 as Colin Town Centre and Lower Newtownards Road.

Stakeholder engagement is progressing regarding development of these locations. The Colin Town Centre village is well developed with an existing masterplan having been launched. The urban village proposed for the Newtownards Road is at a less advanced stage.

OFMDFM has provided £350k, secured through June Monitoring and allocated in October Monitoring to initiate and enable progression of developmental work on the Urban Villages programme in Colin Town Centre and the Newtownards Road.

Governance structures have been put in place and resources have been secured from the Strategic Investment Board to assist with both projects.

Each urban village area will be recognised as a zone for development and the Department for Social Development has now convened project Boards to coordinate and oversee the planning, design and delivery of all aspects of the urban villages. These will be supported by the Urban Villages Strategy Board, chaired by Junior Minister Bell and Junior Minister McCann, and the Urban Villages Programme Board, chaired by the DSD Senior Responsible Owner for the programme.

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Sexual Orientation Strategy will be published.
(AQO 7108/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have regularly stated our commitment to producing a Sexual Orientation Strategy in the Assembly and in the text of the good relations strategy, Together: Building a United Community.

To achieve this commitment we asked officials to commence a public consultation process. The first phase of this process ended on 6 June.

Analysis of responses to this 12 week consultation period has begun and the results will be used to inform the content of a draft Sexual Orientation Strategy.

The draft Strategy will be referred to the Executive for final agreement and publication. A further 12 week period of public consultation will then take place.

We would anticipate that the Sexual Orientation Strategy would be published after this final phase of consultation.

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the internet safety implications of the issues raised by the BBC NI Spotlight Programme broadcast on the 11 November 2014.
(AQO 7110/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The issues raised by this programme were both disturbing and alarming. Evidence was highlighted on the posting of images of schoolgirls from Northern Ireland on an adult pornographic website.

These practices were shocking and entirely unacceptable.

They are a sharp reminder of the online dangers which children and young people face such as pornography, online grooming and cyberbullying.

The programme reinforces the message that OFMDFM has been highlighting and promoting over the last few years in respect of e-safety issues.

There is no room for complacency here.

To increase public awareness of these dangers, Junior Minister Bell and Junior Minister McCann have participated in events such as Safer Internet Day including visits to local schools and engaging with the UK Safer Internet Centre.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has been working closely with OFMDFM on e-safety matters. It has been agreed that the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland should be commissioned formally to develop a Northern Ireland e-safety strategy on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is currently seeking the support of Executive Ministers to obtain additional resources to enable the Safeguarding Board to take forward this work on the development of a Northern Ireland e-safety strategy.

A follow-up meeting is scheduled to take place involving OFMDFM, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Safeguarding Board. The purpose of this meeting will be to discuss issues arising from the Spotlight programme including the most appropriate way forward in relation to the 'gapping and mapping' exercise.

Mr Craig asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the recent Spotlight programme highlighting the inappropriate and unauthorised use of local teenagers' photographs on pornographic websites, for an update on e-safety.
(AQO 7114/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The issues raised by this programme were both disturbing and alarming. Evidence was highlighted on the posting of images of schoolgirls from Northern Ireland on an adult pornographic website.

These practices were shocking and entirely unacceptable.

They are a sharp reminder of the online dangers which children and young people face such as pornography, online grooming and cyberbullying.

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Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 38282/11-15, when the findings of the stakeholder consultation on the review of North West Gateway Initiative will be available.

(AQW 39389/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: At its plenary meeting in October 2014 the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) noted the findings of the stakeholder review of the North West Gateway Initiative (NWGI) and agreed that these should now form the basis of further consultation with relevant departments. This work is continuing and it will be for the Council to consider at a future stage the publication of any material relating to the review.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the development of mountain bike trails in Fermanagh.

(AQW 39235/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Forest Service is committed to working in partnership with local government and other organisations to secure a wide range of recreational facilities and attractions for the benefit of the local communities and visitors to Fermanagh. This includes facilitating viable proposals to deliver a range of cycling products, including mountain biking.

In the continuation of this work my officials in Forest Service are liaising closely with Fermanagh District Council providing forest information for a mountain bike scoping study being carried out on behalf of the Council in Lough Navar forest.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how jobs currently located in Dundonald House will be relocated; and what is the total estimated cost of this proposal.

(AQW 39251/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There are 4 Relocation Projects currently being taken forward to advance the relocation of the DARD Headquarters to a rural location. The question relates to relocations from Dundonald House and these are as follows:

1. Forest Service to move 51 posts from Dundonald House to Fermanagh by June 2015;
2. Fisheries Division to move 51 posts from Dundonald House to South Down by June 2015;
3. DARD HQ staff to move from Dundonald House to Ballykelly in two phases:-
 - 350 posts to move by the end of 2017
 - The remainder (approximately 300 posts) to move by the end of 2020.

An HR Strategy has been developed to guide the overall direction regarding retention, relocation and redeployment of staff.

Staff whose posts are impacted by the relocation programme have been surveyed to identify those who wish to relocate and those who would prefer to be redeployed. DARD has also invited Expressions of Interest from the wider NI Civil Service to identify others who would be interested in a post in one of the DARD regional locations.

This information will inform the retention, resourcing and redeployment elements of the HR Strategy.

The costs for the 3 relocation projects which impact on DARD staff in Dundonald House are £43.1m, made up of Capital costs of £28.8m and Resource Costs of £14.3m. These costs are the total costs over the 25 year period addressed within the Business Cases.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department, or its arm's-length bodies, have any plans to develop Tievenadarragh Forest in Loughinisland, Co Down.

(AQW 39252/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service manages Tievenadarragh forest in line with best practice sustainable forest management standards. My Department currently has no plans to develop Tievenadarragh for any other purpose and I am not aware of any development interest from any other organisation or body.

A review of Forest Management plans for all DARD Forest Service woodlands in County Down is due for completion in 2015 and a key part of this process will be consultation with other Government bodies, as well as the local Council and members of the public.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures can be put in place to help the plight of dairy farmers whose production costs are higher than the price they receive from the sale of their milk.

(AQW 39284/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The price that farmers receive for their milk is a commercial matter and therefore not something in which I can directly intervene. However, I do believe that farmers should receive a fair price for the milk that they produce. I and my Department will therefore continue to work closely with the local dairy industry to ensure that it is competitive and profitable.

I am conscious that, as the local dairy industry trades in global markets it experiences significant volatility in milk prices. In view of this my Department's dairy advisers have been disseminating relevant information on managing cash flow and briefing on steps to assist with cash flow has also been provided to the Ulster Farmers' Union.

In addition, I met recently with the Ulster Farmers' Union to discuss the cash flow concerns being experienced by many dairy farmers. To help address this matter I proposed a joint meeting with the local banks and arrangements for this are in hand. I also agreed to explore potential taxation measures to help farmers cope with market volatility.

I understand that the role of hedging contracts was among the issues identified by the Agri-Food Strategy Board Dairy Sub-Group for consideration in the medium term. The members of this group agreed that the industry needs to build resilience to cope with the peaks and troughs of the dairy market and flagged the need for better integration along the supply chain and effective sharing and mitigation of risk. As this is a commercial matter farmers may want to explore this option directly with their milk buyer.

Following the introduction of the Russian ban on dairy products from the EU I wrote to the DEFRA Secretary of State, Elizabeth Truss MP, expressing my concerns and pressing her to lobby for appropriate EU support for the dairy sector. I also met with Commissioner Ciolos when I highlighted the impact the Russian ban was having on our dairy industry and requested that the Commission explores alternative markets for products. I will monitor the situation closely and will continue to press Defra and the Commission to take prompt and effective action to support the dairy sector, as appropriate and necessary.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 38551/11-15, to detail whether (i) there are plans to extend the number departmentally funded Gangmasters Licensing Authority officers, particularly during seasonal work periods; and (ii) any inspections or site visits by the current officers led to detections or reports of alleged unlicensed gangmastering and/or any associated concerns.

(AQW 39430/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The approach taken by the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) here allows for the deployment of enforcement officers according to a risk based assessment or acting on specific intelligence. This approach enables seasonal work patterns to be taken into consideration when planning enforcement activities. My Department monitors the enforcement work conducted by GLA officers here and maintains close communication links with GLA headquarters staff to remain informed of any developments to the GLA enforcement regime which may have implications for the operation of GLA in the north of Ireland. At this time there are no plans to increase the number of departmentally funded GLA officers.

Regarding the outcome of GLA enforcement activity here, I can advise that from 2010 to date, there have been 8 prosecution cases for the offences of acting as an unlicensed gangmaster and using an unlicensed gangmaster under the 2004 Act. In addition, one prosecution file is currently with the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) for direction and a further 6 prosecution files are being prepared by GLA officers here. I can also advise that, since 2010, there have been 20 arrests for offences under the Act, 36 interviews under caution, 17 formal warnings issued in lieu of prosecution, and 5 GLA licences revoked for serious breaches of licensing standards.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many dog licences have been issued in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39890/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Dog control is legislated for here by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. Councils implement this legislation and provide statistics to my Department regarding its operation. These statistics are collated on an annual basis.

The number of dog licences issued here in each of the last three years remains the same as previously advised to you in my response to AQW 30846/11-15 and are as detailed in Table 1 below.

Information in respect of 2014 should be available around February 2015.

Table 1 – Dog licences issued

Year	Number of dog licences issued
2011	130,667
2012	123,034
2013	129,180

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she was invited to attend the Armistice Day service on 11 November 2014 at St. Ann's Church in Dawson Street, Dublin.

(AQW 38716/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): In my capacity as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure I can confirm no such invite was received into my office.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she was invited to attend the Annual Armistice Day Commemoration at Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin on 11 November 2014.

(AQW 38717/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In my capacity as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure I can confirm no such invite was received into my office.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she will provide the relative resourcing position of Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and language, in comparison with Irish culture, heritage and language in Northern Ireland, as requested by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure in early 2014.

(AQW 39435/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The information has been collated and will issue to Ian Crozier in the next few days.

Department of Education

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, given that there is no legal definition or status for shared education, why the Education and Training Inspectorate is recruiting assessors for appointment to "the Shared Education sector"; and what is the definition of "shared education sector" that is being deployed and in respect of which criteria are being set.

(AQW 38943/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The public advertisement for Associate Assessors to work in schools in relation to Shared Education stated:

"ETI wishes to appoint Associate Assessors to support inspection and other aspects of policy work in pre-school, inclusion, special and alternative education, youth, Irish medium education, and shared education (primary and post-primary phases). The period of tenure (initially for three years) will be reviewed on an annual basis."

The definition of Shared Education being used by ETI is as follows:

Shared Education is the organisation and delivery of education so that it:

- Meets the need of, and provides for the education together of pupils from all Section 75 categories and socio-economic status.
- Involves schools and other education providers of differing ownership, sectoral identity and ethos, management type or governance arrangements; and
- Delivers educational benefits to pupils, promotes the efficient and effective use of resources, and promotes equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

Specifically, Shared Education involves the provision of opportunities for children and young people from different community background to learn together.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education whether there are any schemes in place, or schemes he would consider, whereby school children required to walk to school or to buses, particularly along country roads, are supplied with high visibility jackets. **(AQW 38946/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The safety of children when walking to school or to bus stops rests with their parents and I am not aware of any current or planned schemes to supply pupils with high visibility jackets. However, to assist parents and schools, the Department of Education (DE) has issued guidance to schools with respect to pupil safety through the design of school

uniforms. Much of that guidance applies with equal effect to clothing worn by pupils, such as an overcoat, which is not part of a school uniform.

The wearing of a school uniform is not governed by legislation but falls to schools to determine. The day-to-day management of schools, including school uniform policy, is a matter for school Principals, subject to any directions that might be given by the Board of Governors. Section 5 of this guidance covers travelling to school and emphasises that the safety of children is paramount. It highlights the need for pupils to be visible to drivers and other road users as they make their way between home, bus stops and school. It asks schools to take this into account when designing their uniform and to consider using reflective materials and to encourage the wearing of high visibility items. The guidance is available on the Department's website: www.deni.gov.uk/index/support-and-development-2/school_uniform.htm

Further to this, the Department of the Environment (DOE) has confirmed that each year it offers Practical Child Pedestrian Safety Training (PCPST) to selected primary schools. The objective of PCPST is to help children in Years 3, 4 and 5 to acquire and develop pedestrian skills, observe dangers and practise crossing roads safely via supervised training walks in the locale of their school. This includes guidance on the benefits of wearing reflective and fluorescent clothing and accessories.

The road safety teaching aid calendar is provided to every classroom in every primary school and provides an opportunity for teachers to deliver a weekly road safety message to children. This includes guidance on making sure child pedestrians are as visible to other road users as possible.

In relation to post-primary schools, a number of different education packs have now been created by DOE and issued to every post primary school. Each pack, which contains a DVD, a worksheet and teacher's notes, is centred on the road safety message or theme used in a road safety campaign. These multimedia resources are informative and very effective in getting road safety messages across. One education pack 'Respect everyone's journey' is aimed at children in years 8, 9 and 10 and provides information and guidance on the need for pedestrians to wear reflective or fluorescent clothing.

A new leaflet 'Be Safe, Be Seen' has also been created and made available online and in hard copy. The leaflet provides detailed guidance on how pedestrians can make themselves safer by wearing reflective or fluorescent clothing.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education whether he will place a copy in the Assembly Library of the reliability data provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to support his claim in a departmental press release that Pisa-based Test for Schools items are credible.

(AQW 39210/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information referred to is produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and is available via the web link below:

<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/PISA-Based%20Test%20for%20Schools%20Instrument%20Design%20and%20Development.pdf>

As this document does not belong to my department, or its public bodies, I do not plan to place a copy in the Assembly Library.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what parts of his current 2014/15 budget is legally and contractually committed; and what remains unallocated.

(AQW 39213/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In relation to the resource budget approximately 80% is allocated for staff costs across of the education sector and as such this expenditure is deemed contractually committed.

There are also a number of other substantial contractual commitments, such as £39m funding for provision of ICT services for grant-aided schools and £38m funding for Public Private Partnership contracts.

In addition the Department has a statutory responsibility to provide funding for maintenance of the Schools Estate to ensure it complies with all Health and Safety requirements and the Disability Discrimination Act. In 2014-15 £17 million has been provided for this purpose.

The Department and its ALB's also have a statutory duty to pay rates across the Education sector. In the 2013-14 financial year, this accounted for £59.6million of the Education Budget.

The remainder of the resource budget while not wholly contractual is allocated to support Ministerial priorities and the Executive's Programme for Government commitments. In addition as 8 months of the year have now passed the amount of funding not contractually committed is substantially reduced.

The programmes funded from the capital budget are largely contractual in their nature, with an estimate of 80% currently contractually committed across the various capital programmes.

I can confirm both my 2014-15 Resource budget and Capital budget have been fully allocated.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 38124/11-15, to detail (i) the criteria used in assessing development proposals prior to the approval of the new nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools; and (ii) any changes in criteria during that period.

(AQW 39359/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Executive has a Programme for Government commitment to ensure that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it and, in considering any proposal for change, my key focus is on the pre-school children, not the individual setting.

The criteria used to assess development proposals for new nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools are:

- the level of need for the type of change proposed which is assessed taking into consideration:
 - existing provision in a two mile and five mile radius around the proposed development and reflecting the urban or rural nature of the setting;
 - an analysis of whether or not there are sufficient pre-school places in the area;
 - the potential impact of the proposal on other providers, including the possible displacement of good quality voluntary or private provision;
 - population projections; and
 - the potential need for future additional pre-school provision in the area: and
- how the proposed change fits with early years' policy.

The application of these criteria is supported by, among other things, an analysis of the proposed development's impact on the Department's statutory duties; consideration of the potential financial consequences; and ETI's assessment of the quality of pre-school provision in the area.

While these criteria have not changed during the period referenced in AQW 38124/11-15, they align with current early years' policy which is now informed through the Programme for Government commitment and the publication of Learning to Learn.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education whether there are plans to replace the current school buildings at King's Park Primary School, Lurgan.

(AQW 39363/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are no current plans to replace the school buildings at King's Park Primary School.

Prior to my capital investment announcement on 24 June 2014 the Southern Education & Library Board identified King's Park Primary School, Lurgan along with its other priorities for major capital investment.

I approved a protocol that was used to administer the process to prioritise potential major works projects at that time. However when the protocol was applied, King's Park Primary School was not one of the schools that I was able to include in my announcement.

There are many school building projects I would like to fund and difficult decisions have to be made on how to invest the capital budget available to me. This in no way implies that the project for King's Park Primary School will not be considered for a new build at some later stage.

Meanwhile I can advise that a substantial scheme of works amounting to £115,000 for the provision of modular accommodation at the school was completed on 25 September 2014. These works should greatly improve conditions at the school and address concerns about the standard of the existing facilities.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether any current projects will be financed through bids to the unallocated £35m of Financial Transactions capital in 2014/15.

(AQW 39371/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are no plans to finance any current capital projects through bids to the unallocated £35m of Financial Transactions Capital (FTC) in 2014/15.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what projects he is planning to finance from the £115.6m of Financial Transactions capital allocated for 2015/16.

(AQW 39372/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is unlikely that any capital projects will be financed from the £115.6m of Financial Transactions Capital (FTC) allocated for 2015/16.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the educational work for children provided by the Ulster Orchestra.

(AQW 39378/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not commission any work directly from the Ulster Orchestra. It is a matter for schools and youth providers to decide what musical service they use.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of current primary school teachers who graduated in the last ten years with specialism in a science subject from (i) Stranmillis University College; (ii) St. Mary's University College; and (iii) University of Ulster.

(AQW 39403/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department is not able to provide information in the format requested. Data provided by the General Teaching Council (GTCNI) indicates that there are currently 96 teachers employed in primary schools, including preparatory departments, who hold a teaching qualification gained here in the last ten years, in which the main specialism is a science subject. There are also three teachers currently employed in primary schools, including preparatory departments, who, in addition to their teaching qualification, hold a degree gained in the last ten years in which the main subject is science.

These figures do not include teachers who hold a teaching degree, i.e. a Bachelor of Education, the primary programme of which is the most common route into teaching in the primary sector. This programme prepares students for all areas of the primary curriculum including science, and students may also select optional science related modules as part of this provision. In addition, the figures do not include teachers currently employed who have not advised the GTCNI of their subject specialism or any additional qualifications they hold over and above those required to teach.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to detail 'the previous arrangement' for translation services as referred to in paragraph 8.1 of the minutes of the Interdepartmental Charter Implementation Group meeting on 21 November 2013.
(AQW 39437/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The previous arrangement for translation services refers to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's contract to provide a translation service for the Irish Language, in order to meet the commitments for translations to and from Irish, within the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of access to support class placement for children with autism in Key Stage 1 and 2 in mainstream schools, broken down by Education and Library Board area.
(AQW 39477/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that support class placement is one of a range of specialist services provided to support children with autism. The needs of each child, including those at Key Stages 1 and 2, will be unique depending on the specific presentation of their condition and the nature and extent of the support will, therefore, be determined by the extent of each child's special educational needs.

Support may, if appropriate, include placement in an autism specific class attached to mainstream schools which will provide opportunities for children with autism to be educated in small school settings with appropriate interventions for their individual needs.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail the benefits of Jigsaw support workers in secondary schools.
(AQW 39492/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board has informed me that the Jigsaw project was established in 2011 as an education support service in Ballymena within 3 primary schools and 1 post primary school, Ballee Community High School (CHS). Ballee CHS received services from a Jigsaw Support Worker until the school closed in August 2014.

The Board have indicated that during this time feedback from the school, parents and pupils highlighted a number of benefits through programmes delivered by Jigsaw Support Workers including improvements in pupil attendance and behaviour, motivation to progress onto further education and positive outcomes through health related interventions.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education when his Department will be make a decision on The Randalstown Central Primary School Nursery School Unit.
(AQW 39554/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Development Proposal is currently under consideration by my Department.

Advice from all relevant policy areas has been received and is currently under discussion.

All Development Proposals are considered on a case by case basis within the appropriate policy framework. This proposal for conversion to a 16 place nursery unit (rather than the usual 26-place unit) has required additional consideration to ensure that the advice is comprehensive and reflects the best interests of pre-school children.

I expect to receive the advice from my officials shortly and I will then make a decision on the proposal.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education when his Department received, or will be receiving, the response from their Early Years team on the development proposal on Randalstown Central Primary School Nursery Unit.
(AQW 39555/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Development Proposal is currently under consideration by my Department.

Advice from all relevant policy areas has been received and is currently under discussion.

All Development Proposals are considered on a case by case basis within the appropriate policy framework. This proposal for conversion to a 16 place nursery unit (rather than the usual 26-place unit) has required additional consideration to ensure that the advice is comprehensive and reflects the best interests of pre-school children.

I expect to receive the advice from my officials shortly and I will then make a decision on the proposal.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to outline the reasons for the delay in his Department's decision on the development proposal for the Randalstown Central Primary School Nursery Unit.

(AQW 39556/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Development Proposal is currently under consideration by my Department.

Advice from all relevant policy areas has been received and is currently under discussion.

All Development Proposals are considered on a case by case basis within the appropriate policy framework. This proposal for conversion to a 16 place nursery unit (rather than the usual 26-place unit) has required additional consideration to ensure that the advice is comprehensive and reflects the best interests of pre-school children.

I expect to receive the advice from my officials shortly and I will then make a decision on the proposal.

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Education what is the appropriate timeframe for the Chairperson of a Board of Governors to respond to a letter of complaint from a parent of a pupil; and what action can be taken by a parent who does not receive a response within an appropriate timeframe.

(AQW 39562/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The appropriate timeframe for a Chair of a Board of Governors to respond to a parental complaint will depend on the "Parental Complaints Procedure" adopted by the school. My department has produced a model "Parental Complaints Procedure" to assist schools. It is in the best interests of every school to have its own formal complaints procedure in place.

The model "Parental Complaints Procedure" includes an Appeals Process if parents are dissatisfied with the response they have received to their complaint. In the case of a controlled school, a parent may also appeal to the employing authority for the school i.e. the local ELB for the area.

The OFMDFM Committee is currently considering a draft Bill that would merge and reform the offices of the Assembly Ombudsman and the NI Commissioner for Complaints into a new office to be known as the NI Public Services Ombudsman, whose remit would include schools.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education for an update on plans for a new school build for St Bronagh's Primary School in Rostrevor.

(AQW 39587/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my January 2013 statement to the Assembly on the Major Capital Investment Programme I identified St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor as one of 22 projects to be taken forward in planning.

The Project Manager has commenced work on the feasibility study for the new build and is working closely with my Department. The feasibility study and supporting business case are currently being prepared and following approval a design team will be appointed to take forward the detailed design of the new school.

It is currently anticipated that the design will commence in early 2015 with construction works starting in late 2015.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education when he will ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to withdraw the UK derogation on the European Convention on Human Rights that allows religious discrimination in the employment of teachers and contributes to the economic costs of division in Northern Ireland society.

(AQW 39596/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: OFMDFM has responsibility for the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (FETO) legislation, which governs the exemption under Article 71.

I have previously stated that I do not support the exemption, but any removal of this under FETO is a matter for OFMDFM to take forward.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education whether his Department provides incentives to encourage science graduates to enter primary school teaching.

(AQW 39597/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Bachelor of Education primary programme is the most common route into teaching in the primary sector in the north of Ireland. This four-year initial teacher education programme prepares students for all areas of the primary curriculum including science. Students may also select optional science related modules as part of this provision.

My Department does not employ teachers; this is the responsibility of the Employing/Funding Authorities. The selection of students for entry to courses of initial teacher education is a matter for the providing institution.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education what his Department is doing to encourage the uptake of continued professional development amongst primary school teachers.

(AQW 39598/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) in each of the Education and Library Boards provides advisory and support services to all grant aided schools and are the main providers of in-service training for teachers. In order to provide such training CASS carry out an annual training needs audit for schools from which they then prepare a scheme of support.

In addition, five Baker days and up to five school development days are available to support staff development.

It is therefore a matter for schools to prioritise the continuing professional development (CPD) their teachers require and to encourage uptake. To inform this, the CPD requirements of individual teachers can be established by school leaders through the course of the annual Performance Review and Staff Development Scheme.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education (i) how many pupils have dyslexia; (ii) what support is offered to these pupils; and (iii) what level of dyslexia screening occurs in schools.

(AQW 39616/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The 2013/14 School Census reported a total of 8,545* pupils with dyslexia.

The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that a range of special education support and provision is available to parents and schools for a child identified with dyslexia, including the following:

- dyslexia awareness training for schools (and parents) as requested by schools to enhance the capacity of teachers to identify and respond appropriately in addressing dyslexia;
- all Educational Psychologists (EPs) are trained and skilled in the assessment and identification of dyslexia. Following the identification of dyslexia EPs provide a comprehensive range of support including recommendations and resources to parents and schools to assist the pupil achieve his/her potential;
- a range of innovative strategies, resources and computer assisted programmes are available to pupils with dyslexia for whom more traditional methods are unsuccessful;
- some schools have achieved or are working towards achievement of Dyslexia Friendly status usually in association with the British Dyslexia Association (BDA). Schools are supported by the Board services in achieving this award;
- a range of measures to help those children and young people identified as having dyslexia under examination conditions.

When children who are thought to have dyslexia are put forward for assessment at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice (COP), they may be screened for additional Board support by EPs or psychology assistants. A range of cognitive and attainment tests are used in the identification of dyslexia with agreed five board criteria for additional Stage 3 and Stage 5 support applied in each case.

In addition DE is funding the SEN Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Literacy Project which is delivered jointly by Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges. This project is being funded for 3 years and will be completed at the end of March 2015.

The project, which offers specialist training accredited by the British Dyslexia Association to all primary schools, enables teachers to identify children with literacy difficulties, including dyslexia, assess their individual needs and provide appropriate interventions.

ELBs will continue to review their services in order to provide improved assistance to those children and young people with dyslexia.

*This figure includes funded children in voluntary and private preschools, nursery schools, primary (including nursery, reception and year 1-7 classes, post primary and special schools).

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children in East Antrim in receipt of free school transport in each post-primary school, broken down by (a) controlled; and (b) grammar, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39627/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board has provided the information detailed in the table below in respect to pupils eligible for transport assistance in East Antrim, in (a) controlled; and (b) grammar post-primary schools for each of the last three years.

School Controlled	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Ballyclare Secondary School	44	52	40
Carrickfergus College	123	142	112
Downshire School	128	152	145
Glengormley High School	9	18	14

School Controlled	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Knockbreda High School	*	*	*
Larne High School	26	27	43
Laurelhill Community College	*	*	*
Monkstown Community School Special Unit	5	9	10
Newtownabbey Community High School	*	*	*
Grammar			
Antrim Grammar School	49	51	47
Aquinas Grammar School	34	35	24
Ballyclare High School	236	245	199
Belfast High School	197	201	163
Belfast Royal Academy	340	332	296
Bloomfield Collegiate School	*	*	*
Cambridge House Grammar School	*	*	5
Campbell College	13	13	11
Carrickfergus Grammar School	133	135	77
Dominican College (Fortwilliam)	276	287	237
Friends' School	*	*	*
Hunterhouse College	*	*	*
Lagan College	*	*	*
Larne Grammar	177	191	166
Malone College	*	*	*
Methodist College	21	15	11
Rathmore Grammar School	*	*	*
Royal Belfast Academical Institution	20	25	18
St Dominic's High School	9	7	*
St Louis' Grammar	41	38	37
St Malachy's College	251	245	197
St Mary's CBS Grammar School	*	6	*
St Mary's Grammar	*	*	*
Victoria College Belfast	15	19	10
Wellington College	*	*	*

* Denotes fewer than 5. Number suppressed due to possible identification of individual pupils

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education whether schools will have discretion as to the subjects they offer at GCSE and A-level; or if there are any subjects they will be able to offer.

(AQW 39648/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have announced previously that the Qualifications market will remain open and that the issue will be kept under review as changes to qualifications evolve.

Under the Entitlement Framework, all schools here are required to offer access to a minimum number and range of broad and balanced courses at Key Stage 4 and post-16. It is up to individual schools which courses they offer across the areas of learning. However, schools here will not be permitted to offer reformed A Level Science specifications from English-based awarding organisations when they are introduced for first teaching in September 2015. This is mainly due to the assessment of the practical elements which will no longer contribute to the overall grades for the subjects. Similarly, schools will not be permitted to offer new GCSE English Language specifications from English based awarding organisations, where the Speaking and Listening component will no longer contribute to the overall grade for the subject.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education what plans are in place to help with pupils requiring literacy and numeracy assistance in post-primary schools from September 2014.

(AQW 39667/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: First and foremost teachers are best placed to identify pupils requiring additional support with literacy and numeracy and to determine the most appropriate action to meet individual pupil needs.

However, schools may require additional support to address low achievement in literacy and numeracy particularly amongst socially disadvantaged pupils. Therefore, I am continuing to provide funding and support for a range of additional interventions which focus on improving pupil outcomes.

In the post-primary sector the interventions include the Delivering Social Change (DSC) Literacy and Numeracy Programme through which 167.5 full-time equivalent teachers have been appointed in 140 post-primary schools; a literacy and numeracy CPD project which will be delivered to primary and post-primary schools in the next financial year; and the strategic development fund to support Area Learning Communities to develop effective approaches to improving literacy and numeracy levels amongst disadvantaged pupils.

Through the DSC programme, ELB officers are working with the schools to identify effective interventions which are delivering positive outcomes for pupils. This good practice is already being disseminated to schools through face to face training sessions, and via the DSC web page on the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) website. ESAGS.tv is also a valuable tool for the dissemination of best practice.

In addition, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is working with nineteen post-primary schools in an improvement programme (Promoting Improvement in English and Maths – PIEM) to raise the standards achieved by the pupils in English and mathematics. The ETI has also published a Survey of Best Practice in English and Mathematics in Post-Primary Schools (October 2013) which provides a useful resource for schools. The weblink is: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-post-primary/surveys-evaluations-post-primary-2013/best-practice-english-and-mathematics-in-post-primary-schools.htm>

I also recognise the need to focus on families and communities and I am continuing to fund community-based programmes which have a specific focus on positive educational outcomes.

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education how many pupils, who reside in Cookstown District Council, travel to schools in the Dungannon District Council area and receive transport assistance for travel by bus, broken down by school in (i) 2013/14; and (ii) 2014/15.

(AQW 39724/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board have informed me that the information requested is not held in the format required and an exercise to produce it would result in disproportionate cost.

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education how many pupils, who reside in Dungannon District Council, travel to schools in the Cookstown District Council area and receive transport assistance for travel by bus, broken down by school in (i) 2013/14; and (ii) 2014/15.

(AQW 39725/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board have informed me that the information requested is not held in the format required and an exercise to produce it would result in disproportionate cost.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, in light of the apparent move in England to prioritise academic over vocational subjects as part of the review of GCSEs and A-levels, whether he is concerned that vocational subjects taken in Northern Ireland will not be deemed of equal value as academic subjects by English universities.

(AQW 39746/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The implementation of the Entitlement Framework, with a balance of general and applied courses, has ensured a broad and relevant curriculum is available in post-primary schools here in order that the needs, interests and aspirations of all learners can be met. Our young people here continue to have access to a range of qualifications which have integrity, are offered by recognised awarding organisations, are properly regulated, and have clear progression pathways in line with the requirements for further study, training and/or employment.

The Universities and Colleges Admissions System (UCAS) bases its tariff on the level and size of the qualification and does not differentiate between academic and vocational. However, it remains the case that individual universities determine their entry requirements and admissions policies.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what impacts he foresees of the promotion of vocational subjects in the Entitlement Framework and the move away from vocational subjects in England under the review of GCSEs and A-levels; and whether the Entitlement Framework should be adapted in light of policy changes in England.

(AQW 39747/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Entitlement Framework is about schools providing equality of access to a broad and balanced range of courses that are economically relevant and individually engaging, with clear progression pathways. Providing access to a balance of general and applied courses is an essential part of the Entitlement Framework as this ensures that every pupil, regardless of aptitude or ability, has the opportunity to pursue a course of study which meets their individual needs, interests and aspirations.

The Entitlement Framework applies to schools in the north of Ireland and is based on the curriculum here which is different to that offered in England.

I remain committed to ensuring that the qualifications offered in schools here are comparable to those offered in other jurisdictions. Equally I remain committed to putting pupils first, and I am confident that the Entitlement Framework is right for the young people in our schools.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact on staffing levels in schools as a result of budgetary constraints within his Department.

(AQW 39750/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Approximately 77% of the Education budget is made up of staff costs. Therefore, in order for the Department to manage within the impending budget constraints, there will need to be a significant reduction in the number of posts across the Education sector. My initial estimate is that at least 1,000 teaching and at least 1,500 non-teaching jobs will need to exit the system at 1 April 2015. This number will, inevitably, increase should the timing of the redundancies extend further into the 2015/16 financial year.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, given that the requirements he has placed for assessed content of some GCSE and A-level subjects, to detail (i) the GCSE and A-level subjects that meet his requirements, including the examinations board; and (ii) the courses that will no longer meet the requirements.

(AQW 39804/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have announced previously that the qualifications market here will remain open subject to continuous review. Restrictions will only be put in place where there are sound educational reasons for doing so.

I have expressed concerns about England's stance on the Speaking and Listening component of GCSE English Language, for example. I am also concerned about the proposed approach in that jurisdiction to assessing the practical elements within new A levels in the science subjects, which are due to be introduced from September 2015.

Consequently, I have confirmed that schools here will continue to be required to offer GCSE English Language specifications in which assessment of the Speaking and Listening component contributes to the overall grade for the subject.

In addition, schools here will continue to be required to offer A level science specifications in which the assessment of the practical elements contribute to the overall grades for the subjects.

The Department has communicated my decisions to the relevant awarding organisations, making them aware that specifications which do not meet our requirements will not be available to learners in schools here. As is currently the case, the list of qualifications in all subjects approved by the Department for use by schools here is available on the Entitlement Framework audit website.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, given that his assessment requirements for GCSEs and A-levels are resulting in schools' choices in some subject areas being limited to the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) examination board, for his assessment of CCEA standards; and what work has been undertaken to improve standards.

(AQW 39805/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the main, the English and Welsh based awarding organisations - AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC- will continue to be able to offer their specifications here. However, our curricular requirements may impact on the availability of some GCSE English Language and A Level science specifications.

CCEA, as the regulator of general qualifications here, is required by legislation to ensure comparability of the GCSE and A/AS Levels taken by learners here with similar qualifications offered in England and Wales.

CCEA works collaboratively with the qualifications regulators in England (Ofqual) and Wales (Welsh Government) on a range of functions including the development of GCSE and A/AS Level criteria and the accreditation of qualifications to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) where these criteria are met. In addition, the regulators collaborate on the production of a Code of Practice which sets out common principles as to how awarding organisations operate their qualifications; and agreed common awarding procedures.

Whilst joint work is more challenging within a context where qualifications policy across the three jurisdictions is diverging, CCEA, in its regulatory capacity, will continue to work with its fellow regulators to ensure that GCSE and A/AS Levels taken here are comparable in standard to the equivalent qualifications taken in England and Wales.

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how many Education and Library Board members of staff are included in the 2,500 proposed redundancies; and to detail where they are located.

(AQW 39852/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Of the 2,500 proposed redundancies, it is anticipated that 1,000 will be teaching and 1,500 will be non-teaching posts, which will be both school based and across the Department's Arms Length Bodies. This number will, inevitably, increase should the timing of the redundancies extend further into the 2015/16 financial year.

There is no further information or details available at this time as to where the redundant posts will be located.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the date for the launch of the consultation relating to proposed legislation to permit flexibility for primary school starting age.

(AQW 39875/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The consultation on proposals to introduce deferral of school starting age in exceptional circumstances will be launched on 15 December and will last 12 weeks.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how schools, particularly through the Northern Ireland Curriculum, are encouraging entrepreneurship and business innovation.

(AQW 39948/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At post-primary level, the Employability strand of Learning for Life and Work consists of work in the local and global economy, career management and enterprise and entrepreneurship. This provides opportunities for our young people to investigate the need for creativity and enterprise, whether as an employer or employee, and to identify and practise some of the skills and develop the attributes associated with being enterprising.

Schools receive delegated budgets to enable them to deliver all aspects of the curriculum, including the Personal Development & Mutual Understanding and Learning for Life and Work Areas of Learning.

My Department also provides funding to a number of organisations to provide enterprise, employability and innovation events and programmes either in school or at larger regional events, for both primary and post-primary pupils.

Department for Employment and Learning

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students that graduated from the University of Ulster Business School, in each of the last three years, broken down by Campus.

(AQW 39028/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Departmental officials contacted the University of Ulster for the requested information, which can be found at Annex A.

Annex A

Graduates from Ulster Business School by campus 11/12 - 13/14

			11/12	12/13	13/14
Belfast	Undergraduate	Full time	46	54	60
		Part time	4	25	23
	Postgraduate taught	Full time	22	12	12
		Part time	4	6	4
	Belfast campus total		76	97	99
Coleraine	Undergraduate	Full time	234	258	273
		Part time	17	13	7
	Postgraduate taught	Full time	23	13	7
		Part time	7	2	
	Postgraduate research	Full time	4		1
	Coleraine campus total		285	286	288
Jordanstown	Undergraduate	Full time	398	390	381
		Part time	1,129	757	585
	Postgraduate taught	Full time	163	151	144

			11/12	12/13	13/14
		Part time	127	135	120
	Postgraduate research	Full time	2	3	3
		Part time	1	3	3
	Jordanstown campus total		1,820	1,439	1,236
Magee	Undergraduate	Full time	143	151	122
		Part time	26	33	34
	Postgraduate taught	Full time	28	13	22
		Part time	25	16	35
	Postgraduate research	Full time	1	1	
	Magee campus total		223	214	213
Birmingham	Undergraduate	Full time		5	117
	Postgraduate taught	Full time	39	79	95
	Birmingham campus total		39	84	212
London	Undergraduate	Full time		20	245
	Postgraduate taught	Full time	79	194	209
	London campus total		79	214	454
Ulster Business School total			2,522	2,334	2,502
Graduates from Ulster Business School by campus 11/12 - 13/14					

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the percentage of undergraduate students at Queen's University Belfast whose community background is (i) Protestant; (ii) Roman Catholic; and (iii) other or unknown; and in each case, how figures compare with (a) 2009; and (b) 2004.

(AQW 39077/11-15)

Dr Farry: The tables below were produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and show the latest figures available.

Table 1: All Undergraduate enrolments at Queen's University, Belfast by Religion - 2004/05, 2009/10 and 2012/13

Religion	Enrolments at QUB in 2004/05	Enrolments at QUB in 2009/10	Enrolments at QUB in 2012/13
Protestant	28.6%	32.0%	29.1%
Catholic	34.7%	41.5%	40.9%
Other	2.9%	5.5%	7.0%
Not Known/available	25.5%	13.8%	13.3%
Non NI Domiciled	8.2%	7.3%	9.7%
Total Undergraduates	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 2: All Undergraduate enrolments at University of Ulster by Religion - 2004/05, 2009/10 and 2012/13

Religion	Enrolments at UU in 2004/05	Enrolments at UU in 2009/10	Enrolments at UU in 2012/13
Protestant	29.7%	29.2%	27.3%
Catholic	45.5%	46.8%	44.9%
Other	2.2%	3.5%	8.9%

Religion	Enrolments at UU in 2004/05	Enrolments at UU in 2009/10	Enrolments at UU in 2012/13
Not Known/available	13.3%	9.7%	5.6%
Non NI Domiciled	9.2%	10.8%	13.3%
Total Undergraduates	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the percentage of undergraduate students at the University of Ulster whose community background is (i) Protestant; (ii) Roman Catholic; and (iii) other or unknown; and in each case, how figures compare with (a) 2009; and (b) 2004.

(AQW 39079/11-15)

Dr Farry: The tables below were produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and show the latest figures available.

Table 1: All Undergraduate enrolments at Queen's University, Belfast by Religion - 2004/05, 2009/10 and 2012/13

Religion	Enrolments at QUB in 2004/05	Enrolments at QUB in 2009/10	Enrolments at QUB in 2012/13
Protestant	28.6%	32.0%	29.1%
Catholic	34.7%	41.5%	40.9%
Other	2.9%	5.5%	7.0%
Not Known/available	25.5%	13.8%	13.3%
Non NI Domiciled	8.2%	7.3%	9.7%
Total Undergraduates	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 2: All Undergraduate enrolments at University of Ulster by Religion - 2004/05, 2009/10 and 2012/13

Religion	Enrolments at UU in 2004/05	Enrolments at UU in 2009/10	Enrolments at UU in 2012/13
Protestant	29.7%	29.2%	27.3%
Catholic	45.5%	46.8%	44.9%
Other	2.2%	3.5%	8.9%
Not Known/available	13.3%	9.7%	5.6%
Non NI Domiciled	9.2%	10.8%	13.3%
Total Undergraduates	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he ensures that private education providers, who are offering education and training from high-street locations and are in receipt of funding from his Department, are not causing economic displacement which is affecting local small businesses.

(AQW 39212/11-15)

Dr Farry: Currently, a range of public, private and third sector organisations hold contracts with the Department to deliver training programmes such as Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI. Contracts were awarded following an open procurement process which was managed with the support of Central Procurement Directorate.

The quality and performance of training suppliers is monitored in line with contractual terms and conditions.

In advance of procurement, the business case process requires consideration of economic displacement. In the case of the programmes named, economic displacement was not considered to be an issue.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of and average salary of (i) Chancellors; (ii) Pro-Chancellors; (iii) Vice Chancellors; (iv) Pro-Vice Chancellors; (v) Chief Officers; (vi) Directors; (vii) Registrars; (viii) professors; (ix) associate professors; (x) assistant professors; (xi) instructors; (xii) lecturers; (xiii) deans; (xiv) associate deans; (xv) assistant deans; (xvi) heads of department; and (xvii) heads of school, in (a) the University of Ulster; and (b) Queen's University, Belfast.

(AQW 39232/11-15)

Dr Farry: The information requested is not held by my Department. Nor is there a requirement on the universities to publish this type of information in their annual financial statements. I would suggest that the member approaches the institutions directly for this information.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 38314/11-15, when a decision will be taken on whether to change the name of the Magee campus.

(AQW 39281/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster has advised that it is discussing the option of renaming the Magee campus with civic and community leaders, staff and students, at a series of meetings during the first three weeks of December. These meetings will be hosted and led by the Provost of the campus, Professor Deirdre Heenan. The University will review and fully consider those discussions in the New Year and anticipates reaching a decision in the early part of next semester.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether the financial assistance for students, who have been in foster care or care of social services for a significant period of time, that this currently provided by the University of Ulster and Queen's University, including Stranmillis University College, will be ring-fenced following budget cuts to his Department's budget.

(AQW 39321/11-15)

Dr Farry: Access to Success, my Department's regional strategy for widening participation, has identified care leavers as being under-represented in higher education.

Through the submission of annual Widening Access and Participation Plans the Department is able to monitor and review the work that each institution is doing to widen participation, which includes the work they are doing to encourage those from a care background to enter higher education and the subsequent support they are offered to progress through their chosen course.

Each year the higher education institutions re-invest a significant proportion of their additional fee income to attract and retain students from groups that are identified as under-represented in Access to Success. However, while the Department encourages higher education institutions to make additional investment in support for students who have been in foster care or care of social services, it is a matter for each of the individual institutions to decide on the quantum of this support depending on individual circumstances.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what provision is made by the University of Ulster, at each campus, for the study of the Irish language and associated literature; and how many staff members are employed at each campus in delivering that provision.

(AQW 39336/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster has advised that the School of Irish Language and Literature offers a range of courses in Irish Language and Literature on the University's Belfast and Magee campuses. Programmes at pre-degree, degree and postgraduate level are delivered by 14 members of academic staff.

Eight members of staff, including the Head of School and the Director of the Irish and Celtic Studies Research Institute, are based on the Magee campus, where the key provision is an undergraduate programme, full-time and part-time, in Irish Language and Literature; they also offer Irish in combinations with other subjects, a part-time Diploma, as well as a suite of Certificate/Diploma programmes in Irish Studies (including the Irish language) designed primarily for international students. Staff at Magee also deliver part-time outreach courses, at Diploma level at Cookstown (Burnavon Arts Centre) and at degree level at Letterkenny (LYIT). An Irish Studies Summer School for international students was initiated at Magee in 2014.

A further six members of staff are based at Belfast, where the offer includes an undergraduate programme in Irish Language and Literature (full-time and part-time), a postgraduate taught programme (PgDip/MA Modern Irish, part-time), and a part-time Diploma. All academic staff are members or associate members of the Irish and Celtic Studies Research Institute. These staff also maintain a wide range of community links throughout Northern Ireland, particularly in the two major cities, and facilitate a range of widening access activities and events for schools.

Further details of course provision are available on the university's website <http://study.ulster.ac.uk/prospectus/courselist/201516>

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department manages the Higher Education Funding Council for England recommendations in local higher education institutions.

(AQW 39341/11-15)

Dr Farry: The funding of higher education institutions is a devolved matter for which my Department has responsibility in Northern Ireland. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) performs this, and related functions, in England. Its remit does not extend to Northern Ireland.

However, under a Service Level Agreement, HEFCE carries out funding distribution calculations in respect of the NI universities on behalf of my Department. These are based on funding resource and student number parameters set each year by the Department. HEFCE also carries out data collection and audit exercises related to the Northern Ireland funding model.

While my officials may discuss topics of mutual interest with the other UK funding bodies, including HEFCE, responsibility for HE policy, funding and accountability in Northern Ireland rests with my Department.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to define the term international best practice as referred to in the Aspiring to Excellence report by the International Review Panel on Initial Teacher Education in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 39368/11-15)

Dr Farry: One of the priorities of the International Review Panel's work was to provide, at the outset of the Review, an overview of the most current developments in the field of initial teacher education which represents best practice internationally.

In this overview, the Panel refers to international best practice as relating to ensuring that Initial Teacher Education programmes attract the best and most suitable candidates; offering academic awards that are competitive, practice-focused and built on relevant educational research; developing strong links between theory and practice, in a way that helps students to understand and explore the interconnectedness of educational theories and classroom practices; establishing strong links between Initial Teacher Education and continuing professional development of teachers in schools; and ensuring that all of the above principles are underpinned by a clear understanding of evidence about how student teachers learn to teach.

These best practice themes are reflected in the Aspiring to Excellence report.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 38671/11-15, to detail the number of training (i) positions currently available within each of the eleven training suppliers; and (ii) suppliers in East Londonderry being used to capacity, as part of the Training for Success Programme.

(AQW 39390/11-15)

Dr Farry: Through the Training for Success Programme, my department guarantees a training place for all 16 and 17 year olds who are not in education or employment, with extended eligibility for persons under 22 years with a disability and under 24 years for those who qualify under the Children Act NI (2002).

In line with the guarantee, there is no restriction on the number of young people that can avail of the programme and no capacity limit is set for any of the contracted training suppliers.

Published statistical information (including occupancy levels broken down by Parliamentary Constituency) is contained in the Training for Success Statistical Bulletin.

The most recent Statistical Bulletin, published on 26 November 2014, can be accessed via the link below.

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/publications/r-and-s-stats/tfs-and-programme-led-apprenticeships-statistical-bulletins.htm>

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students who are currently in receipt of an Education Maintenance Allowance; and what assurance he can give that money for this will be ringfenced in light of current budgetary pressures.

(AQW 39463/11-15)

Dr Farry: In academic year 2013/14 there were 21,629 students in receipt of the means tested Educational Maintenance Allowance and it is anticipated that a similar number of students will be eligible in academic year 2014/15. The Educational Maintenance Allowance estimated budget requirement for financial year 2014/15 is £23.1 million and I can confirm that this is ring-fenced.

In relation to future funding, my Department is currently considering all options for budget savings across all spending lines. Final decisions on how the cuts will be managed will not be made until a public consultation has been completed and the detail of the cuts has been confirmed. However, my Department is preparing and planning for the financial challenges that cuts in the region of 11% will bring and is in the process of considering its work priorities to determine how the budget cuts can be absorbed.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of the Government's Military Covenant his Department has adopted as a policy; and what percentage has been implemented.

(AQW 39800/11-15)

Dr Farry: Although the Northern Ireland Executive has not formally endorsed the Armed Forces Covenant, individual Northern Ireland departments have taken measures to ensure that members of the Armed Forces Community do not face any disadvantage in accessing public services.

My Department is currently working with the Ministry of Defence to amend the legislation governing the 'Service Leavers Scheme' to extend provision to Northern Ireland 'Service Leavers'. The Scheme will provide 'Service Leavers' with access to a first full Level 3 (GCE A Level or vocational equivalent) or a first higher education qualification (a first foundation degree or first undergraduate degree or equivalent) free from tuition fees. It is anticipated that the Scheme will be available to Northern Ireland 'Service Leavers' to participate in the academic year commencing September 2015.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what savings were envisaged by the previously proposed dissolution of his Department.

(AQW 39834/11-15)

Dr Farry: In January 2012, the First Minister and deputy First Minister proposed that the Department for Employment and Learning be abolished. In July 2012 they then announced that they would await the outcome of engagement with party leaders on the number of government departments, before making any decision on the future of DEL. This matter is on the agenda of the ongoing all-party talks.

I am not aware of any attempts in 2012, or since, to estimate the associated savings to the public purse.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the proposed new build for the Southern Regional College in Armagh City; and whether the proposal will be impacted upon by the current proposed cuts within the Department.

(AQW 39923/11-15)

Dr Farry: Formal approval to the Southern Regional College's (SRC) business case was given in June 2014 to build new campuses at Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon. Funding totalling £33.5m for the Armagh project is to be provided from the Department's capital budget.

The three projects are in development stage with the design team due to be appointed early in 2015. It is proposed that the Armagh project will provide a new, modern and fit for purpose building within the current campus boundary.

I can confirm that the design phase for the building will proceed and will be completed in preparation for the construction tendering stage to take place during 2015/16.

The capital funding position beyond 2015/16 is less clear, however I am determined to proceed with capital developments to ensure continued improvement in the standard of educational and training facilities across the Further Education sector. I am therefore working to ensure that Colleges are best placed to utilise funding as it becomes available.

As I confirmed during my response to Oral Questions in the Assembly on 1 December, a number of schemes have been approved in the Southern Region, and we are awaiting decisions on the Northern Regional College area. Both those areas have had underinvestment relative to the other four college areas in recent years and these two areas need to be given priority in new capital funding allocations.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the application process for the United Youth Programme; and when successful applicants will be notified.

(AQW 40003/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning is leading on a co-design process to develop the United Youth Programme. Organisations have submitted concept proposals. Those proposals demonstrating the most potential will engage in a further development phase, which will conclude with the selection of pilots, to commence in 2015.

While my Department has the necessary funding to support the pilots during the current financial year, sufficient central funding is required to allow this work to be completed during the 2015/16 financial year. On clarification of the budget, organisations will receive notification of the outcome of their pilot concept proposals.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of (i) new jobs created; (ii) assistance offered; and (iii) total investment to and by (a) locally owned companies; and (b) externally owned companies in each of the 26 district council areas during (i) the 2013/14 financial year; and (ii) the first half of the 2014/15 financial year.

(AQW 38775/11-15)

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

- (i) The table below details the number of (i) new jobs created by businesses in each of the 26 district council areas during the 2013/14 financial year.

DCA	2013-14
Antrim	223
Ards	126
Armagh	250
Ballymena	110
Ballymoney	113
Banbridge	61
Belfast	2,049
Carrickfergus	30

DCA	2013-14
Castlereagh	99
Coleraine	108
Cookstown	177
Craigavon	450
Londonderry	438
Down	151
Dungannon	606
Fermanagh	155
Larne	78
Limavady	89
Lisburn	336
Magherafelt	194
Moyle	55
Newry & Mourne	263
Newtownabbey	160
North Down	121
Omagh	147
Strabane	181

Notes: Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

Invest NI is not able to provide a split by locally and externally-owned since the application of statistical disclosure controls mean that information cannot be disaggregated if there are less than 5 businesses included in the results. Only Belfast does not breach this rule, where the number of jobs created was 898 by locally-owned and 1,151 by externally-owned businesses.

It can take between 3 to 5 years, and in some cases longer, to create jobs that have been promoted by Invest NI. The jobs created detailed in the table above are a result of offers made in both the 2013-14 financial year and in previous financial years. Therefore, (ii) assistance offered and (iii) planned investment for 2013-14 projects does not directly relate to jobs created in the same year.

The response that I provided to the member for AQ 38774/11-15 detailed the assistance offered and planned investment for offers made in each council area to (a) locally owned companies; and (b) externally owned companies during 2013-14. This information is included in the tables below.

a. Invest NI Assistance Offered to Locally Owned Companies by DCA 2013-14

DCA	Assistance Offered £m	Planned Investment £m
Antrim	1.57	7.09
Ards	1.42	6.20
Armagh	1.95	12.01
Ballymena	3.19	21.25
Ballymoney	0.61	4.90
Banbridge	1.07	2.35
Belfast	84.71	349.28
Carrickfergus	0.55	1.98
Castlereagh	1.80	6.74
Coleraine	2.66	9.37
Cookstown	2.44	9.23
Craigavon	5.65	26.01
Londonderry	3.44	13.12

DCA	Assistance Offered £m	Planned Investment £m
Down	2.11	7.71
Dungannon	5.73	27.92
Fermanagh	2.06	6.57
Larne	0.49	3.08
Limavady	0.51	2.17
Lisburn	5.19	16.69
Magherafelt	2.30	10.58
Moyle	0.24	1.11
Newry & Mourne	3.10	12.52
Newtownabbey	21.40	39.73
North Down	2.48	11.70
Omagh	1.64	7.76
Strabane	0.85	4.59

Notes

- 1 Total Planned Investment includes Total Assistance.
- 2 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

b. Invest NI Assistance Offered To Externally Owned Companies By Dca 2013-14

DCA	Assistance Offered £m	Planned Investment £m
Antrim	9.69	63.65
Ards	0.01	0.01
Armagh	0.09	0.43
Ballymena	0.23	1.23
Ballymoney	-	-
Banbridge	0.10	0.34
Belfast	39.69	303.86
Carrickfergus	2.35	33.38
Castlereagh	0.06	0.13
Coleraine	0.09	2.45
Cookstown	0.32	8.51
Craigavon	0.62	3.44
Londonderry	2.78	20.54
Down	-	-
Dungannon	0.27	1.35
Fermanagh	0.05	0.14
Larne	1.09	8.50
Limavady	-	-
Lisburn	1.00	4.63
Magherafelt	0.01	0.01
Moyle	-	-
Newry & Mourne	0.13	0.70

DCA	Assistance Offered £m	Planned Investment £m
Newtownabbey	0.33	1.88
North Down	0.01	0.01
Omagh	0.41	3.05
Strabane	0.36	3.15

Notes

- 1 Total Planned Investment includes Total Assistance.
- 2 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

It should be noted that the job promotion figures provided in response to AQ 38774/11-15 are not directly related to the job creation figures included in this answer, since the latter is a consequence of job promotion activity which has taken place over a number of years.

- (ii) Invest NI only releases job creation figures at the end of each financial year so is unable to provide these for 2014/15 at this stage.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of new jobs created during (i) the 2013/14 financial year; and (ii) the first half of the 2014/15 financial year, in each of the 26 district council areas which pay (a) below the private sector median wage; and (b) above the private sector median wage.

(AQW 38776/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below details the number of new jobs created during the 2013/14 financial year in each of the 26 district council areas.

DCA	2013-14
Antrim	223
Ards	126
Armagh	250
Ballymena	110
Ballymoney	113
Banbridge	61
Belfast	2,049
Carrickfergus	30
Castlereagh	99
Coleraine	108
Cookstown	177
Craigavon	450
Londonderry	438
Down	151
Dungannon	606
Fermanagh	155
Larne	78
Limavady	89
Lisburn	336
Magherafelt	194
Moyle	55
Newry & Mourne	263
Newtownabbey	160

DCA	2013-14
North Down	121
Omagh	147
Strabane	181

Notes: Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

All projects supported by Invest NI are subject to a Post Project Evaluation to ensure all requirements have been met. As projects can take between three and five years, or longer, it is meaningless to assess this during the life of a project. It is also important to note that not all projects have a job quality clause. It is therefore not possible to provide the information requested.

Invest NI only releases jobs created figures at the end of each financial year so is unable to provide figures for 2014/15.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support his Department offers to local companies who wish to enhance the skills of their workers on the cultural intricacies of potential export markets.

(AQW 39048/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI offers a comprehensive range of support to local businesses who wish to explore potential export markets. A number of these 'trade solutions' deal with business culture, language awareness and the key differences in business practice in export markets. They include export skills workshops, pre-mission briefings and seminars focussed on 'doing business' in export markets, in-market briefings and one-to-one mentoring with in-market trade advisors. Detailed country reports can also be accessed by local businesses via Invest NI's Business Information Centre at Bedford Square in Belfast.

Last month, Minister Farry and I launched the Graduate Export Sales and Marketing Academy, which matches graduates with local exporters. During an initial eight-week training programme, the graduates complete an important module called 'Cross-cultural Communication', which educates them in the cultural differences and business customs when conducting business overseas. The graduates will also spend a week at the Leuven Institute in Brussels.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of staff employed (i) directly by her Department; and (ii) by its agencies, who currently earn less than the living wage.

(AQW 39063/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are currently no staff in the Department earning less than the living wage.*

With regard to DETI's Agencies, under protection afforded by the Data Protection Act, I am obliged not to release the actual number as to do so may allow the individuals to be identified.

*The above answer is based on the current UK Living Wage rate of £7.85 per hour. This reflects net hours worked (37 per week) in order to have a consistent approach between industrial and non industrial staff.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 37668/11-15, whether the hopes of claiming repair costs to the Moyle interconnector through insurance have not been realised.

(AQW 39131/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Mutual Energy advises it has submitted a claim to its insurers in relation to the repair of the 2011 Moyle cable faults. Part of the claim has now been settled and the remainder is still being dealt with as part of the ongoing claims process.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many UK National Contact Points are available to Northern Ireland to support Horizon 2020 application and how many of these are based outside the Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster.

(AQW 39165/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As a region within the UK, Northern Ireland applicants to Horizon 2020 have access to all of the UK National Contact Points. One of the UK National Contact Points for SME's is based in Invest NI. There are no National (i.e. UK) Contact Points based within either Queen's University Belfast or the University of Ulster.

Northern Ireland has however established its own network of Horizon 2020 Contact Points (NICPs) who are actively providing expert thematic support for applicants. There are 12 in total - 5 of which are based within Queen's University Belfast, 2 in the University of Ulster, 3 in Invest NI, 1 in the Agri-Food and BioSciences Institute (AFBI) and 1 within DOE.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 37866/11-15, how many customers would (i) pay more; and (ii) pay less, for energy if the Warm Homes Discount Scheme was extended to Northern Ireland.

(AQW 39167/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As I indicated in response to AQW 37866/11-15, the Warm Home Discount Scheme is a GB scheme. The question could only be answered in light of a developed policy on how such a scheme was to be implemented in Northern Ireland following analysis, impact assessment, modelling, eligibility criteria, consultation, legislation and other steps.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any Shale Gas Regulators Forum meetings have taken place since February 2014; and if so when the minutes will be published on the departmental website.
(AQW 39203/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Yes, a Shale Gas Regulators Forum meeting was held on 28 July 2014. In keeping with agreed practice, the minutes of this meeting will be published on the DETI website following their ratification at the next meeting, a date for which is currently being agreed.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the removal of the Shale Gas licence in Fermanagh, that other licensees insist they are not targeting unconventional gas and the recent budgetary cuts, whether she plans to disband the Shale Gas Regulators Forum.
(AQW 39204/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not issue shale gas licences. DETI licence PL2/10 over an area of County Fermanagh was a Petroleum Licence with an intended shale gas target.

The establishment of the Shale Gas Regulators' Forum in 2012 was a joint initiative and any decisions regarding its future would require to be jointly informed.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether new exploration licences targeting Shale Gas, or other unconventional oil and gas, will be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment.
(AQW 39205/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Departmental officials are continuing to consider how best to give effect to the European Commission's January 2014 Recommendation paper on minimum principles to be applied to high volume hydraulic fracturing.

Any decisions regarding the commissioning of a Strategic Environmental Assessment remain to be informed as part of these broader deliberations.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she has taken following the Assembly's endorsement of a motion by the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on 25 February 2014 on the contribution of Credit Unions.
(AQW 39224/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I fully recognise the valuable work of the credit union movement in Northern Ireland.

However as I stated in response to the motion, it is important to recognise the distinction between my Department's statutory role as Registry of Credit Unions and the provision of financial assistance to the credit union movement. My Department is not responsible for providing such financial support to the credit union movement.

A number of departments have an interest in the issues of access to banking services and affordable lending. Following the 25 February debate, I met with the Minister for Social Development. DARD officials also met with officials from DETI, DSD, OFMDFM and DFP to discuss the issue of credit unions as DARD has an interest in this area from a rural perspective.

The Department for Social Development is working with the local credit union movement from a social policy perspective to consider how credit unions can contribute to improving the financial capability of consumers, Social Security Agency claimants, and particularly those with low income.

DSD has been working closely with the credit union trade associations to identify the specific support credit unions may require and has agreed to progress two pilots, with each pilot likely to involve up to 3 credit unions. The first is to support credit unions to modernise their operations and the second will support credit unions to modernise their services, to include new or enhanced banking services/products.

My Department is also working towards updating the Northern Ireland legislation governing credit unions by way of an Assembly Bill. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has considered initial policy proposals and is content with the majority of them. The Committee has, however, raised issues in respect of three areas, two of which have been resolved, with the third being addressed with UK regulatory authorities and key sectoral stakeholders. This legislation will remove further restrictions on Northern Ireland credit unions and thereby permit them to expand the range of their activities, and reach out to new groups.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many innovation vouchers have been granted to increase participation in Horizon 2020; and how many companies have been offered project definition to pursue an application to Horizon 2020.
(AQW 39256/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Although the Horizon 2020 Innovation Voucher scheme has been widely promoted, to date there have been no applications to the scheme. This does not mean companies are not seeking advice for Horizon 2020, rather that the Northern Ireland Contact Point Network appears to meet the same needs as the Horizon 2020 Innovation voucher and has the advantage of being entirely free.

Nineteen local companies have benefited from Project Definition support for Horizon 2020 – this has included 8 offers made directly to local companies and 7 offers have been made to universities and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute that have included 11 Northern Ireland companies in consortium bids

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on InvestNI's Transformative Power of Service Innovation programme.
(AQW 39257/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As a result of a competitive call by European Commission's DG Enterprise & Industry, Invest NI bid for, and was selected as, one of six 'model demonstrator' regions in Europe. The bid proposed designing and implementing a strategy that would build upon Service Innovation (SI) as a catalyst for structural change.

The EU Commission contracted the European Service Innovation Centre (ESIC) to support the successful regions to develop service innovation (SI) thinking. As part of this, ESIC presented a final Northern Ireland policy brief and recommendations to Invest NI this summer.

The brief makes the case that support for Service Innovation (SI) should be made more explicit in existing Northern Ireland policy measures and sets out three recommendations for Invest NI to consider taking forward. Invest NI is currently consulting with all relevant stakeholders in this area (DETI, Matrix, Universities etc) to explore options for taking these recommendations forward in 2015.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 37897/11-15, to outline the complex policy issues which are currently under consideration; and whether she will introduce an Energy Bill during the current mandate.
(AQW 39280/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The complex policy issues currently under consideration relate in particular to the proposed energy efficiency obligation and the small scale Feed in Tariff. The previously proposed Energy Bill will not be introduced in the current mandate.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the inspections carried out by the Health and Safety Executive during its recent blitz on construction, including (i) the name of the company; (ii) the approximate location of the site; and (iii) the date of inspection.
(AQW 39320/11-15)

Mrs Foster: HSENI's work is governed by the Health and Safety at Work Order (NI) 1978 which sets out the powers of HSENI inspectors.

Article 30 of the Order covers 'restrictions on disclosure of information'. Article 30 (6) protects the confidentiality of information that people are required to provide to HSENI or its inspectors. The name of the companies inspected cannot therefore be released. However Article 30(3)d allows 'disclosure by the recipient of information in a form calculated to prevent it from being identified as relating to a particular person or case'.

The following information has therefore been made anonymous in compliance with Article 30(3)d. I hope it will provide the majority of information you have requested:

Name ¹ (Anonymous in compliance with regulation 30(3)(d) of the Health and Safety at Work Order (Northern Ireland) 1978)	Location	Date of Contact	Site Type	No of Workers
1	Lisburn	19.09.14	Other ²	6 - 20
2	Dungannon	09.09.14	Other	6 - 20
3	Comber	19.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
4	Belfast	10.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
5	Belfast	10.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
6	Belfast	23.09.14	Other	6 - 20
7	Belfast	04.09.14	Other	6 - 20
8	Londonderry	05.09.14	Housing	21 - 50

Name¹ (Anonymous in compliance with regulation 30(3)(d) of the Health and Safety at Work Order (Northern Ireland) 1978)	Location	Date of Contact	Site Type	No of Workers
9	Feeny	12.09.14	Other	1 - 5
10	Comber	19.09.14	Other	1 - 5
11	Portavogie	19.09.14	Other	1 - 5
12	Eglinton	05.09.14	Other	6 - 20
13	Banbridge	03.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
14	Banbridge	12.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
15	Belfast	17.09.14	Other	6 - 20
16	Feeny	12.09.14	Civil Engineering	6 - 20
17	Belfast	11.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
18	Magherafelt,	10.09.14	Apartments	6 - 20
19	Newtownards	14.09.14	Other	6 - 20
20	Belfast	26.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
21	Belfast	04.09.14	Other	1 - 5
22	Belfast	04.09.14	Other	6 - 20
23	Newtownabbey	09.09.14	Other	6 - 20
24	Belfast	10.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
25	Magherafelt	10.09.14	Housing & Apartments	6 - 20
26	Newry	02.09.14	Other	21 - 50
27	Moy	09.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
28	Castlewellan	09.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
29	Larne	05.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
30	Hollywood	19.09.14	Civil Engineering	6 - 20
31	Londonderry,	05.05.14	Other	n/a
32	Portavogie	03.09.14	Other	6 - 20
33	Belfast	11.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
34	Londonderry	05.09.14	Other	6 - 20
35	Portrush	18.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
36	Maguiresbridge	02.09.14	Civil Engineering	6 - 20
37	Portaferry	03.09.14	Housing	n/a
38	Saintfield	01.09.14	Other	1 - 5
39	Maghera	10.09.14	Apartments	1 - 5
40	Banbridge	19.09.14	Civil Engineering	1 - 5
41	Newry	02.09.14	Other	6 - 20
42	Kilkeel	09.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
43	Belfast	10.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
44	Cookstown	02.09.14	Other	
45	Comber	19.09.14	Civil Engineering	1 - 5
46	Banbridge	03.09.14	Other	21 - 50

Name¹ (Anonymous in compliance with regulation 30(3)(d) of the Health and Safety at Work Order (Northern Ireland) 1978)	Location	Date of Contact	Site Type	No of Workers
47	Antrim	09.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
48	Londonderry	12.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
49	Ballynahinch	01.09.14	Housing & Apartments	6 - 20
50	Londonderry	12.09.14	Other	6 - 20
51	Ballymena	11.09.14	Other	6 - 20
52	Downpatrick	10.09.14	Other	6 - 20
53	Belfast	08.09.14	Other	21 - 50
54	Belfast	04.09.14	Civil Engineering	1 - 5
55	Belfast	08.09.14	Other	1 - 5
56	Belfast	26.09.14	Other	6 - 20
57	Newtownards	03.09.14	Other	6 - 20
58	Cookstown	04.09.14	Other	1 - 5
59	Banbridge	12.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
60	Lisburn	04.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
61	Cultra	19.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
62	Portavogie	03.09.14	Civil Engineering	1 - 5
63	Banbridge	03.09.14	Other	6 - 20
64	Kircubbin	11.09.14	Other	6 - 20
65	Newcastle	09.09.14	Apartments	6 - 20
66	Belfast	23.09.14	Other	6 - 20
67	Lisburn	18.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
68	Lisburn	04.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
69	Newtownards	11.09.14	Housing	21 - 50
70	Belfast	04.09.14	Other	21 - 50
71	Newcastle	03.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
72	Coalisland	09.09.14	Other	6 - 20
73	Lisburn	18.09.14	Civil Engineering	6 - 20
74	Comber	24.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
75	Magherafelt	10.09.14	Civil Engineering	6 - 20
76	Londonderry	17.09.14	Housing	21 - 50
77	Desertmartin	24.09.14	Civil Engineering	1 - 5
78	Portaferry	05.09.14	Other	6 - 20
79	Glengormley	02.09.14	Apartments	6 - 20
80	Enniskillen	02.09.14	Apartments	6 - 20
81	Cookstown	02.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
82	Broughshane	11.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
83	Newcastle	03.09.14	Apartments	1 - 5
84	Hillsborough	01.09.14	Housing	n/a

Name¹ (Anonymous in compliance with regulation 30(3)(d) of the Health and Safety at Work Order (Northern Ireland) 1978)	Location	Date of Contact	Site Type	No of Workers
85	Larne	05.09.14	Other	6 - 20
86	Dungannon	09.09.14	Other	21 - 50
87	Saintfield	01.09.14	Civil Engineering	6 - 20
88	Ballyclare	17.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
89	Antrim,	02.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
90	Moy	09.09.14	Other	1 - 5
91	Limavady	24.09.14	Housing	6 - 20
92	Maguiresbridge	02.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
93	Rathfriland	12.09.14	Other	1 - 5
94	Portaferry	11.09.14	Other	1 - 5
95	Downpatrick	05.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
96	Lisburn	05.09.14	Civil Engineering	6 - 20
97	Lisburn	18.09.14	Other	6 - 20
98	Ballymena	11.09.14	Other	1 - 5
99	Londonderry	12.09.14	Other	6 - 20
100	Kilkeel	03.09.14	Other	1 - 5
101	Cookstown	02.09.14	Other	6 - 20
102	Belfast	19.09.14	Housing	1 - 5
103	Lisnaskea	02.09.14	Other	6 - 20
104	Newtownards	14.09.15	Other	6 - 20

1 Article 30 of The Health and Safety at Work Order (NI) 1978 sets powers of HSENI inspectors and “restrictions on disclosure of information”.

Article 30 (6) prevents disclosure of ‘any information obtained by him as a result of the exercise of any power’ and protects the confidentiality of information which people are required to provide to HSENI or its Inspectors.

However Article 30(3)d allows ‘disclosure by the recipient of information in a form calculated to prevent it from being identified as relating to a particular person or case’

2 Other includes Commercial Buildings, Schools, Refurbishment and Demolition

n/a – information not available

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she will publish the report on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment’s investigation into the NI Events Company.
(AQW 39322/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer the member to the answer I provided in AQW 38515/11-15.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the proposals for Financial Transaction Capital submitted by her Department.
(AQW 39332/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Proposals totalling £7.5million Financial Transactions Capital funding have been put forward for 2014-15 for Access to Finance and the Northern Ireland Science Park.

Proposals totalling £33.3million have been put forward for Financial Transactions Capital funding in 2015-16 for Agri-Food Loan Scheme, Access to Finance, Film Studios, Sustainable Use of Poultry Litter and the Northern Ireland Science Park.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the contribution of the Ulster Orchestra to the local events sector and in attracting investment in the creative arts.

(AQW 39349/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Neither my Department nor the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has undertaken any research that demonstrates the contribution of the Ulster Orchestra to the local events sector or in attracting investment in the creative arts.

As you are aware, the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL) is responsible for the creative arts in Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what was the outcome of the Utility Regulator's request of May 2013 to Mutual Energy to conduct a more in-depth analysis extending the examination to assess future costs and savings to consumers, in respect of its estimated £60m cost for the restoration of full and reliable capacity to the Moyle interconnector.

(AQW 39369/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Utility Regulator has advised that, as part of its procurement of new low voltage cables, Mutual Energy is in the process of finalising costs for the permanent restoration of the Moyle Interconnector. When the process is concluded the Regulator plans to publish an update of the estimated consumer impact.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much has been spent on advertising insolvency notices in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39411/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

Financial Year	Amount Spent (£)
2011/12	250,194
2012/13	227,473
2013/14	220,818
Total	698,485

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of whether advertising insolvency notices in the press is good value for money, given that there are cheaper alternative methods to provide this information.

(AQW 39412/11-15)

Mrs Foster: After careful consideration, I have concluded that the cost of routinely advertising insolvency notices outweighs any benefits. I have decided, therefore, to align Northern Ireland legislation with that of Great Britain and make the advertising of insolvencies in newspapers discretionary.

Advertising in the printed media may still take place where it is considered appropriate but this is likely to be only in rare instances. Advertising in the Belfast Gazette will continue in all cases. My officials are exploring the use of other media, such as my Department's website, for the routine advertising of bankruptcy and winding up orders in the future.

Legislation to implement this decision has been drafted and will be taken through the Assembly processes in due course.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of jobs that have been (i) created; and (ii) proposed by her Department and InvestNI in the (a) last; and (b) next twelve months, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 39416/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI produces job creation figures based on financial years, so is unable to provide figures for the last 12 months. The table below details the number of jobs that have been created during the 2013-14 financial year, broken down by constituency.

Constituency Area	2013-14
Belfast East	852
Belfast North	350
Belfast South	832
Belfast West	198
East Antrim	124
East Londonderry	201
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	637
Foyle	434

Constituency Area	2013-14
Lagan Valley	209
Mid Ulster	495
Newry And Armagh	371
North Antrim	272
North Down	128
South Antrim	413
South Down	288
Strangford	157
Upper Bann	482
West Tyrone	327

There are no specific targets relating to job creation. However, the Programme for Government contains a target for Invest NI to promote (proposed) 13,371 new jobs in the 2014-15 financial year. This figure is for Northern Ireland as a whole; Invest NI does not set job-related targets at a sub-regional level.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the current expected commission date for the restoration of full and reliable capacity to the Moyle Interconnector.

(AQW 39455/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Moyle will be restored to full capacity by Mutual Energy laying new low voltage cables alongside the existing Moyle cables. This work is expected to be completed by 2017.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any plans to improve the cooperation and partnership between InvestNI and local councils.

(AQW 39462/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is already working closely with councils regularly attending meetings on issues relating to economic development, planning etc. Invest NI is also working with a number of councils currently developing economic strategies for their areas. It will continue to engage on this basis to maximise growth prospects for the Northern Ireland economy. Invest NI also has a close association with NILGA.

Significant progress is also being made in relation to the three broad economic development functions that will transfer from Invest NI to councils as part of Local Government Reform (LGR). The three functions are entrepreneurial awareness, social enterprise and under-represented groups.

Going forward through LGR, Invest NI will provide input to councils Community Plans on matters relating to economic development. Invest NI is leading as a Statutory Partner for Community Planning on economic development matters.

Finally, the Local Economic Development (LED) Measure of European Funding provides an excellent platform for councils and my Department to work together on initiatives. Within the overall LED Measure across Northern Ireland since 2011 Invest NI has now approved assistance for 99 Council Projects with total investment of circa £38.3 million and total Invest NI assistance of circa £25.1 million.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the total level of capital receipts generated by her Department in each year since 2011; (ii) each individual asset; (iii) its location; (iv) when it was sold; (v) by whom it was purchased; and (vi) for how much it was sold.

(AQW 39500/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There were no capital receipts from asset sales in the 2011/12 and 2012/13 financial years.

There was one asset sale in the 2013/14 financial year, details of which are shown below:

- Sales proceeds: £6,416
- Asset: Motor Vehicle
- Location: DETI Headquarters, Netherleigh
- Date of Sale: 26/07/2013
- Purchased by: Mervyn Stewart Ltd

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 38574/11-15, how many (i) community engagement sessions; (ii) participants and groups progressing action planning; (iii) mentoring sessions with relevant groups; and (iv) promotional and information events have been in East Londonderry.

(AQW 39534/11-15)

Mrs Foster: To date the activity in East Londonderry as requested has been as follows:

- (i) Community engagement sessions - six
- (ii) Participants and groups progressing action planning - five
- (iii) Mentoring sessions with relevant groups - eleven
- (iv) Promotional and information events have been in East Londonderry - four

These activities have been delivered by the three Delivery Agents who work in this constituency area, Ledcom, North West marketing and Omagh Enterprise Company. In addition to this work already completed in the East Londonderry constituency area these Delivery Agents also have a programme of planned activity to the end of their contracts. Invest NI is responsible for managing the delivery contracts.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to question AQW 1338/11, for an update on any action taken, or proposed action, to recoup grant monies from Craigavon Borough Council for the provision of biomass boilers.

(AQW 39590/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A writ of summons was served on Craigavon Borough Council in November 2011 and DETI continues to work with Craigavon Borough Council to resolve the matter.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) when the Single Electricity Market committee will publish an updated generator profitability report; (ii) when the last report was published; and (iii) for what period.

(AQW 39674/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) I am informed by the Regulator that the Single Electricity Market Committee expects to publish its second report on Generator Financial Performance, later this month.
- (ii) Its first report was published in May 2013, reflecting information in 2011.
- (iii) I am advised that the second report will cover the period 2011 to 2013.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the Single Electricity Market committee will publish its annual report for 2013; and to outline the reasons for the delay in its publication.

(AQW 39676/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am informed by the Regulator that the Single Electricity Market Committee is scheduled to publish its annual report for 2013 in February 2015. The Regulator has advised that the delay has resulted from a demanding workload and the need to prioritise resources associated with the re-design of the market.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has any plans to ask the utility regulator to review and investigate whether network and other charges and tariffs for electricity are reflective of cost.

(AQW 39678/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am informed by the Regulator that the current network charge licence conditions require that customer charges are non-discriminatory between customer groups (i.e. that they are cost reflective). The Regulator has also advised that it wrote recently to NIE and the company confirmed that its charges are cost reflective. I therefore have no plans to ask for a review.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she took to ensure that First Flight Wind had the required confidence to enable it to progress with its proposed investment in Northern Ireland's renewable energy generation.

(AQW 39688/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since the granting of the Crown Estate's agreement to lease in October 2012 I have met with both the Directors of First Flight Wind (FFW) and other key stakeholders.

I have written to the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) Secretary of State on many occasions to ensure that the implementation of Electricity Market Reform delivers a level playing field for all Northern Ireland renewable generators.

FFW has also had many meetings with senior DETI staff and DETI has supported FFW at meetings with DECC.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) for an update on the Moyle Interconnector; (ii) what targets are in place for its full restoration; and (iii) what effect it will have on customers' bills.

(AQW 39716/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Mutual Energy has been working on interim Moyle Interconnector repair options including recent seabed cable repairs. While there was some success with the engineering process, it did not result in the Moyle Interconnector being restored to full transfer capacity.

The focus by owners Mutual Energy will now be on completing permanent Moyle Interconnector repairs by 2017, through laying new low voltage cables alongside the existing Moyle Interconnector cables.

The Utility Regulator will publish details on expected Moyle Interconnector repair costs and the impact on consumer bills, after Mutual Energy has completed the ongoing procurement process for the new cables, and provided the Regulator with further information on planned expenditure.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps are being taken to ensure that the two tidal projects proposed for the north coast continue as planned, given the issues raised by First Flight Wind.

(AQW 40021/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The two tidal projects continue to progress and are currently engaging with stakeholders as part of the marine licence and consent application process.

Wave and tidal projects will transition to Electricity Market Reform with a 100MW minimum threshold (which is not subject to competitive allocation) across the UK for the duration of the first delivery plan. The first delivery plan supports eligible projects that are due to commission by March 2021.

Department of the Environment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 38950/11-15, whether the deposition of waste on site was assessed as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment determination or Habitats Regulation Assessment prior to the approval of K/2013/0072/F.

(AQW 39218/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): I refer you to AQW 37112/11-15. I would also state that the material brought on to site was processed aggregate.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment to provide a geographical breakdown of cross-compliance inspections conducted by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, broken down by constituency, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39285/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The attached table provides the number of farm businesses where a planned Cross Compliance inspection was carried out by NIEA for each parliamentary constituency for the years 2012 to 2014 inclusive.

Farm Businesses Cross Compliance Inspections by NIEA in Each Parliamentary Constituency for the Years 2012 to 2014

Parliamentary Constituency	2012	2013	2014	Total
Belfast East	0	1	1	2
Belfast North	0	1	0	1
Belfast South	0	1	0	1
Belfast West	0	0	0	0
East Antrim	9	4	8	21
East Londonderry	27	12	39	78
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	32	51	53	136
Foyle	29	7	5	41
Lagan Valley	19	19	8	46
Mid Ulster	33	49	31	113
Newry And Armagh	69	31	28	128
North Antrim	17	44	30	91

Parliamentary Constituency	2012	2013	2014	Total
North Down	2	0	3	5
South Antrim	8	11	6	25
South Down	67	54	31	152
Strangford	19	42	18	79
Upper Bann	19	3	5	27
West Tyrone	26	64	54	144
Totals	376	394	320	1090

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, further to the appearance of a departmental official at the Committee for the Environment on 20 November 2014, to provide or place in the Assembly Library, a copy of the full consultation document which he states is the source of the letter from Vehicle Policy Branch headed TAXI (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2008 PROPOSED NEW TAXI PLATES, as well as a list detailing who the document was sent to and when.

(AQW 39365/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The information requested has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment whether in planning applications (a) N/2011/0309/F; and (b) N/2012/0505/F any planning official, or official of any consultee, declared any relevant interest.

(AQW 39381/11-15)

Mr Durkan: DOE Planning has no record of any declaration of interest by a planning official or by any official of any consultee in relation to either application.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 38577/11-15, what assurance he can provide that a review of current fees for the processing of driver licences, which are currently not in parity with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, will be a priority objective during the development of a new driver licensing IT system.

(AQW 39388/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In my response to AQW 38577/11-15 I advised that the administration of driver licensing in Northern Ireland is expected, as far as possible, to be a self-financing service, with costs recovered through fee income.

The Northern Ireland Driver Licensing System (NIDLS) was developed some 30 years ago, and while some enhancements have been made to the system there has been no redesign in relation to data structure, business logic or processing since the system was first introduced.

The development of a new driver licensing system, which includes a fundamental review of business processes, will provide a range of online services and deliver efficiency savings.

However these improvements, which will be phased in, may take some time for all of the efficiencies to be realised.

In the meantime, the DVA will continue to annually review the administration of driver licensing and, in particular, the fees charged to ensure that the service is cost effective and where efficiency savings are realised these are passed onto customers.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the progress of transferring planning powers to local government.

(AQO 7191/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My programme for the transfer of planning powers to local government is on track for completion on 1 April 2015.

Preparations for transfer have involved a major programme of work which is well advanced. This included a broad range of subordinate legislation required to bring the 2011 Planning Act fully into operation and to establish the new two-tier planning system. Public consultation on this legislation is being taken forward in two stages.

Phase 1 addressed the issues essential for councils to inherit a functioning planning system at the point of transfer and has been completed.

Phase 2 proposals deal with a range of matters which, while important in delivering the broader range of planning reforms, are not essential to the continued operation of the system when powers transfer. They are currently subject to public consultation which closes on 31 December 2014.

The necessary policy framework is also being introduced. I published the draft Strategic Planning Policy Statement for consultation in the Spring. This sets out the core planning principles to underpin delivery of the reformed two-tier planning system. My officials have been analysing responses to the consultation and I am planning to finalise the Policy Statement by the end of this year, subject to Executive agreement.

Over the past 3 months my Department has been delivering an extensive capacity building programme for local government. This has included training sessions covering - an "Overview of the Planning System", "Development Plans and Working with the Community" and "Practical Planning". A further session on "Propriety and Outcomes" will roll out during December.

In addition to the structured capacity building programme, advice and guidance is being prepared on a wide variety of planning related matters. This includes guidance on the planning element of the Councillors' code of conduct, the operation of planning committees and practice notes on the operation of the reformed 2 tier planning system.

My Department has been taking steps to ensure that the necessary systems and structures are in place for the successful transfer of planning functions. Planning applications previously dealt with in Strategic Planning Division have been realigned to Local Planning Offices to reflect the new responsibilities. The local offices have also been restructured in line with the new 11 council model and Planning managers have been appointed to each of the new councils. It is anticipated that all staff will be allocated to the relevant councils within the next few weeks. This will involve the transfer of nearly 400 staff from my Department to local government to ensure that adequate resources are available to effectively deliver the planning function.

Whilst the programme is on track there is still work to be done. My staff are working closely with the local government sector to ensure that all transitional arrangements are in place and also to ensure the necessary practical issues, relating to matters such as accommodation, IT and communications, are addressed.

I am confident that the reforms that I have introduced over the past year, together with the changes in the coming months will ensure that a fast, fair and fit purpose planning system transfers in 2015, and continues beyond.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) what plans he has to ban the burning of certain types of coal; (ii) how this policy would compare with the rest of the UK and Ireland; and (iii) any all-Ireland air quality reports which demonstrate that air quality is a problem in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 39439/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There are currently no plans to ban certain types of coal in Northern Ireland. The issue of air pollution from residential combustion of solid fuel, in particular bituminous or 'smoky' coal, is currently the subject of an ongoing all-island study, which has been commissioned by the North South Ministerial Council.

The study is due to report its findings in the first half of 2015; these findings will include policy recommendations for consideration in reducing air pollution from the residential heating sector.

In the Republic of Ireland, the sale and burning of smoky coal is currently banned in twenty-nine urban areas. In Northern Ireland (as is the case in England, Scotland and Wales), air pollution from residential heating in urban centres is addressed by Smoke Control legislation. Smoke Control legislation in the UK has the effect on banning the burning of unauthorised fuels such as smoky coal in designated areas (Smoke Control Areas).

Smoke Control Areas are designated by district councils. In such areas, the emission of smoke from a chimney (with allowance for a lighting-up period) is an offence. Smoke Control legislation lists authorised fuels which may be burned in designated areas, such as smokeless coal and other fuels which adhere to specific emissions standards. The legislation also lists appliances, whose emissions (when burning authorised fuels) adhere to Smoke Control emissions standards.

There are currently no all-Ireland reports on air quality. My Department, however, publishes annual reports on air quality in Northern Ireland. The latest of these reports, which summarises air quality in Northern Ireland in 2013, was published on 28th November 2014 and is available at the following link: http://www.doeni.gov.uk/air_pollution_in_northern_ireland_2013.pdf

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Portavogie Harbour Authority have sought approval for dredging Portavogie Harbour and the disposal of any waste material.

(AQW 39449/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority, a DARD-sponsored public body, has secured a marine licence under the Marine and Coastal Access Act. This allows them to proceed with the dredging of Portavogie Harbour. The dredged material is to be land-filled and a mobile plant licence has been issued by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to enable this material to be transferred to a licensed waste disposal facility.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of the Environment to outline each step in the current planning enforcement process, providing details of the permitted timescales for every stage and any right of appeal which an applicant may have.

(AQW 39469/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The steps of the current planning enforcement process are as follows:

- Complaint received and acknowledged. All written/telephoned enquires entered onto database.
- Assessment of complaint, including legislative requirements, gathering of information and evidence. Initial Site Inspection carried out.
- Cases discussed internally with initial recommendation on whether further action is required.
- If after the meeting there is a successful resolution to the breach of planning control, inform complainant of outcome and authorisation – no further action. If unsuccessful proceed to case.
- Issue warning or contact letter to individual or business responsible for breach.

- If decided further action is required a second site visit may be required. Site inspected and owner/occupier interviewed, photographic record taken. Action Agreed
(If there is a reasonable suspicion that a person is guilty of an offence the person must be cautioned before being asked any questions about his or her suspected involvement). The caution must be given and the subsequent interview must be done in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order (1989) (PACE).
- Where a breach of control has been established and the Department has tried but failed to resolve the breach, formal enforcement action may be taken.
- Depending on the nature of the breach, the Department may serve an enforcement notice or a breach of condition notice.
- The enforcement notice requires a breach of control to be remedied, and will specify what needs to be done to remedy the breach and the period of time for compliance. The notice does not take effect until at least 28 days after the date it is served.
- Where planning permission has been granted subject to conditions, and one or more of these conditions has not been complied with, a breach of condition notice can be served. The notice will specify what needs to be done to remedy the breach and a period of time for compliance. At least 28 days will be allowed for compliance with the notice. The notice becomes effective immediately when it is served.
- Where the Department feels that immediate action is required to remedy a breach of control which is causing serious harm to public amenity it may serve a stop notice. The stop notice may either accompany the enforcement notice or may be served at a later date but before the enforcement notice has taken effect. A stop notice is essentially a supplement to an enforcement notice and cannot be served independently.
- Alternatively, the Department has the power to seek an injunction to restrain any actual or perceived breach of control at any stage of the enforcement process, regardless of whether the Department has exercised or proposes to exercise any of its other enforcement powers.
- An injunction is only likely to be used where there is an immediate threat to the environment.
- The Department's use of its enforcement powers is discretionary and any action taken against a breach of planning control will be commensurate with the harm being caused and whether it regards it expedient to do so. The Department will also take into account the potential effects of enforcement action on both local and regional economies.
- After serving a notice the Department will carry out a site visit to verify compliance or non-compliance with enforcement notice. Photographic record taken.
- If breach or non compliance still occurring instruction given to summons to Departmental Solicitors Office (DSO)
- A follow up letter will be sent to the site owner/operator drawing attention to continuing breach and intention to prosecute.
- Summons issued, court date set DSO.
- Site inspected before and after hearing, photographic record taken.
- Court Hearing, Complainant notified of outcome of Court Hearing.
- Continued monitoring.
- Continued legal action if appropriate.
- Case closed after full compliance.
- Please note the steps outlined above relate to general enforcement procedures; however each enforcement case is assessed on a case by case basis and acted on accordingly.
- Enforcement can be a lengthy, protracted and complex process and if a person decides to submit a planning application or appeal enforcement notice this may add many months to the time taken to resolve the case. It is therefore difficult to set down time scales for dealing with enforcement investigations and any associated action taken.
- The Department however gives priority to those breaches where in its opinion the greatest harm is being caused or likely to be caused to the environment.
- Furthermore the new provision within The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 introduced a standard 5 year time period for taking enforcement action, and will also result in a more efficient system of control, less confusion and greater clarity in dealing with breaches of planning control.
- With respect to an applicant's rights of appeal, any person who owns, occupies or controls land which is the subject of an enforcement notice, may appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission before the date the notice becomes effective. When an appeal has been made, the requirements of the notice are suspended until the appeal has been either determined or withdrawn.
- An appeal may also be made against a submission notice, listed building enforcement notice or hazardous substances contravention notice.
- There is no right of appeal against a breach of condition notice. However, the validity of the notice or the validity of the decision to serve the notice may be challenged by application to the High Court for Judicial Review.
- There is no right of appeal against a stop notice. However, the validity of the stop notice can be challenged either by way of an application to the High Court for Judicial Review, or it can be raised as a defence in the event of any prosecution by the Department for contravention of the notice.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the total level of capital receipts generated by his Department in each year since 2011; (ii) each individual asset; (iii) its location; (iv) when it was sold; (v) by whom it was purchased; and (vi) for how much it was sold.

(AQW 39496/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The total level of capital receipts generated by my Department each year since 2011 are set out in the table below.

Calendar Year	Receipts £
2011	6,398
2012	21,517
2013	26,505
2014	7,775
Total	62,195

Annex A provides the level of detail requested. In relation to information on the purchaser, as the vehicles were sold at public auction no information is provided by the auctioneers as to who the purchasers are.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether he sought legal advice from the Attorney General prior to issuing the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

(AQW 39506/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As you are aware I made an Oral Statement to the Assembly on 8 September this year to announce adoption of BMAP. In response to a question raised following that announcement, I stated that as regards legal advice received from the Attorney General, I had previously given undertakings to adhere fully to the convention concerning legal advice and therefore I was not in a position then to reference any legal advice that may or may not have been taken on the matter. That remains the case.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment what facility exists and criteria apply for a change of applicant whilst still keeping a planning application live.

(AQW 39513/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Article 30 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 provides that a permission will enure for the benefit of the land. The Department will require the submission of an amended application form, with the correct certificate completed, if the name of an applicant is to change. The planning application will remain live and the merits of the application will continue to be assessed by the Department.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 38247/11-15, what research was undertaken to measure the effects on the construction industry of the consultation on developer contributions for affordable housing; and what ongoing research was conducted on the construction industry during the consultation period.

(AQW 39538/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A draft partial Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) setting out the economic, social and environmental costs and benefits of options for the introduction of developer contributions was published for consultation alongside my Department's draft Planning Policy Statement 22 'Affordable Housing' and the Department for Social Development's draft 'Developer Contributions for Affordable Housing' paper.

The draft RIA acknowledges that whilst economic modelling/cost benefit analysis has been conducted that a further Small Business Impact test will be undertaken following consideration of the responses received during the consultation and prior to any preferred policy option being implemented.

There were 53 responses received to the Department's public consultation which closed on 23 September 2014.

The Minister of the Department for Social Development and I have listened to the views received through the public consultation on our respective policies and have decided to commission further research to inform how we move forward to deliver a viable scheme of developer contributions. This research will explore the likely economic impact, both positive and negative, of the various options for developer contribution schemes that could be implemented here. It would also be the intention that as we progress, further engagement with key stakeholders will also take place.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of budgetary pressures, what contingency measures are in place to ensure that the road safety strategy in his Department is not negatively impacted.

(AQW 39540/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As part of the Draft Budget consultation process, information on the implications of the Executive's Budget proposals for my Department was published on 27 November 2014.

I should however emphasise that, while my Department has lead responsibility for co-coordinating a strategic approach to road safety, implementation of the measures contained in the Road Safety Strategy fall to a number of departments and agencies working in partnership. The implementation process is monitored by a Strategy Delivery Board, which comprises representatives from all of those road safety partner organisations, including the Department for Regional Development, Department of Education, PSNI, the NI Fire and Rescue Service and the NI Ambulance Service. Once the final Budget for 2015/16 is in place, decisions on implications for the Road Safety Strategy will be informed by the resources made available to all the members of the Delivery Board and their respective priorities. For my own department, I will similarly consider how to best deliver the strategy within the constraints of the resources available to me.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment to detail, broken down by Department (i) the number of grievances lodged by staff of Craigavon Borough Council in the last three years; (ii) the number of grievances resolved; (iii) the number of grievances still outstanding; (iv) the cost of each resolution; and (v) how long it will take to resolve outstanding grievances.
(AQW 39541/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department does not hold the information you have requested. It is specific and relevant only to one council, and in these circumstances it would be more fitting that you contact Craigavon Borough Council directly.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the issues of taxi-licensing at the Kingspan Stadium, formerly Ravenhill Rugby Ground, (i) to provide copies of the records around this matter contained within the taxi-licensing database; (ii) how many times these records have been inspected, or reports compiled on these issues, since the financial year beginning April 2012; and (iii) who, or what level of staff, has responsibility for updating and maintaining the information on the database.
(AQW 39557/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In response to the member's question:

- (i) The records held within the Taxi Licensing database which relate to the taxi licensing matters at the Kingspan Stadium either relate to the application process or as part of an investigatory process and as such it is necessary to limit the disclosure of this information to protect the integrity of this and other investigatory processes. It would not be appropriate to detail the content or place a copy in the Assembly library;
- (ii) The information requested regarding how many times these records have been inspected, or reports compiled is not held; and
- (iii) All staff in the Passenger Transport Licensing Section, at all grades, have access to update and maintain information on the database in line with business requirements.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment (i) when the Driver and Vehicle Agency commenced issuing Fixed Penalties; (ii) whether they were introduced in stages; (iii) if so, what were the dates of each stage; (iv) what infringements did they cover; and (v) what types of vehicles were covered, such as freight, buses and taxis.
(AQW 39561/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) commenced issuing Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) in February 2011. Due to the broad scope of enforcement provisions, the legislation was implemented in three phases.

- Phase 1, commenced in February 2011, which provided DVA enforcement officers with the powers to issue FPNs for a range of road traffic offences within their remit. FPNs issued for freight and bus related offences included mechanical defects, overloading, driver's hours and record keeping. FPNs offered for taxi related offences included mechanical defects, licensing and insurance infringements;
- Phase 2, commenced in February 2012, introduced graduated fixed penalties ranging from £60 to £200 for certain offences depending on the extent of the infringement. Offences covered included overloading and driver's hours infringements; and
- Phase 3, commenced in November 2014, implemented powers and introduced a financial deposit scheme for foreign drivers (i.e. drivers with no verifiable UK address) and the provision to immobilise and ultimately recover vehicles for non payment of related FPNs. Phase 3 also enables both domestic and foreign vehicles to be immobilised for a wide range of prohibitable offences.

Although the scheme is mainly directed at the freight, bus and taxi industries, it will also impact on private motorists who operate their vehicles in breach of legislative requirements.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what is the hare population of Rathlin Island.
(AQW 39577/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There are currently no scientific estimates of the hare population on Rathlin Island.

My Department has recently facilitated the provision of funding to Queen's University through the 'Challenge Fund' which will permit a detailed hare survey of the island to be undertaken. The fieldwork will begin in January 2015, and will involve a spotlight night driven transect survey utilising all public roads and private lanes where access permission has been granted. The resulting data will be analysed with a statistical package which will provide an estimate of the hare population on the island.

The final report should be available in April 2015.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to protect the hare population of Rathlin Island.
(AQW 39578/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Hares in Northern Ireland are protected under the terms of a range of local and European legislation. The Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928 makes it an offence to take/kill Irish hares during the 'closed season' i.e. 1 February – 11 August, however hares can be taken/killed outside this period during the 'open season' by authorised persons.

The hunting/shooting of hares can be an emotive subject with strong feelings often expressed, however, my Department has substantial land holdings at the west of the island where wildlife, including hares, are protected through a prohibition on hunting.

My Departmental staff work closely with the PSNI in wildlife crime investigations and actively encourage the public to immediately report any instances of illegal poaching of any game species, including hares. I am not aware of any recent reports of illegal hunting of hares on Rathlin. I chair the Northern Ireland Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAWNI) and am encouraged by the attitude of all members in their collective condemnation of illegal activity.

Queen's University was successful in their recent bid to the DoE Challenge Fund to carry out a survey and provide a scientific estimate of hare numbers on Rathlin Island. The results of this study are due by April 2015 and will provide a representative comparison with hare densities found elsewhere in Northern Ireland. These results will inform future proactive management prescriptions for the Rathlin hare population which will be delivered through local agreement and arrangements with Rathlin landowners.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 38899/11-15, and given the alternative for people with a physical disability, whether the same alternative will be afforded to someone who does not have the physical strength to do this manually.
(AQW 39604/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Pursuant to AQW 38899/11-15, European and domestic legislation restricts the exemption of offering oral questions, in place of the practical coupling and uncoupling exercise in the B+E test, to disabled candidates only.

Candidates who deem themselves as lacking the physical strength to carry out the coupling and uncoupling exercise, but who are not physically disabled, can help themselves in a number of ways which are acceptable for test purposes:

- They can use the minimum weight of load required of 600kg.
- They can ensure the load is correctly distributed so there is not too much trailer nose weight and which allows the axles, suspension, wheels and tyres to work efficiently by balancing the load and centre of gravity.
- They should ensure the trailer tyres have the correct tyre pressures.
- They should however ensure that there is at least 50kg trailer nose weight for stability but at the same time adhere to manufacturer's recommendations for the trailer nose weight.
- They can ensure that when coupling, they park as close as possible to the trailer hitch to reduce the amount of manual handling required.
- Lastly, there are a number of remote control motorised jockey wheel devices widely available on the market which may be helpful for a candidate who feels they lack the physical strength to couple and uncouple a trailer.

I would encourage candidates to contact their local test centre manager in advance of their test date for advice to help them prepare for this aspect of the test.

Mr Milne asked the Minister of the Environment whether there is a presumption in favour of development in the countryside as part of the new Strategic Planning Policy Statement.
(AQO 7188/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Member will be aware that the planning system has always exercised a presumption in favour of development. This means that if a development is acceptable, or can be made acceptable through the use of planning conditions, then it should be approved. I fully support this principle and I am sure that everyone in this Assembly chamber supports it too.

The draft SPPS is no different. It carries forward this general presumption in favour of development by setting out the guiding principle that sustainable development should be permitted, having regard to the local development plan and all other material considerations, unless it would cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance. This is a matter of public interest which is what the planning system is all about.

In the countryside, the draft SPPS acknowledges that sustainable development means striking a balance between protecting rural areas from unnecessary or inappropriate development, whilst at the same time supporting the essential needs of vibrant local communities. I am sure every member can agree on the importance of balancing these competing objectives in a way that supports rural dwellers.

With this in mind the objectives of the draft SPPS are:

- To manage growth to deliver sustainable patterns of development that supports a vibrant rural community;
- to conserve the landscape and natural resources of our rural areas and protect them from excessive development and from the effects of pollution;
- to facilitate development which contributes to a sustainable rural economy; and
- to promote high standards in the design, siting and landscaping of development.

To this end the draft SPPS identifies a range of types of development that contribute to the above aims and objectives. Development considered acceptable in principle includes residential development such as small scale social and affordable housing; infilling/ rounding off of appropriate development clusters/groups; a replacement dwelling; a farm dwelling or conversion housing linked to a rural business, and a dwelling / mobile home where there are compelling personal and domestic circumstances.

Other non-residential development also considered acceptable in principle includes farm diversification proposals, agriculture and forestry development; tourism/holiday accommodation; and the re-use conversion of existing buildings in the countryside.

Members should recognise that the transfer of planning to councils will afford them flexibility to develop their own policy approach in local development plans in respect of each of the development types identified in the SPPS, tailoring them to fit local circumstances as appropriate. This is a hugely important change for the better that will ensure that local planning policies can respond effectively to local circumstances, while still taking proper account of regional policies.

In addition, the move to a plan-led system, will I believe ensure that sustainable development, which accords with a local development plan, will be permitted. It is also important to remember that the plan will be developed in close consultation with the local community and should therefore deliver for their needs and aspirations.

By adopting this positive approach to plan-led development in the countryside in the SPPS I want to ensure that the planning system strikes the right balance between protecting rural areas from unnecessary or inappropriate development and creating the right conditions for rural communities and business to flourish and grow.

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the transition of the taxi and operator licensing unit from Belfast to Coleraine.

(AQO 7196/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Following the unjustified and unwarranted decision by the Department for Transport to centralise all vehicle registration and licensing services in Swansea, I have worked hard to secure alternative employment for the staff affected.

I identified work for relocation to Coleraine which would be available to surplus DVA staff, which included the transfer of the taxi licensing function from Belfast to Coleraine on 15 September 2014.

As a result of the transfer, there was a significant loss of experienced staff who were relocated to other posts within various departments across the NICS, as suitable opportunities became available. This loss of knowledge and expertise inevitably led to some initial backlogs as new staff were appointed and trained.

The disruption arising from the transition resulted in the taxi industry encountering longer processing times. That said, throughout the transition period, all published targets were met albeit at a slower pace.

I am pleased to report that the new Team is now established and the delays in processing applications have significantly reduced.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the implementation of Single Tier Licensing for Taxis.

(AQO 7197/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department continues to work to implement the various elements of the Taxis Act with the intention of enabling a safer, fairer and fit for purpose industry. One of the elements of the Act is the introduction of a new taxi licensing regime.

I believe that the current dual tier system in place in Belfast, with some taxis able to be hailed and others only available through prior bookings, cannot adequately address a number of problems that the Act was designed to tackle.

The public (residents and visitors alike) are confused as to which taxis they can use in different circumstances. There are insufficient numbers of taxis which can pick up on the street in Belfast, particularly at peak periods, to meet demand and ensure public order. Furthermore, there is too much enforcement activity addressing relatively minor licensing offences, which reduces the resources available to address illegal and dangerous taxis.

I have listened to, considered and reconsidered the concerns expressed that the change would adversely impact on Belfast Public Hire taxi drivers, and that enforcement difficulties around illegal picking up in Belfast give cause for concern about the Department's ability to enforce a new licensing regime. I am not persuaded by these arguments. As outlined, therefore, in my statement to the Assembly on 19 June of this year, I intend to pursue the policy objective of single tier licensing throughout the North, in line with the provisions of the Act and with arrangements that already apply in all areas of the North except Belfast.

The relevant legislation is nearing completion and will be made by my Department in early December 2014. I intend to update the Environment Committee on progress on 4 December 2014.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with local councils to ensure that they are prepared for severe weather this winter.

(AQO 7198/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I wrote to councils on 24 October 2014 asking that they ensure they are well prepared for the onset of severe weather conditions, and the eventuality of resulting emergencies, that may arise particularly during the incoming winter months.

The councils were specifically asked to ensure, for this winter period, that the change of responsibilities arising from the incoming reform of local government did not impact negatively on their response capabilities guaranteeing that essential local services would be sustained.

Councils have Emergency Plans in place and Emergency Planning Co-ordination Officers who assist lead agencies in their response and any recovery aspect of an emergency situation, including those caused by adverse weather conditions. Of course, my own officials are fully engaged in this process, through the forum of the Local Government Emergency Management Group, participating in the teleconferencing system where all responders, including other departmental and local government nominees, are represented. I am kept fully up to date with all emergency and potential emergency incidents as they are notified through this 24/7 exercise.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the proportion of road fatalities in 2014 that were drivers or passengers in cars or heavy goods vehicles compared to the last two calendar years.

(AQO 7199/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The information requested is presented in the table below.

Year	No. of drivers or passengers of cars and HGVs killed**	Total killed	Proportion of total %
2012	31	48	64.6%
2013	35	57	61.4%
2014 (to 23 Nov)*	37	73	50.7%

* 2014 statistics are provisional and subject to minor amendment

** Includes cars, light goods vehicles and HGVs.

Source: Statistics Branch, Police Service of Northern Ireland, Lisnasharragh

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the ongoing cross-border co-operation between the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Environmental Protection Agency.

(AQO 7200/11-15)

Mr Durkan: NIEA and EPA meet in a number of forums and co-operate on a wide variety of issues and initiatives on both a strategic and operational level, and also on a number of research initiatives.

For example, such Forums include:

- The North South Working Group on Water Quality;
- The North South Rivers and Lakes Technical Advisory Group; and
- The Unconventional Gas Steering Committee;

On a strategic level the 2 agencies co-operate on issues such as:

- Implementation of European Directives, such as the Water framework Directive;
- Transboundary waste and water management issues;
- The natural environment;
- And emerging issues of mutual interest.

On an operational Level the 2 agencies co-operate on issues such as:

- Environmental monitoring;
- Environmental crime;
- Cross border transport of radioactive material;
- Sharing of data and knowledge;
- Joint technical training and development initiatives;

Examples of co-operation on Research initiatives include studies into:

- High volume hydraulic fracturing; and
- Radioactive levels in and around Carlingford Lough;

These are just a few wide ranging examples of cross border co-operation between NIEA and EPA.

My position is that the environment knows no borders; I therefore encourage Officials in NIEA to co-operate with their counterparts in the EPA at every opportunity possible to promote positive environmental outcomes.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has any plans to work with the Department for Social Development to standardise the definition of houses in multiple occupation, so that the Planning Service and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive work to the same definition.

(AQO 7201/11-15)

Mr Durkan: From a planning perspective any proposed change in the definition of a HMO will need to be considered with regard to the Planning (Use Classes) Order (Northern Ireland) 2004 ("UCO").

The current UCO separates a number of the most common land uses into 11 groups (classes) and stipulates that a change in use between activities within the same group is not 'development' and therefore planning permission is not required. A house in multiple occupation does not belong to a specific class in the UCO and therefore express planning permission for such a change is required.

Article 2 of the UCO attracts the definition of Article 75 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (as amended) for the purposes of the term "house in multiple occupation".

My officials have recently been engaged in discussions with officials from the Department for Social Development (DSD) on related cross cutting issues including the definition of houses in multiple occupation. I am advised that DSD officials are working on proposals for a new HMO Bill which will introduce a licensing scheme. Subject to Assembly process, it is their aim that the new Bill will be passed in the current mandate. These discussions will continue with a view to achieving a common legislative definition of a house in multiple occupation in both housing and planning law.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, to detail the number of domestic properties and residents in the vicinity which were written to, and consulted on, the planning proposals (i) Z/2012/1387/F; and (ii) Z/2014/1473/F.

(AQW 39803/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department operates a neighbour notification process whereby those neighbouring properties which are on land that abuts the application site, and are also within 90m of the proposed development site, will be individually notified. This process was carried out on both applications and a total of 11 properties were notified. However given the location of the application site this did not include any residential properties. I understand that the closest residential property is located approximately 1 km from the application site.

All applications for planning permission are advertised in at least one newspaper circulating in the locality in which the land to which the application relates is situated. In both cases publication took place in a total of 6 newspapers.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the comments by the Royal Bank of Scotland's Northern Ireland Chief Executive that Ulster Bank branch closures are inevitable, what communication her Department has had with the Royal Bank of Scotland and Ulster Bank.

(AQW 38116/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I have met with Ulster Bank and RBS senior management on several occasions this year to discuss a range of issues including the bank's restructuring process. Clearly, it is disappointing that Ulster Bank sees a need to close a further ten branches in Northern Ireland as part of that process.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps his Department is taking to improve accessibility and transparency in the publishing of departmental spending and budgets.

(AQW 38958/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department produces annual guidance to assist departments in the publication of Resource Accounts. Bi-annually, my Department publishes detailed departmental Estimates, which provides details of the proposed spending plans of all departments. Those spending plans underpin the Budget Act legislation.

In addition, the Review of the Financial Process which my Department has undertaken would assist the transparency of departmental spending and budgets. That review has not yet been endorsed by the Executive.

In relation to the Budget, the draft Budget document is published on the Executive's website and my Department has issued guidance to assist all departments in publishing detailed underpinning budgetary information; however, publication of such material is ultimately a matter for individual Ministers.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number and percentage of jobs created since 1 April 2008, broken down by (a) full time; (b) part time; and (c) self employed posts; (ii) the number and percentage of (a) full time; (b) part time; and (c) self employed people at 1 April 2008 and 1 April 2014; and (iii) the number of people that currently work part time but are seeking a full time job.

(AQW 38993/11-15)

Mr Hamilton:

- (i) It is not possible to provide information on the total number of jobs created as requested. Information is collected on the number of jobs at a particular point in time. Therefore, statistics can only be provided on the net change in jobs between two points in time.
- (ii) The table overleaf provides information on the net change in all employee jobs (part-time and full-time) as measured by the Quarterly Employment Survey as well as self employment figures which are taken from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The net changes take into account both job gains and losses during the period (Quarter 1 2008 to Quarter 1 2014).
- (iii) The latest figures from the LFS (for July – September 2014) indicate that there were 28,000 part time workers in Northern Ireland who could not find a full time job.

Numbers of Full-time, Part-time and Self Employment Jobs

	Quarter 1 2008	Quarter 1 2014	Net Change
Full-time employee jobs ¹	484,720	461,020	-23,700
Part-time employee jobs ¹	247,020	247,460	+440
Total Employee jobs ¹	731,740	708,480	-23,260
Self-employment ²	118,000	125,000	+7,000

Sources:

- 1 Quarterly Employment Survey
- 2 Labour Force Survey

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether peace funding has been distributed to (i) South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society; (ii) Tyrone Cultural Society; and (iii) North Antrim Historical Society; and if so, to detail the extent and date it was distributed.

(AQW 39132/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) has advised that the South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society, the Tyrone Cultural Society and the North Antrim Historical Society have received no funding under the PEACE I, PEACE II or the PEACE III Programmes.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQT 1606/11-15, when the promised correspondence will be issued.

(AQW 39525/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The response issued on 27 November 2014.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any options for savings submitted by Health and Social Care Trusts were not utilised; and if so, to detail the proposals.

(AQW 38502/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): All Trusts were advised during the summer that it would be necessary to implement a range of contingency proposals given the outcome of June Monitoring and the first draft of their proposals were produced in August. Since then, the HSCB (in liaison with the PHA) has liaised closely with all Trusts and has critically reviewed, analysed and revised the proposals as appropriate to safeguard the safety and integrity of services and to reflect the subsequent outcome of October Monitoring.

The trusts' contingency plans have necessarily changed throughout this process to reflect the changing financial context. The additional funding that was made available through the October Monitoring round meant that the level of unfunded pressures to be resolved through contingency plans was significantly reduced.

A range of proposals were therefore not utilised such as closure of some Statutory Residential Homes, cessation of a range of hospital services and closure of some small hospital sites, closure of Mental Health Resource centres and Family Centres, retraction of some Voluntary Service contracts, cessation of provision of community meal packages, reduction of diagnostic services, cessation of access to specialist drugs, cessation of provision of treatment room services in GP practices and more significant cuts to elective care, agency and locum spend and domiciliary care.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average cost of a patient stay in a ward in an acute hospital with an Emergency Department.

(AQW 38658/11-15)

Mr Wells: The average cost of an inpatient stay, measured as a finished consultant episode (FCE), in a ward in an acute hospital with an Emergency Department in 2012/13 was £2,562. The average length of stay in these hospitals on a basis that is like with like with the costs shown was 3.6 days in 2012/13.

Such averages do not take account of the complexity of the case or the level or extent of treatment delivered, hence they can vary greatly between clinical specialties. They include all costs associated with the episode, including any procedures carried out.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the savings expected from the proposed closure of hospitals, including Bangor Community Hospital.

(AQW 38758/11-15)

Mr Wells: No hospitals are proposed to close. Whilst some services are proposed to be temporarily removed from Bangor Community Hospital, it will continue to provide outpatient services.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the estimated operating cost of the Causeway Hospital when staffed by permanent employees compared to the current model of temporary and agency staff.

(AQW 38833/11-15)

Mr Wells: The need to provide safe and effective services means that there will always be a need for non permanent staff within the HSC. The managed use of temporary and agency staff allows HSC trusts to respond flexibly and efficiently to varying activity levels and to cover short term absences and vacancies.

Generally the use of temporary staff will be at a higher cost than using permanent staff. However, the overall cost to the trust will vary over time as the need to respond to differing circumstances dictates the levels of temporary staff resources required.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the relocation of paediatric cardiac surgery to Dublin is based on the new build children's hospital being fully equipped.

(AQW 38844/11-15)

Mr Wells: I will announce the plans for the relocation of paediatric cardiac surgery in early 2015, subject to the outcome of the current consultation which ends on 23 January 2015. Planning for the revised service model, which I announced in my Oral Statement to the Assembly on 14 October 2014, is proceeding on the basis of the existing facilities in both Belfast and Dublin, and implementation is therefore not dependent upon the proposed new hospitals at either location.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the funding that will be provided to the Citizens Advice Bureau by Health and Social Care Trusts in 2015/16; and if funding remains to be determined, when he anticipates a decision being made.

(AQW 38858/11-15)

Mr Wells: I refer to my response to AQW 37912/11-15 on 7 November 2014.

The South Eastern, Western, Northern and Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trusts have no plans to provide funding to Citizens Advice Bureaux in 2015/16.

The amount of funding which will be provided to the Citizens Advice Bureau by the Belfast and Southern Health and Social Care Trusts in 2015/16 has yet to be determined.

My Department determines health and social care priorities based on need and the availability of resources. At this time I am unable to confirm funding for Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the funding provided to the Citizens Advice Bureau by Health and Social Care Trusts is determined.

(AQW 38859/11-15)

Mr Wells: Funding by Health and Social Care Trusts to Citizens Advice Bureaux is determined by health and social care priorities, the need for such services and the availability of funding.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37425/11-15, how many hours self-employed translators were contracted by each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.

(AQW 38922/11-15)

Mr Wells: Unfortunately, information is not available on the number of hours self-employed translators are contracted by each Health and Social Care Trust. However, information is available on the number of interpreting sessions by Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years, and is set out in the table below.

HSC Trust	No of Interpreting Sessions		
	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12
Southern HSC Trust	42,531	37,880	32,798
Belfast HSC Trust	23,812	19,412	15,842
Northern HSC Trust	10,987	9,321	7,334
Western HSC Trust	6,269	5,852	5,051
South Eastern HSC Trust	4,085	3,184	2,843
Total	87,684	75,649	63,868

*Source: Business Services Organisation

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37425/11-15, what steps are being taken to increase the efficiency of translation services across Health and Social Care Trusts; and why full time employees are not employed as a means of doing so.

(AQW 38923/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Business Services Organisation (BSO), in collaboration with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), have initiated a Service Improvement Programme to increase the efficiency of the Interpreting services across Health and Social Care Trusts. This programme will entail improvements to systems, process, governance, communication, safety and training.

The current arrangements of employing interpreters on a self-employed basis allows for the flexible deployment of translators on an as-needs basis to meet demand. To ensure appropriate coverage in terms of the wide range of languages, the large number of appointments and the wide geographical spread would require a significant number of interpreting staff to be employed under contractual arrangements. It is very unlikely that this would be more cost effective than the existing arrangements whereby interpreters are utilised on an as-needed basis.

A recent review of Interpreting and Translation across Health and Social Care, commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board, considered the merits of employing minority ethnic language interpreters on a permanent basis however the conclusion was that this may not be the most cost effective way of employing the services of minority ethnic language interpreters given the transient nature of immigrant populations coming to Northern Ireland. Another consideration was the age profile of migrants arriving in the province and the associated likelihood of them developing proficiency in the English language as they spend more time here in employment and academic circles.

The decision to employ interpreters on a permanent basis will largely be determined by the development of a regional strategy for interpreting and translation. It is anticipated that this will evolve over coming months by the Business Services Organisation who now manage the Service, the Health and Social Care Board, who commission the Service, and key stakeholders.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a breakdown of (i) redundancies; and (ii) redeployment of staff in each Health and Social Care Trust following the recent contingency plans.

(AQW 38928/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i) All Health and Social Care Trusts have confirmed there are no planned redundancies.
- (ii) The information contained in the Table below on planned redeployments has been provided by Health and Social Care Trusts.

(iii)

Health and Social Care Trust	Grade	Facility	Whole time equivalent	Headcount	Re-deployment	Timescale for Action
South Eastern	Bands 1 - 7	Downe Hospital, Lagan Valley Hospital, Bangor Community Hospital	Band 1 = 9.81; Band 2 = 18.52; Band 3/4 = 3.58; Band 5 = 43.99; Band 6/7 = 9.94.	Band 1 = 14; Band 2 = 21; Band 3/4 = 5; Band 5 = 53; Band 6/7 = 11.	Ulster Hospital, Lagan Valley Hospital, Down Community, Ards Community Hospital, Community – North Down & Ards Locality and Lisburn Locality	1 December 2014
Western	Bands 1, 3 & 5	Tyrone County Hospital, Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital Site	Band 1 = 0.96; Band 3 = 4.80; Band 5 = 5.41.	Band 1 = 2; Band 3 = 5; Band 5 = 6.	Alternative posts within the Trust area, staff deployed to cover sickness and maternity absences pending permanent redeployment filling existing vacancies	5 December 2014 – early December 2015
Northern	Bands 1 - 3 & 5 - 7	Mid-Ulster Hospital, Whiteabbey Hospital, Dalriada Hospital	64.25	80 -100 (excluding GPs who are not employees but the Trust purchases their services)	No further details can be provided at this time as the process of redeploying staff is ongoing.	Anticipated to be 1 December 2014
Southern	Bands 5 & 7	Minor Injuries Unit, Armagh, South Tyrone Hospital	Band 7 = 2; Band 5 = 3.4.	Band 7 = 2; Band 5 = 4	South Tyrone Hospital, Craigavon Area Hospital	17 November 2014

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has advised that there will be no formal redeployment, however there may potentially be some temporary movement of staff within teams and where this is the case staff will be involved in any decisions.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the mechanisms, including timescale, by which he was made aware of the geographical remit, and specific nature, of the services provided by the Multiple Sclerosis Respite Unit in Dalriada Hospital.

(AQW 38938/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Trust Health and Social Care Trust's final contingency plan was submitted to my Department on 23 October 2014. The contingency plan included a proposal recommending the temporary closure of the MS Respite Unit from 30 November 2014.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurance he can give that other community hospitals will be allowed to continue to provide vital palliative and rehabilitation services in their communities.

(AQW 38942/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Trusts' Contingency Plans for 2014/15 are available on my Department's website. The plans set out the Trusts' proposals for temporary changes in service delivery.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what financial support is available for families travelling outside of Northern Ireland for their child's heart surgery or treatment.[R]

(AQW 38997/11-15)

Mr Wells: Patients seeking treatment outside the United Kingdom under the EU Directive on Cross Border Healthcare (Article 56), i.e. treatment that is not arranged by the HSC, will have the actual treatment cost, or the equivalent NHS treatment cost (whichever is lower), paid for by the Health and Social Care Board. No other financial support is offered.

Paediatric patients (including paediatric cardiac surgery patients) and their parents travelling outside Northern Ireland for treatment arranged by the HSC will receive financial support in the following areas:

Treatment

Treatment costs are paid in full by the Health and Social Care Board.

Travel

The Board will fund both parents to travel with children. Where recommended by the referring consultant, the funding of travel for additional escorts may also be considered.

In the case of land travel, patients and escorts are expected to use public transport where possible, as this is generally the most cost effective option, however a taxi can be used for paediatric patients and escorts where:

- a child is travelling for treatment which requires a local or general anaesthesia;
- there is clinical justification demonstrated by the referring consultant;
- it is the most cost effective option.
- Travel by car will be reimbursed at the public transport rate for mileage.

Accommodation

In general adult patients/carers are expected to arrange their own accommodation and submit receipts for payment. However, an initial one night's stay will be arranged for parents travelling with a paediatric patient. Parents are given the option to book their own accommodation thereafter or to have this booked on their behalf.

The Board will reimburse to a maximum of £85 per room single occupancy and £95 based on two people sharing. The Board takes into account London tariff increases and verifies reasonableness with its travel agent provider. Where extended stays are necessary the Board will seek to arrange rental accommodation. Amounts payable are kept under review. Pre-booking and direct payment of accommodation by the Board will be considered where the patient/family can demonstrate financial hardship or other exceptional circumstance.

Subsistence

Patients may seek financial assistance retrospectively to cover the cost of meals or other incidental expenses. Patients/carers are asked to submit receipts to support such claims. The Board is however considering amending this to a per diem rate to avoid the need for patients/carers to keep receipts.

General

In general patients claim reimbursement of expenses after each travel period, however the Board recognises that there may be occasions where long treatment episodes are required and in such circumstances the Board will process claims as frequently as the patient/family or escort submit them.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration his Department has given to the introduction of robotic assisted radical prostatectomy operations.

(AQW 39123/11-15)

Mr Wells: The decision regarding the specific surgical technique and whether robotic assisted surgery is the preferred approach is a matter of clinical judgement and is determined by the patient's consultant who will take due account of the patient's clinical circumstances

National expert opinion is that that in order to maintain skill and to deliver the best possible outcomes surgeons providing robotic assisted laparoscopic radical prostatectomies should ideally undertake at least 50-100 cases per annum.

Whilst prostate cancer affects about 1000 men in Northern Ireland each year, only around 50 may require radical prostatectomy. Currently therefore Northern Ireland does not have sufficient demand to meet nationally recommended activity for this procedure.

Trusts currently refer men who need radical prostatectomy to a GB centre that has the facility to undertake robot assisted surgery and meets the recommended volume of activity.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the current round of proposed cuts, how many of the proposals, and to what extent, adversely affect (i) senior management; (ii) middle management; and (iii) other administrators.

(AQW 39130/11-15)

Mr Wells: All Health and Social Care Trusts have confirmed there are no planned redundancies in relation to the current round of proposed cuts and these three groups of staff will receive a non-consolidated 1% increase or a contractual increment.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of inpatient treatment for alcoholism.

(AQW 39169/11-15)

Mr Wells: Based on the latest available information, the estimated average cost of an inpatient finished consultant episode, where alcohol related conditions were recorded, was £1,375.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the opening hours of the Minor Injuries Unit in (i) Bangor Community Hospital; and (ii) Ards Community Hospital in each of the last five years; and where opening times have changed, to detail the dates of change.

(AQW 39191/11-15)

Mr Wells: Both minor injuries units currently operate from 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday, with the exception of Christmas Day. The changes to their opening hours over the last five years are given in the table below.

	Bangor Minor Injuries Unit		Ards Minor Injuries Unit	
	Hours	Days per week	Hours	Days per weeks
2010	9am – 5pm	7	9am – 5pm	7
March 2010	As above	As above	9am – 5pm	5
June 2012	9am – 5pm	5	As above	As above
February 2013	9am - 5pm	7	As above	As above
December 2013	9am – 5pm	5	As above	As above

Source: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the public consultation on 'Delivering High Quality Congenital Cardiac Services' held in Portadown on 19 November 2014, why those in attendance from his Department did not collect the contact details of attendees, which could have aided better consultation with parents and those attending regarding this consultation.

(AQW 39220/11-15)

Mr Wells: Attendees at any of the six public consultation meetings on 'Delivering High Quality Congenital Cardiac Services', the first of which was held in Craigavon on 19 November 2014, are able to engage in the process in numerous ways: through verbal and written feedback at the meetings (individually or as a group), or by submitting an email, letter, or completed consultation response form to my Department at any time before 5pm on 23 January 2015. These options have been explained at the meetings held to date, and further details have been provided both in the information packs given out at the meetings and on my Department's website.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much each Health and Social Care Trust will receive of the £18m allocated in the October Monitoring Round for contingency plans; and to detail how this will be spent, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 39223/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Trusts will receive the following allocations, out of the £18m allocation received in the October Monitoring Round:

HSC Trust	Amount Allocated £m
Belfast HSC Trust	5.7
Northern HSC Trust	3.8
South Eastern HSC Trust	1.5
Southern HSC Trust	3.7
Western HSC Trust	3.3
	18.0

This has been allocated by the Health and Social Care Board to the Trusts relative to the financial pressures they face and will be used to offset the worst impact of the Contingency Plans in the current financial year.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are any plans to facilitate robotic-assisted keyhole laparoscopic surgery for prostate cancer patients.

(AQW 39231/11-15)

Mr Wells: National expert opinion is that in order to maintain skill and to deliver the best possible outcomes surgeons providing robotic assisted laparoscopic radical prostatectomies should ideally undertake at least 50-100 cases per annum.

Whilst prostate cancer affects about 1000 men in Northern Ireland each year only around 50 may require radical prostatectomy. Currently therefore Northern Ireland does not have sufficient demand to meet nationally recommended activity for this procedure. Trusts currently refer men who need radical prostatectomy to a GB centre that has the facility to undertake robot assisted surgery and meets the recommended volume of activity. It is for the Health and Social Care Board to consider if that service could be provided more effectively on a all island basis.

To date my Department has not discussed this service with our counterparts in the Republic of Ireland

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to ensure recipients of organ donations have appropriate long term psychiatric support following surgery.

(AQW 39237/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has advised that there are no dedicated psychological services for people who are recipients of organ donations, although some Trusts do provide pre-surgical psychological assessment and post-surgery support. If a recipient of an organ donation was experiencing significant psychological difficulties, they may be referred to mental health services for psychiatric support.

Mental health services are tailored to meet each individual's particular needs and are provided in a variety of settings, depending on the nature and seriousness of the condition.

The HSCB is committed to implementing a stepped care model across all mental health services. A key objective of this model is the development of services, which enable early and effective intervention for people with mental health care needs.

As part of this ongoing development of services, the HSCB is currently establishing Primary Care Talking Therapies Hubs across each Trust area. These Hubs will focus on providing a range of psychological therapies (such as counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy and psychotherapy) and lifestyle support for people who are experiencing common mental health problems.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the back-dated pay for which Health and Social Care Trusts are liable.

(AQW 39245/11-15)

Mr Wells: Detail of the back-dated pay for which Health and Social Care Trusts are liable is set out in the table below:

HSC Trust	Detail
Belfast	Agenda for Change (AfC) arrears related to job evaluations has affected approximately 130 staff at a cost of £196k with 10 remaining cases to be calculated. It is anticipated that these will be processed for payment by end December 2014.
Western	AfC arrears related to incremental pay progression and pay in lieu of annual leave has affected approximately 6,656 staff - 5,078 of which have been paid and a remaining 1,578 cases require calculations to be made (53) and verified (1042). Based on recent calculations this is averaging at around £700 per person. It is anticipated that all cases will be processed by end March 2015.
South Eastern	As at 31 March 2014 AfC arrears related to job evaluations has affected 51 staff at an estimated cost of £441k. The vast majority of staff have been paid.
NIAS	No arrears outstanding (excludes any on-going AfC job evaluations)
Northern	AfC arrears related to job evaluations has affected 848 staff with a further 159 applications to be considered. Work is progressing on the calculation and payment of the arrears.
Southern	No arrears outstanding

Extra revenue will not be made available to Health and Social Care Trusts to resolve the issue of back pay.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, whether his Department, working in close partnership with local Health and Social Care Trusts, will proactively promote the free e-learning module which is endorsed by Royal College of General Practitioners and which will assist health professionals, including GPs, to refresh their awareness of the importance of early diagnosis of pancreatic cancer.

(AQW 39260/11-15)

Mr Wells: The body responsible for General Practitioner training, the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA), has agreed to make GP Programme Directors, Trainers and Trainees aware of this specific resource.

Qualified General Practitioners are provided with updates on the diagnosis of all cancers by GP Facilitators from Macmillan Cancer Care who are funded by the Health and Social Care Board. These facilitators are aware that this educational material is available online from the Royal College of General Practitioners.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38065/11-15, to outline the criteria for determining what is a (i) temporary closure; and (ii) permanent closure.
(AQW 39262/11-15)

Mr Wells: Generally, the temporary closure of a service would usually be within a defined timescale or a situation where the temporary closure would be kept under review until such times as the circumstances that caused the temporary closure can be resolved. The permanent closure of a service would be exactly what the term describes.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the end of year financial deficits or overspends recorded by each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last five years.
(AQW 39268/11-15)

Mr Wells: None of the HSC trusts incurred an overspend during the period 2009/10 – 2012/13. However, in 2013/14, four trusts incurred an overspend against the Revenue Resource Limits (RRL) set by the Department, as per the following table:

Trust	2013/14 Overspend £000
Western	2,122
Southern	3,157
South Eastern	4,004
Northern	4,601

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust autism spectrum disorder service, to detail (i) the number of staff employed; (ii) the job descriptions of staff; (iii) when the service is available; (iv) how many families the service supports; and (v) the number of staff currently absent due to (a) long term illness; (b) maternity leave; and (c) secondment; and what effect this has on service provision.
(AQW 39276/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table in the attached Annex provides the detail requested in relation to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust's Autism Spectrum Disorder Service.

Annex: Northern Health and Social Care Trust's Autism Spectrum Disorder Service.

The number of staff employed	There is one ASD Co-ordinator. There are 8 staff employed within the adult ASD service (WTE 3.2) and 11 staff employed in the paediatric ASD service (WTE 7.6). There is also 1.2 WTE sessional input provided to the diagnostic clinics.
Job descriptions of staff	In line with the Regional Autistic Spectrum Disorder Network 'Six Steps of Autism Care', Autism Adult Care Pathway and the NICE guidelines, all staff within the ASD service provide and deliver a high quality assessment and diagnostic service for children, young people and adults where concerns regarding ASD have been identified and provide support and intervention to children, young people and adults with a diagnosis of ASD and their families.
When the service is available	The paediatric ASD service is centralised through an office in Ballymena and the adult ASD service is centralised through an office in Ballymoney. Delivery of the service occurs across all geographical areas of the Northern Trust and an open referral system operates, with standardised referral criteria. The paediatric ASD service is available for those aged 2-18 years (19 years if attending a special school) and resident within the Northern Trust geographical area.

How many families the service supports	<p>Between 1 January 2010 and 31 October 2014, 1,413 children have received a diagnosis of ASD and have been offered post diagnostic support. In addition the service provides intervention for those with a historical diagnosis, the numbers who have received this service is not however currently available.</p> <p>Since the implementation of the adult pathway, 39 adults have received a diagnosis of ASD. In addition to this, the adult intervention service currently has involvement with 63 service users and their families to offer support.</p> <p>Individuals over 16 years who have a diagnosis of ASD can also avail of support via the Northern Adult Autism Advice Service (NAAAS). Individuals and/or their family can attend this weekly drop in service and can be provided with support from the multiagency team.</p>
<p>The number of staff currently absent due to:</p> <p>(a) long term illness</p> <p>(b) maternity leave</p> <p>(c) secondment and what effect this has on service provision</p>	<p>There is currently one staff member (0.63 WTE) absent on long term illness. From the sessional work, there is one staff member (0.2 WTE) who is employed by NEELB, on long term illness. Within the Paediatric ASD service, as at 30 November 2014, there are two members of staff absent due to maternity leave (1.65 WTE) although 0.6 WTE professional cover is in place. There are currently no absences due to secondment.</p> <p>Due to the significantly increasing number of referrals to the ASD service and current staff absences, the service is not able to meet the present demand of commencing assessment within the 13 week recommendation and offering intervention within the 13 week timeframe.</p>

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the Western Health and Social Care Trust intends to achieve their approved savings of £6.9m.

(AQW 39286/11-15)

Mr Wells: As these questions relate to projected cost savings in Western Health and Social Care Trust, a combined response has been provided.

All Trusts were advised during the summer that it would be necessary to implement a range of contingency proposals given the outcome of June Monitoring and the first draft of their proposals were produced in August. Since then, the HSCB (in liaison with the PHA) has liaised closely with all Trusts and has critically reviewed, analysed and revised the proposals as appropriate to safeguard the safety and integrity of services and to reflect the subsequent outcome of October Monitoring.

Below is a list of contingency plan proposals for the Western Trust. This list excludes measures to contain goods and services expenditure and administration costs, which are being managed locally within Trusts in order to help achieve break even. They also exclude the original savings proposals from the start of 2014/15, which were part of the Western Trust's contributions to the overall Departmental savings target of £170m.

The Western Trust's contingency plans have necessarily changed throughout this process to reflect the changing financial context. The additional funding that was made available through the October Monitoring round meant that the level of unfunded pressures to be resolved through contingency plans was significantly reduced.

A range of proposals were therefore not utilised such as the cessation of a range of hospital services, retraction of some Voluntary Service contracts, reduction of diagnostic services and more significant cuts to elective care, agency and locum spend and domiciliary care.

All Trusts (and other Arms Length Bodies) are expected to achieve financial balance by the year end.

Western Health and Social Care Trust Contingency Plans 2014/15

Description	Proposal	£m
Wards/Beds/OPD	Closure of Roe Valley OPD (Note 1)	0.056
Elective Care Downturn	By 50% on average	1.489
ED/MIU/OOH	Accelerated planned merger of OOH Emergency/Urgent Care provision at TCH	0.070
Domiciliary Care	Domiciliary Care containment (£0.35m) & review of domiciliary care packages (£0.2m)	0.550
Control of goods & services	Cease unfunded scanning bureau and document scanning (£0.1m), contain expenditure relating to wheelchair service (£0.1m)	0.200

Description	Proposal	£m
Workforce/Pay Cost control	Includes – stop Flexicare (£0.07m), reduction in consultant PAs (£0.013m), cease all bank/agency and overtime in day centres and supported living accommodation (£0.120m), reduce staffing levels at Spruce House (£0.03m), reduction in staffing at Ralph's Close (£0.05m), stop all Agency except with the express permission of the Director (£0.5m), reduce consultant programmes activities (PAs) - £0.11m & stand down all managerial call rotas (£0.05m).	0.999
Redesign/restrict service quantum	Includes: secondary care – inpatient stroke services (re Lysis Rota) - £0.018m, cease provision in Spruce and Westbridge House (£0.05m), progress of Older People's Mental Health Services Bed Ash Villa & Slievemore (£0.438m), review of rapid response services (£0.04m), merger of wards (£0.095m), AHP services (£0.066m), provide respite services at the Cottage within funded parameters (£0.035m), reduction in personality disorder service (£0.019m)	0.765
Income Slippage	Hold income from PHA/Telehealth	0.150
Residential Homes	Primary & Community Care – curtail private nursing home placements	0.300
Clinical Excellence Awards	Withdraw circular on clinical excellence awards for 2012/13, 2013/14 & 2014/15	0.170
Renegotiate medical locum rates to NHS rates		0.300
Total		5.049

Note 1 – Roe Valley to continue to provide services; savings will be delivered through elective care spend reductions

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the savings plans submitted by the Western Health and Social Care Trust totalling almost £16m, including the plans which were not approved by his Department or the Health and Social Care Board which total almost £8m.

(AQW 39288/11-15)

Mr Wells: As these questions relate to projected cost savings in Western Health and Social Care Trust, a combined response has been provided.

All Trusts were advised during the summer that it would be necessary to implement a range of contingency proposals given the outcome of June Monitoring and the first draft of their proposals were produced in August. Since then, the HSCB (in liaison with the PHA) has liaised closely with all Trusts and has critically reviewed, analysed and revised the proposals as appropriate to safeguard the safety and integrity of services and to reflect the subsequent outcome of October Monitoring.

Below is a list of contingency plan proposals for the Western Trust. This list excludes measures to contain goods and services expenditure and administration costs, which are being managed locally within Trusts in order to help achieve break even. They also exclude the original savings proposals from the start of 2014/15, which were part of the Western Trust's contributions to the overall Departmental savings target of £170m.

The Western Trust's contingency plans have necessarily changed throughout this process to reflect the changing financial context. The additional funding that was made available through the October Monitoring round meant that the level of unfunded pressures to be resolved through contingency plans was significantly reduced.

A range of proposals were therefore not utilised such as the cessation of a range of hospital services, retraction of some Voluntary Service contracts, reduction of diagnostic services and more significant cuts to elective care, agency and locum spend and domiciliary care.

All Trusts (and other Arms Length Bodies) are expected to achieve financial balance by the year end.

Western Health and Social Care Trust Contingency Plans 2014/15

Description	Proposal	£m
Wards/Beds/OPD	Closure of Roe Valley OPD (Note 1)	0.056
Elective Care Downturn	By 50% on average	1.489
ED/MIU/OOH	Accelerated planned merger of OOH Emergency/Urgent Care provision at TCH	0.070
Domiciliary Care	Domiciliary Care containment (£0.35m) & review of domiciliary care packages (£0.2m)	0.550

Description	Proposal	£m
Control of goods & services	Cease unfunded scanning bureau and document scanning (£0.1m), contain expenditure relating to wheelchair service (£0.1m)	0.200
Workforce/Pay Cost control	Includes – stop Flexicare (£0.07m), reduction in consultant PAs (£0.013m), cease all bank/agency and overtime in day centres and supported living accommodation (£0.120m), reduce staffing levels at Spruce House (£0.03m), reduction in staffing at Ralph's Close (£0.05m), stop all Agency except with the express permission of the Director (£0.5m), reduce consultant programmes activities (PAs) - £0.11m & stand down all managerial call rotas (£0.05m).	0.999
Redesign/restrict service quantum	Includes: secondary care – inpatient stroke services (re Lysis Rota) - £0.018m, cease provision in Spruce and Westbridge House (£0.05m), progress of Older People's Mental Health Services Bed Ash Villa & Slievemore (£0.438m), review of rapid response services (£0.04m), merger of wards (£0.095m), AHP services (£0.066m), provide respite services at the Cottage within funded parameters (£0.035m), reduction in personality disorder service (£0.019m)	0.765
Income Slippage	Hold income from PHA/Telehealth	0.150
Residential Homes	Primary & Community Care – curtail private nursing home placements	0.300
Clinical Excellence Awards	Withdraw circular on clinical excellence awards for 2012/13, 2013/14 & 2014/15	0.170
Renegotiate medical locum rates to NHS rates		0.300
Total		5.049

Note 1 – Roe Valley to continue to provide services; savings will be delivered through elective care spend reductions

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department will deal with the projected £8m deficit of the Western Health and Social Care Trust by the end of the 2014/15 financial year.

(AQW 39290/11-15)

Mr Wells: As these questions relate to projected cost savings in Western Health and Social Care Trust, a combined response has been provided.

All Trusts were advised during the summer that it would be necessary to implement a range of contingency proposals given the outcome of June Monitoring and the first draft of their proposals were produced in August. Since then, the HSCB (in liaison with the PHA) has liaised closely with all Trusts and has critically reviewed, analysed and revised the proposals as appropriate to safeguard the safety and integrity of services and to reflect the subsequent outcome of October Monitoring.

Below is a list of contingency plan proposals for the Western Trust. This list excludes measures to contain goods and services expenditure and administration costs, which are being managed locally within Trusts in order to help achieve break even. They also exclude the original savings proposals from the start of 2014/15, which were part of the Western Trust's contributions to the overall Departmental savings target of £170m.

The Western Trust's contingency plans have necessarily changed throughout this process to reflect the changing financial context. The additional funding that was made available through the October Monitoring round meant that the level of unfunded pressures to be resolved through contingency plans was significantly reduced.

A range of proposals were therefore not utilised such as the cessation of a range of hospital services, retraction of some Voluntary Service contracts, reduction of diagnostic services and more significant cuts to elective care, agency and locum spend and domiciliary care.

All Trusts (and other Arms Length Bodies) are expected to achieve financial balance by the year end.

Western Health and Social Care Trust Contingency Plans 2014/15

Description	Proposal	£m
Wards/Beds/OPD	Closure of Roe Valley OPD (Note 1)	0.056
Elective Care Downturn	By 50% on average	1.489
ED/MIU/OOH	Accelerated planned merger of OOH Emergency/Urgent Care provision at TCH	0.070

Description	Proposal	£m
Domiciliary Care	Domiciliary Care containment (£0.35m) & review of domiciliary care packages (£0.2m)	0.550
Control of goods & services	Cease unfunded scanning bureau and document scanning (£0.1m), contain expenditure relating to wheelchair service (£0.1m)	0.200
Workforce/Pay Cost control	Includes – stop Flexicare (£0.07m), reduction in consultant PAs (£0.013m), cease all bank/agency and overtime in day centres and supported living accommodation (£0.120m), reduce staffing levels at Spruce House (£0.03m), reduction in staffing at Ralph's Close (£0.05m), stop all Agency except with the express permission of the Director (£0.5m), reduce consultant programmes activities (PAs) - £0.11m & stand down all managerial call rotas (£0.05m).	0.999
Redesign/restrict service quantum	Includes: secondary care – inpatient stroke services (re Lysis Rota) - £0.018m, cease provision in Spruce and Westbridge House (£0.05m), progress of Older People's Mental Health Services Bed Ash Villa & Slievemore (£0.438m), review of rapid response services (£0.04m), merger of wards (£0.095m), AHP services (£0.066m), provide respite services at the Cottage within funded parameters (£0.035m), reduction in personality disorder service (£0.019m)	0.765
Income Slippage	Hold income from PHA/Telehealth	0.150
Residential Homes	Primary & Community Care – curtail private nursing home placements	0.300
Clinical Excellence Awards	Withdraw circular on clinical excellence awards for 2012/13, 2013/14 & 2014/15	0.170
Renegotiate medical locum rates to NHS rates		0.300
Total		5.049

Note 1 – Roe Valley to continue to provide services; savings will be delivered through elective care spend reductions

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, with budget reductions of 10.8 per cent, to detail the services he has identified as (i) 'ring fenced' from further cuts; and (ii) priorities in terms of proposed reduction of spending.

(AQW 39300/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department launched its consultation on the Executive's draft budget for 2015/16 on 26 November. The consultation document highlights the potential implications of the draft budget proposals on health and social care. This is an important element in informing the Executive's decisions on the final budget for 2015/16, which is due to be published in January 2015. Final decisions on expenditure allocations can only be made once the final budget for my Department has been confirmed. In terms of savings proposals, I can confirm that I am committed to maximising the resources available for front line health and social care services.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the most recent figures available for the amount spent by the Western Health and Social Care Trust on respite care for children with a disability, broken down by capita spend per head; and to detail how these costs compare with other Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 39301/11-15)

Mr Wells: This information is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the administrative cost of processing (i) a single NHS HS21 prescription; and (ii) a single NHS PV1 (pharmacist) prescription, excluding the cost of the item dispensed; and how many of each of these types of prescriptions have been processed since April 2013.

(AQW 39316/11-15)

Mr Wells: From April 2013 to October 2014 a total of 34,254,019 HS21 prescriptions have been dispensed. The dispensing fee for each item dispensed was £0.98. In the same period a total of 473,839 PV1 (pharmacist) forms were dispensed. These are used in connection with medicines prescribed by pharmacists for smoking cessation and to treat minor ailments. A PV1 form may contain more than one item. The dispensing fee for PV1 items issued in relation to smoking cessation is £0.98. The dispensing fee for each PVI item issued to treat minor ailments is £1.11 and a consultation fee of up to £8.50 can be claimed in relation to each PV1 prescription form issued for minor ailments.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will issue a consultation on the proposed closure of Bangor Community Hospital Minor Injuries Unit and GP Ward; and if not, to outline the reasons for this, given that the precedent for public consultation on such decisions has already been established in relation to the Multiple Sclerosis Respite Centre in Dalriada Hospital.

(AQW 39358/11-15)

Mr Wells: I would refer the Member to the Assembly's Official Report of my speech on 25 November 2014, concerning Dalriada Hospital's MS Respite Unit and intermediate care beds, and my Department's news release dated 28 November 2014, available on the DHSSPS website, concerning Bangor Community Hospital's Minor Injuries Unit and GP Ward.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will reverse the decision and immediately reinstate the service at Dalriada Hospital, as agreed by the Assembly on 25 November 2014.

(AQW 39366/11-15)

Mr Wells: I refer the Member to my speech in the Assembly on 25 November 2014 responding to his motion on the temporary closure of the Regional MS Respite Unit at Dalriada Hospital.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a breakdown of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust's budget for the remainder of the current financial year and 2015/16 to (a) 'Save The Dal' campaign group; and (b) North Antrim MLAs to ensure that they can adequately respond to the consultation on the future of Dalriada Hospital.

(AQW 39391/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust's budget, which includes both recurrent and non recurrent items, for the remaining five months of the current financial year can be broken down as follows:

Area	2014/15 Budget (£'m)
Pay	155
Non Pay	99
Total	254

With regard to the 2015/16 financial year, the Executive published its draft Budget on 3 November 2014 setting out Departmental allocations for 2015/16. The announcement of the draft Budget triggered the commencement of a public consultation period, the closing date for which is 29 December 2014.

Therefore, the 2015/16 budget for each Trust has yet to be determined.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, further to his recent public comments regarding engagement with the Minister of Health in the Republic of Ireland "on issues such as paediatric cardiac surgery, and I am strongly committed to maximising the amount of work we can secure for Northern Ireland, treating patients from the Irish Republic", to detail (i) the number of patients from the Republic of Ireland who have been treated in Northern Ireland; (ii) the number of patients from Northern Ireland who have been treated in the Republic of Ireland; (iii) the cost of these treatments; and (iv) all transactions completed between both Governments in relation to all patients concerned, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39393/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i) It is not possible to identify the number of patients from the Republic of Ireland who have been treated in Northern Ireland. It is, however, possible to provide the number of inpatient admissions (Table 1) and outpatient attendances at consultant-led services (Table 2) for patients from the Republic of Ireland during the period 2011/12 to 2013/14.

Table 1: Admissions of residents of the Republic of Ireland to HSC hospitals in Northern Ireland, 2011/12 – 2013/14

HSC Trust	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Belfast	62	76	38
Northern	18	0	23
South Eastern	36	20	31
Southern	1,503	1,283	1,265
Western	2,409	2,240	1,960
Northern Ireland	4,028	3,619	3,317

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Table 2: Attendances at consultant-led outpatient services in Northern Ireland by patients resident in the Republic of Ireland, 2011/12 – 2013/14

HSC Trust	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Belfast*	-	299	256
Northern	21	12	8
South Eastern	64	46	44
Southern	527	532	447
Western	2,116	1,942	2,069
Northern Ireland	2,728	2,831	2,824

Source: HSC Trusts

* Information on attendances at consultant-led outpatient services in Belfast Trust is only available from September 2012 for patients with an address in the Republic of Ireland.

(ii) There are three main ways for residents of Northern Ireland to receive planned treatment in the Republic of Ireland, which are as follows.

- Transfer by the Health and Social Care Board (Extra Contractual Referral [ECR])
- S2 (E112) mandated treatment
- The EU Directive on cross-border healthcare (Article 56)

An Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) occurs when the Board approves a consultant's request to transfer a patient outside Northern Ireland for assessment or treatment, which the consultant considers necessary but is not available through HSC facilities locally. This may be to a provider outside the UK where it is clinically justified.

The S2 (or E112) route is one where an individual who has been assessed as requiring treatment that is not available locally (or is not available within a reasonable period of time) seeks access to state-funded treatment in another European Economic Area (EEA) country or Switzerland (but not in other parts of the UK).

The Article 56 route is one where an individual seeks access to treatment in another European Economic Area (EEA) country or Switzerland in either the state or private sectors. Unlike other options, this arises where the Board considers treatment is available locally or within the rest of the UK within a reasonable period of time.

The numbers of ECR, S2 and Article 56 approvals for residents of Northern Ireland to receive treatment in the Republic of Ireland are detailed in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Board transfers, S2 approvals and Article 56 reimbursements, 2011/12 – 2013/14

Year	ECRs	S2 approvals*	Article 56 reimbursements
2011/12	13	10	0
2012/13	36	8	0
2013/14	25	15	4

* S2 approvals are detailed by calendar year for the period 2011 to 2013.

(iii) It has not been possible to provide the total cost of treatments. It is, however, possible to provide the estimated cost of inpatient admissions of Republic of Ireland residents to Northern Ireland HSC hospitals (Table 4) and the estimated cost of ECRs and Article 56 reimbursements for residents of Northern Ireland travelling to the Republic of Ireland for treatment (Table 5).

Table 4: Estimated cost of admissions of residents of the Republic of Ireland to HSC hospitals in Northern Ireland, 2011/12 – 2013/14

Financial Year	Total Cost (£)
2011/12	£4,476,705
2012/13	£3,922,079
2013/14	£3,070,569

Source: HRG Reference Costs

The cost of admissions of residents of the Republic of Ireland to HSC hospitals in Northern Ireland has been estimated using HRG reference costs (derived from annual Trust costing returns). Reference costs are not yet available for

2013/14, therefore the cost of 2013/14 activity has been estimated using 2012/13 reference costs. As such, the cost presented in Table 4 is likely to be an underestimate of the true cost for 2013/14.

Table 5: Estimated cost of ECR approvals and Article 56 reimbursements

Financial Year	ECR Approvals (£)	Article 56 reimbursements (£)
2011/12	332,415	0
2012/13	1,122,436	0
2013/14	367,587	5,221

S2 costs are addressed via a national reciprocal arrangement between the two governments.

- (iv) The costs quoted in part (iii), Table 5, include any additional eligible payments associated with treatment, e.g. hospital accommodation costs. The Department is not aware of any other transactions completed between the two Governments.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38505/11-15, to detail the projected mileage payment that will be made to staff who are relocated from Dalriada Hospital (i) from 30 November 2015 to 31 March 2015; and (ii) in 2015/16.

(AQW 39401/11-15)

Mr Wells: The primary obligation is for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to comply with the Court's order of 4 December 2014 concerning the granting of interim relief on the services that were temporarily closed at Dalriada Hospital. The Trust is currently considering the implications of this. Details of the projected staff mileage costs requested by the Member cannot be provided at this time because of the changing situation as redeployed staff return progressively as patient numbers increase.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the support provided by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to Stewart Memorial House, in the last three years.

(AQW 39408/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) does not provide direct support to Stewart Memorial House, rather it provides support to each individual service user, their families and staff at Stewart Memorial to ensure that assessed needs are met on an ongoing basis. SEHSCT staff work in partnership with Stewart Memorial staff to ensure that service user needs are responded to in a timely and appropriate manner.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) whether there will be a temporary Huntington's Disease Coordinator appointed; (ii) why the Huntington's Disease Band 6 post has not been filled; (iii) what actions have taken place to fill the Band 6 post; and (iv) the plans to address the needs of those affected by Huntington's Disease, in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 39409/11-15)

Mr Wells: Recruitment issues are a matter for individual Health and Social Care Trusts based on service needs and available resources. The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has advised that:

- (i) due to the specialist nature of the post it will not be appointing a temporary Huntington's Disease Co-ordinator and that it will continue to attempt to recruit;
- (ii) the post has not been filled due to a lack of suitable applicants;
- (iii) it has been carrying out a public relations exercise to generate interest and the Band 6 post will be re-advertised on 9th December 2014; and
- (iv) it endeavours to continue to provide the service and meet the needs of service users.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the current provision of Urology Services at the Causeway Hospital.

(AQW 39413/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHST) which is responsible for the management of the Causeway Hospital is currently funded for 3 consultant urologists, 2 middle grade doctors and 3 specialist urology nurses.

Unfortunately, despite repeated attempts, the NHST has experienced great difficulty in maintaining the urology team at full complement. At present one consultant and both middle grade posts are vacant. The NHST is continuing to try to recruit to these posts permanently. In the meantime the Trust is using a locum agency to meet demand and is working in partnership with the Western Health and Social Care Trust to create further capacity for Northern Trust patients. All specialist nurses are in post.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current level of consultancy staff at Causeway Hospital.

(AQW 39414/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern HSC Trust has advised that there are currently 37 (36.4 whole-time equivalent) consultants in post at Causeway Hospital, plus an additional 4 locums. There are also an additional 5 (4.7 whole-time equivalent) consultant psychiatrists either based in Causeway Hospital or serving the Causeway locality based in community mental health teams.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average cost of overtime for (i) administrative and non-medical staff; (ii) acute medical staff; and (iii) non-acute medical staff in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in the last twelve months.

(AQW 39460/11-15)

Mr Wells: The cost of overtime for staff at South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in the last twelve months (ending September 2014) is set out in the table below. The Trust has advised that it is unable to provide average costs per employee who worked overtime; however the Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) number of staff who have claimed overtime is set out below.

For the purpose of the answer 'medical' means doctors (including mental health doctors).

Staff Group	Cost of Overtime	WTE
Administrative & non-medical	£3,221,844	7,679
Acute medical staff	£7,795	482
Non-acute medical staff	NIL	-

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much savings were envisaged by the closure of Acute Services at Bangor Hospital.

(AQW 39563/11-15)

Mr Wells: Bangor Hospital does not provide Acute Services. Whilst there are proposals to temporarily close 20 GP beds from 1 December 2014, Bangor Community Hospital will continue to provide outpatient services.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what contractual arrangements the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust have with the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled in regards to providing shelter and care for those placed by the Trust in Stewart Memorial House.

(AQW 39565/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Trust has advised that it has in place a Regional Nursing and Residential Care contract with the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled. This contract, which contains standard terms and conditions, covering areas such as incidents, insurance, indemnity, relevant legislative requirements, and contract termination is utilised by Health and Social Care Trusts in respect of nursing home provision across Northern Ireland.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what alternative facilities are available for the residents of Stewart Memorial House should the facility be closed in (i) North Down; (ii) South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area; and (iii) Northern Ireland; and how many spaces are available at each facility.

(AQW 39567/11-15)

Mr Wells: Following the announcement by the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled of its intention to close Stewart Memorial House, the South Eastern Health and Social Trust has been actively engaging with service users and their families to ensure that appropriate alternative arrangements are secured. A comprehensive assessment will be carried out by the Trust's multidisciplinary team in respect of each individual concerned. This assessment will be person-centred and it will also involve families. The timescale for the completion of the assessment process will be guided by the assessed needs of the current residents and it will be sensitive and responsive to their preferences and those of their families.

Once assessments are completed, it will be then be possible to scope and identify alternative placements for those affected to help ensure that as wide a range of choice as possible is provided. The Trust has advised that there is existing capacity in nursing homes in the North Down and Ards area to meet the number of additional placements that will be required.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding has the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled received from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years for accommodation and services provided at Stewart Memorial House.

(AQW 39568/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) does not provide direct support to Stewart Memorial House, rather it provides support to each individual service user, their families and staff at Stewart Memorial to ensure that

assessed needs are met on an ongoing basis. SEHSCT staff work in partnership with Stewart Memorial staff to ensure that service user needs are responded to in a timely and appropriate manner.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the decision to appoint Chief Medical Officer as Chief Executive of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust will lead to additional staffing costs; and if so, to detail these additional costs.

(AQW 39569/11-15)

Mr Wells: The appointment of the Chief Medical Officer as Chief Executive of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust will not incur additional staffing costs.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much annual funding the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust provides to the Stewart Memorial Nursing Home in Bangor.

(AQW 39570/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) does not provide direct support to Stewart Memorial House, rather it provides support to each individual service user, their families and staff at Stewart Memorial to ensure that assessed needs are met on an ongoing basis. SEHSCT staff work in partnership with Stewart Memorial staff to ensure that service user needs are responded to in a timely and appropriate manner.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what can be done to protect the 18 residents that are living at Stewart Memorial Nursing Home in Bangor which is due for closure.

(AQW 39572/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) has a duty of care to those people currently residing in Stewart Memorial Nursing Home. Following the announcement by the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled of its intention to close Stewart Memorial House, the South Eastern Health and Social Trust has been actively engaging with service users and their families to ensure that appropriate alternative arrangements are secured. A comprehensive assessment will be carried out by the Trust's multidisciplinary team in respect of each individual concerned. This assessment will be person-centred and it will also involve families. The timescale for the completion of the assessment process will be guided by the assessed needs of the current residents and it will be sensitive and responsive to their preferences and those of their families.

Once assessments are completed, it will be then be possible to scope and identify alternative placements for those affected to help ensure that as wide a range of choice as possible is provided. The Trust has advised that there is existing capacity/ vacancies in nursing homes in the North Down and Ards area to meet the number of additional placements that will be required.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department plan to investigate the reasons behind the proposed closure of the Stewart Memorial Nursing Home in Bangor.

(AQW 39573/11-15)

Mr Wells: Stewart Memorial Nursing Home is not a South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust facility; it is run by the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled (NIID) who are independent of the Trust. It is NIID who proposed the closure of their nursing home and there are no plans to investigate their decision.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what legal requirements does the Stewart Memorial Nursing Home in Bangor have to follow in order to close a privately run nursing home; and what are the rights of the residents.

(AQW 39574/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that it expects any organisation which intends to close a nursing home to comply with the terms of its contract with the Trust. This contract, the Regional Nursing and Residential Care contract, includes a notice period of three months. Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled (NIID), which owns Stewart Memorial Nursing Home, is giving notice beyond their contractual requirement. NIID has advised the Trust that it will work collaboratively with the Trust to ensure that residents can be placed in suitable alternative accommodation commensurate with their assessed need. NIID has signalled its preference that this process should be concluded by July 2015. In addition to the contract, NIID will have to comply with legislative and regulatory requirements which compel NIID to work with the Regulator (the Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority) to ensure that all necessary steps are taken to continue to provide quality care in line with DHSSPS standards whilst the home transitions to closure.

With regard to the rights of the residents concerned, they have a right to be offered suitable alternative service provision, and the Trust has a duty of care to ensure that the assessed needs of those people placed by the Trust continue to be met.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37840/11-15, to account for the difference in figures supplied in his response to this question, which indicated that the maximum wait for a review appointment for patients at the Ulster Hospital's Chronic Pain Clinic was 14 months, and figures supplied by the South

Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in a letter dated 17 November 2014, which indicate that the current waiting list time for a named consultant is 18-20 months.

(AQW 39585/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the reason for the difference in figures, is that figures supplied in AQW 37840/11-5 related to a specific patient group, namely those waiting for review steroid injections, and not the wider waiting times for new or review patients which is what the letter dated the 17th November 2014 referred to.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which organisations or elected representatives (i) wrote to him seeking a meeting; and (ii) made written representations to him on the issue of the minor injuries unit and in patient bed facility at Bangor Hospital.

(AQW 39615/11-15)

Mr Wells: The following elected representatives and organisations have written to me seeking a meeting on Bangor minor injuries unit and Bangor Hospital:

- Lady Sylvia Hermon MP
- Peter Weir MLA
- David McNarry MLA
- Councillor Marion Smith MBE
- North Down Borough Council

The following elected representatives and organisations have made written representations:

- Alex Easton MLA
- Dr Stephen Farry MLA
- Stephen Agnew MLA
- Robin Swann MLA
- Leslie Cree MLA

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of proposed budget reductions, whether he can provide an assurance that there will be continued Fire Service cover provided and service levels maintained in Larne.

(AQW 39633/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has been asked as part of the Department's planning process for 2015/16 to develop a range of savings proposals that could deliver the best possible outcomes under three scenarios, 5%, 10% and 15% reductions.

NIFRS will be required to risk assess and prioritise these proposals on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what alternative arrangements are in place for Cruse Bereavement Care in North Down and Ards for evening and weekend appointments in the absence of Bangor Community Hospital.

(AQW 39641/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that Cruse Bereavement Care have been offered key or swipe card access to enter and leave Bangor Hospital to facilitate their evening and weekend appointments.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) his Department's; and (ii) the Health and Social Care Trust's statutory obligations to provide equal access to respite care for children living with a disability.

(AQW 39682/11-15)

Mr Wells: The statutory provision governing children in Northern Ireland is the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (the Order). Article 21 of the Order requires an authority (defined as the Health and Social Care Board or a Health and Social Care Trust) to provide accommodation for a child in need, even though the person who has parental responsibility for him is able to provide him with accommodation, if the authority considers that to do so would safeguard or promote the child's welfare. Under Article 17(c) a child shall be taken to be in need if he is a disabled child.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety where patients that were previously referred to Bangor Community Hospital will be placed following the temporary closure of the hospital.

(AQW 39709/11-15)

Mr Wells: Following the temporary closure of Bangor Community Hospital the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust will mitigate any impact on capacity for patients within its area by reducing length of stay in other intermediate care and older peoples' beds including those in Ards Hospital. Within this context the Trust is currently working to increase community services in North Down within the resources available; this includes working as part of an integrated care partnership with

GPs and other HSC services to progress new models of care which reduce the need for inpatient admission. Examples of these new models, which are in line with Transforming Your Care, include the Enhanced Care at Home and Community Stroke Care. These community based services have the potential to enable patients to remain at home longer and have rapid access to the right specialist care and treatment when needed.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans to provide alternative step down care for stroke patients in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust who has previously been placed in Bangor Community Hospital, including the bed provision that has been made available.

(AQW 39710/11-15)

Mr Wells: Capacity in Ards Community Hospital and 51 other intermediate care beds across North Down and Ards can be used to provide alternative step down care for stroke patients in the Southern Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area

The Community Stroke team provides therapy to the stroke inpatients within Bangor Community Hospital. The temporary closure of the Bangor ward has released some capacity for these staff to treat stroke patients in their own homes.

In addition the stroke consultant who would have provided cover for the beds in Bangor will be released back to the stroke unit at the Ulster hospital. It is anticipated that this will contribute to a reduction in the length of length of stay in this unit and potentially increase throughput in these beds.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the work by his Department to combat drug addiction in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust; and the importance of the efforts of the Railway Street Community Addiction Service.[R]

(AQW 39739/11-15)

Mr Wells: Through the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase Two, the Health & Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Public Health Agency (PHA) commission a full range of alcohol and drug services. Details of the alcohol and drug services available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHST) area can be found by accessing the following link:

http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/DrugsAlcohol_Directory_Northern_12_12.pdf. It should be noted the PHA are currently in the process of re-commissioning a range of alcohol and drug related services and the new services will be in place by 01 April 2015.

I am disappointed by the decision of the Department of Justice (DoJ) to remove funding from Railway Street Community Addiction Service, which has been a successful partnership between the Community Safety Unit of the DoJ and the NHST and is a model of best practice across the UK. The NHST have informed me that the withdrawal of two thirds of the funding for the scheme means that it cannot be sustained in its present form and the Trust is currently reviewing the way in which a significantly reduced service can be provided in the future. Following a meeting between the NHST and DoJ, funding has been provided to extend the service until the end of February 2015 to facilitate the work with staff and service users in managing this change. I understand further meetings are still to take place.

The NHST recently met with officials from the HSCB and the PHA to discuss and review the implications of DoJ's decision. The NHST has also written to service users advising them of the change and assuring them of its commitment to continue to support them as much as possible. HSCB/PHA will continue to work with NHST to assess and minimise the negative consequences of the DoJ withdrawal of funding.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the announcement by the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled of the closure of Stewart Memorial House, to detail the alternative provision in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust for non-elderly residents with a disability who require placement in residential care.

(AQW 39743/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled (NIID), who runs Stewart Memorial House, confirmed to the Trust on 4 December 2014 that NIID's decision to close the facility had been put on hold to facilitate further discussion with residents, families, staff and MLAs regarding the future of Stewart Memorial House.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to ensure minority parties have equality of opportunity to be nominated or elected to outside bodies such as the Fire Service and local commissioning groups.

(AQW 39756/11-15)

Mr Wells: As the membership of Local Commissioning Groups is prescribed in the Local Commissioning Groups (Membership) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009, the recruitment process is restricted to 12 members, since the other 5 must be employees of the Health and Social Care Board (2) and Public Health Agency (3).

The appointment of members to Local Commissioning Groups is subject to a formal recruitment and selection process and applications are welcomed from all those who meet the relevant eligibility criteria. The eligibility criteria for Local Government members (4) is that they must be serving on a Council within the area of the Local Commissioning Group and the most recent recruitment exercise clarified that, with the 11 new Councils coming into operation on 1 April 2015, they must be a serving Councillor on that date.

The recruitment process is handled by the Human Resources Directorate within the Business Services Organisation on behalf of the Health and Social Care Board. The Health and Social Care Board is an equal opportunities employer and is governed by the relevant legislation.

The Board of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) consists of a Chair and ten non –executive board members, which include 4 District Councillors.

When a locally elected representative is sought for a non-executive public appointment such as to the NIFRS board, each councillor receives a copy of the advert alerting them to the opportunity and encouraging them to apply. This is in addition to the advert also being sent to each Chief Officer at individual Councils and placed on the Departmental website.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will ensure that councillors cannot be nominated for a second term to the Northern Local Commissioning Group, therefore providing the opportunity for new councillors to be nominated.

(AQW 39757/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i) The term of office of members of a Local Commissioning Group (LCG) is prescribed in the Local Commissioning Groups (Membership) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009. The regulations state that the term of office of members shall be 4 years or such other period as may be determined by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) at the time of the appointment. Under paragraph 7(3) of Schedule 1, Section 7 of the Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (NI) 2009, the Department is required to approve the appointment of any person to a committee of the Board.
- (ii) A District Council member may, on the termination of the term of office, be eligible for re-appointment for a further period not exceeding 4 years. The HSCB may extend the appointment for such further period as may appear reasonable in the particular circumstances, for a further period not exceeding 4 years.

In order to rule out a second period of appointment, the legislation would need to be amended.

I can advise that there will be a District Councillor vacancy from 1 April 2015. In anticipation of this, a public recruitment exercise was undertaken in September 2014, and a subsequent exercise was undertaken by email and hard copy correspondence to individual councillors but yielded no applicants for the Northern LCG vacancy. It is anticipated that a further recruitment exercise, which will include the Northern LCG District Councillor vacancy, will take place in January 2015.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the attendance record of all members of the Northern Local Commissioning Group at all official meetings in each year of the current term; and (ii) the total paid to each member, including expenses.

(AQW 39758/11-15)

Mr Wells: 100% of the Northern Local Commissioning Group Members attended over half of the 10 Meetings held in 2012. 85% of Members attended over half of the 11 Meetings held in 2013. 80% of Members attended over half of the 10 meetings held to date during 2014. The minutes of each LCG meeting are available on the Health and Social Care website and record details of attendance for each individual LCG member.

Local Commissioning Group Members are expected to devote 2 days per month. Members receive remuneration of £156 -£207 per day. Independent Contractor members, who receive the higher rate of £207 per day, are also eligible to claim allowances at the agreed Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety rates for locum cover and loss of earnings as well as travel and subsistence costs necessarily incurred on Local Commissioning Group business.

Members from the Community or Voluntary and Local Government sectors receive remuneration of £156 per day plus travel and subsistence costs at the agreed Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety rates which are necessarily incurred on Local Commissioning Group business.

The five members, who are employees of the Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency do not receive remuneration but are eligible to claim travel and subsistence costs at the agreed Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety rates which are necessarily incurred on Local Commissioning Group business.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to in patients based in Bangor Community Hospital, to detail the (i) number; and (ii) location of patients that have been relocated.

(AQW 39770/11-15)

Mr Wells: The ward closed to admissions on Friday 14th November and on this date had 18 patients.

From 14th November to Friday 28th November:

- Sixteen patients were medically fit for discharge. Nine of these patients were discharged from the ward to their own homes and seven were discharged from the ward to a nursing / residential home.
- One terminally ill person passed away.
- One patient whose medical condition was fluctuating transferred to Ards Community Hospital on Friday 28th November.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any of the current councillors on the Northern Ireland Local Commissioning Group have been nominated, without completing an interview, for a further four year term. (AQW 39771/11-15)

Mr Wells: There are 4 Local Government Members on each of the 5 Local Commissioning Groups (LCGs), in accordance with the prescribed membership set out in the Local Commissioning Groups (Membership) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009.

In accordance with these regulations, the term of office of members of LCGs shall be 4 years or such other period as determined by the HSCB at the time the appointments are made. District Council members may, on the termination of the term of office, be eligible for re-appointment for a further period not exceeding 4 years, or the HSCB may, on the expiry of term of office, extend the appointment for such period as may appear reasonable in the particular circumstances but not exceeding 4 years.

The Health and Social Care Board undertakes a rigorous selection and recruitment exercise for each vacant post on a Local Commissioning Group, and I can confirm that no Councillor has been appointed without completing an interview.

The terms of office of 3 Local Government members have each been extended for 2 years.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Commissioning Framework for Alcohol and Drugs 2013-2016; and to detail the reasons for the delay in publication. (AQW 39809/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Public Health Agency (PHA) were tasked by my Department with developing a Regional Commissioning Framework for Alcohol and Drug Services in Northern Ireland. Following a public consultation on the draft Framework, the HSCB and the PHA published an analysis of, and a response to, the issues raised during the consultation in July 2013 (available online at http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/PHA_HSCB%20response%20to%20Commissioning%20Framework%20Consultation.pdf).

Since then, the HSCB and PHA have focused on the development and implementation of a procurement plan to tender for a range of services to address the key priorities outlined in the Framework. The process of developing the tenders has taken longer than expected, however the procurement process has recently gone live, with new services now envisaged to be in place from April 2015. The HSCB and PHA anticipate that the finalised Framework will be published once the procurement process currently underway has been completed.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the ban of statutory residential care homes admitting permanent residents in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust; and to detail the financial impact of the ban on homes. (AQW 39810/11-15)

Mr Wells: As part of the ongoing regional process reviewing statutory residential homes for older people, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) is currently reviewing Trust proposals for change. It is intended that these proposals will be discussed at a forthcoming meeting of the HSCB board early next year. Where no significant change is planned in the near future in respect of individual homes, Trusts will be asked to review their position on permanent admissions to those homes to ensure that optimum use can be made of each facility.

In light of falling demand for residential care, HSC Trusts have taken steps to provide additional services in statutory residential homes. These services include respite care and intermediate care and ensure that the homes are used to best effect. In so doing, HSC Trusts have minimized any financial impact arising from declining demand for residential care pending longer-term decisions about each home arising from the current regional process.

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how vacancy controls have been administered in his Department since March 2011. (AQW 39814/11-15)

Mr Wells: Vacancies within my Department are managed in line with corporate NICS guidance where budget cover is in place. Given the current and future financial landscape careful consideration is being given to the filling of vacancies that arise.

In relation to vacancy controls, the NICS introduced an NICS-wide embargo on promotion and recruitment during the period 9 February 2010 to November 2011 for general service grades up to and including Grade 6. On 26 November 2014 a further NICS-wide embargo on recruitment and substantive promotion was put in place with exceptions granted only with the agreement of Departmental Accounting Officers.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will be in a position to confirm that the mental health unit for the southern sector of the Western Health and Social Care Trust will be located in Omagh. (AQW 39822/11-15)

Mr Wells: To help inform a decision on the location of the second mental health unit for the Western Trust area, the Health and Social Care Board undertook an analysis of demand for and access to acute mental health services in the South West

earlier this year. The report was inconclusive and the Trust has now been asked to develop a business case to assist in determining the need for and location of this facility.

No decision on the location of the unit will be taken until this business case has been completed. It will also be subject to budgetary availability.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average number of times people with a diagnosed with a terminal illness were admitted to hospital during their last year of life between 1 January 2012 and 31 December 2013.

(AQW 39829/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is not possible to provide information on the average number of times people with a diagnosed terminal illness were admitted to hospital during their last year of life.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38422/11-15, (i) for an update on the initial findings of the evaluation which he expected to receive by the end of November 2014; and (ii) for clarification as to the procedure by which the views of patients are being sought during the consultation process.

(AQW 39832/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have been briefed on the initial findings of the evaluation of the IFR process. The evaluation is due to be concluded by the end of the year and I will update the Assembly on the outcome of the evaluation once I have considered its conclusions.

During the course of the evaluation officials held a series of meetings with a range of stakeholders including patients, charities, clinicians and industry, to hear their views and concerns at first hand. The evaluation team also received written submissions from each of those groups.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the outcome of meetings he has had with (i) senior and middle management of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service; and (ii) the Fire Brigades Union regarding the potential negative impact that will arise as a result of budget cuts in 2015/16 and the resultant affect on the safety of the public and firefighters.

(AQW 39833/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has been asked as part of the Department's planning process for 2015/16 to develop a range of savings proposals that could deliver the best possible outcomes under three scenarios, 5%, 10% and 15% reductions.

NIFRS will be required to risk assess and prioritise these proposals on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery.

My officials continue to engage with the NIFRS management team as NIFRS develop their savings proposals before a final submission to my Department for consideration.

I will be meeting with Fire Brigades Union officials in January 2015 to discuss their concerns in relation to possible budget reductions in 2015/16.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of public and firefighter safety should the proposed budget reductions planned for 2015/16 be implemented.

(AQW 39839/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has been asked, as part of the Department's planning process for 2015/16, to develop a range of savings proposals that could deliver the best possible outcomes under three scenarios, 5%, 10% and 15% reductions.

NIFRS will be required to risk assess and prioritise savings proposals before submission to my Department, on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery and ensure the continued safety of the public and firefighters.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the High Court decision on the Northern Health and Social Care Trust's non-admission policy to Dalriada Hospital, whether he will now review other non-admissions policies within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, such as for Pinewood Residential Care Home.

(AQW 39868/11-15)

Mr Wells: Following the publication of agreed criteria to evaluate statutory residential homes, including Pinewood, in June 2014, the Health and Social Care Board is currently reviewing each Trust's proposals for change. For those homes where no significant change is planned in the near future, the Trusts will be asked to review their position on permanent admissions to ensure that optimum use can be made of the facility.

In this context, there are no plans to review admission policies for statutory residential homes at this point.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how cuts are likely to affect the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service in respect of (i) call out times; (ii) public safety; (iii) firefighter safety; (iv) support for animal rescue; and (v) the provision of services during flooding.

(AQW 39873/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has been asked, as part of the Department's planning process for 2015/16, to develop a range of savings proposals that could deliver the best possible outcomes under three scenarios, 5%, 10% and 15% reductions.

NIFRS will be required to risk assess and prioritise savings proposals before submission to my Department, on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery and ensure the continued safety of the public and firefighters.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much the Northern Health and Social Care Trust has spent on all legal proceedings, including internal staff costs, relating to the proposed temporary closure of Dalriada Hospital to date; and to detail the source of this extra funding.

(AQW 39897/11-15)

Mr Wells: This work was undertaken by Northern Health and Social Care Trust staff as part of their normal working business and therefore did not incur additional costs. This may have involved staff reprioritising their work schedule but again this would be normal practice in such situations.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Service Framework for Children and Young People.

(AQO 7244/11-15)

Mr Wells: The overall aim of the Service Framework for Children and Young People is to improve the health and well being of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

It has been developed over a period of time and the draft version of the framework was issued for public consultation on Friday 7 November 2014. It contains 34 standards covering 6 themes and a copy of the consultation documents together with a Children's (easy read) version have been published on my Department's website.

Following public consultation, responses will be reviewed and I anticipate that the final Framework will be launched for implementation before next summer.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the Terms of Reference for the review of the administrative structures within the Health and Social Care system; and whether this is a structural review.

(AQW 39937/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Terms of Reference for the review are currently under consideration and will be brought to me for approval in due course. The review of administrative structures will be carried out in the context of existing DHSSPS organisations and legislation at this stage.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he expects the report on Minimum Care Standards in Nursing Homes to be published.

(AQW 39943/11-15)

Mr Wells: Consultation on the revised minimum standards for nursing homes closed on 27 October. My Department is currently considering the responses received and will issue a report in due course.

It is my intention that the final version of the revised standards be published by the end of March 2015.

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the implementation of the recommendations contained in Professor Kathleen Marshall's report into Child Sexual Exploitation.

(AQO 7236/11-15)

Mr Wells: As announced in the Assembly on 18 November 2014, I am in the process of establishing a Health and Social Care CSE Response Team to consider all of Professor Marshall's recommendations relevant to the HSC. The Response Team will undertake this work in two phases. In Phase 1, it will consider all of the recommendations made for the HSC and advise me by end January 2015 on whether they should be accepted. In Phase 2 we will move to implementation in accordance with an agreed implementation plan, which will identify who will lead on each recommendation and timescales for completion. The implementation plan will be agreed and published by end March 2015. The HSC Response Team will report progress to me on a 6-monthly basis.

Finally, we are in the process of establishing a mechanism to achieve a cross-departmental co-ordinated response to the Marshall report. I have written to the Ministers of Justice and Education to seek their support.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety where patients will be admitted during the consultation period on the future of the MS Respite Centre at Dalriada Hospital.

(AQO 7237/11-15)

Mr Wells: Mr Speaker, I am mindful that this matter is currently before the Courts and would not wish to be drawn into debate that could be considered prejudicial to the outcome of the case. The primary obligation is for the Northern Trust to comply with the Court's ruling of 4 December concerning the granting of interim relief.

In addition the Trust will need to urgently review what actions are available to them to achieve the £6.9 million savings required to break even by the end of the financial year.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to benchmark health and social services expenditure with neighbouring jurisdictions.

(AQO 7238/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department contributes to a range of ongoing projects and workstreams that involve the benchmarking of Northern Ireland's health expenditure with other UK jurisdictions, such as HM Treasury's Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis, HRG Reference Costs and the preparation of Indicative Productivity Opportunity Plans, which provide an annual assessment of opportunities for efficiency and cash savings within Trusts and Family Health Services.

My Department has also commissioned reviews over recent years that have included benchmarking with other UK jurisdictions, such as those conducted by Professor John Appleby and McKinsey.

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Cancer Drugs Fund.

(AQO 7239/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Cancer Drugs Fund was developed by NHS England to provide funding for non National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) approved drugs. It is only operative in England. The Cancer Drugs Fund Operating Procedures were recently reviewed to include, for the first time, an assessment of a drug's cost alongside its clinical benefits.

In Northern Ireland access to NICE unapproved drugs is through the Individual Funding Request (IFR) process which is administered by the Health and Social Care Board.

You will be aware that my Department has been conducting an evaluation of the IFR process. As part of this, officials have held a series of meetings with a range of stakeholders including patients, charities, clinicians and industry to hear their views and concerns at first hand. The evaluation is due to be concluded by the end of the year. I will update the Assembly on the outcome of the evaluation once I have considered its conclusions.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to increase the funding allocated to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

(AQO 7240/11-15)

Mr Wells: There are no immediate plans to increase the funding allocated to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Investment in CAMHS has increased from £9.5m in 2006 to £19.4m in 2014. This includes additional investment of just over £2m within the last two years.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with the First and deputy First Minister on the provision of money to the Health and Social Care Trusts under Delivering Social Change.

(AQO 7241/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department has the lead for 2 of the 6 Delivering Social Change Programmes Direct Family Support – the Family Support Hubs and Support for Parents Signature Programmes.

The DSC Ministerial Sub Committee meets quarterly to discuss all aspects of the DSC programmes including progress, planning and financial matters.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to support hospice care.

(AQO 7242/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am aware of the high quality specialist palliative and end of life care delivered by hospices in Northern Ireland and the professional and compassionate care, support and counselling provided by hospice staff.

In 2010, my Department published a palliative and end of life care strategy for adults "Living Matters:Dying Matters". The 5 year Strategy sets out a vision for palliative and end of life care and outlines a model of care applicable across all care sectors, including hospices. My Department has recently developed a draft Strategy for Children's Palliative and End of Life Care which sets out the strategic direction for the palliative and end of life care of ill and dying children and young people in Northern Ireland for 2014-24. DHSSPS officials have worked closely with the NI Children's Hospice (NICH) and other

stakeholders in the development of the draft Strategy. The Strategy is in its final drafting stage and I hope to publish it by the end of this year.

In November, I was pleased to join the First Minister and deputy First Minister at the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice for the announcement of a £1m grant, to be paid over 2 years, from the OFMDFM Delivering Social Change Fund. This additional money will help the NI Children's Hospice achieve some of its business plan objectives and support the Children's Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy. In June 2013, my predecessor Edwin Poots directed that a one off financial investment of £2.7m be made to the Northern Ireland Hospice to enable the development of a new adult hospice on the Somerton Road, Belfast. The project is progressing well and it is anticipated that the new NI Hospice will be operational at the end of November 2015.

In 2014/15, Health and Social Care Board funding for agreed hospice services is anticipated to be just under £5.4 million, with funding for services sub commissioned by Health and Social Care Trusts amounting to £1.8 million.

My Department also provides core grant funding to the Northern Ireland Hospice to support central administrative costs. This funding amounted to £134,000 in 2013/14, which the NI Hospice attributed to management salary costs and governance of the organisation.

Mr Ó Muilleoir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will consider a value for money review on procedures carried out in the independent health sector.

(AQO 7243/11-15)

Mr Wells: I expect Health and Social Care Trusts to meet demand for services in-house, and only to utilise independent sector providers where capacity is insufficient to meet demand. In the medium to longer term, the focus needs to be on building HSC capacity and addressing demand, to reduce reliance on the independent sector. I therefore welcome the recent recommendation by the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety that my Department publish an action plan to decrease spend on elective activity in the independent sector. I have asked my officials to work with the HSC Board on the development of an action plan. This will include reviewing existing measures to ensure that all contracts with independent providers represent value for money.

Department of Justice

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice whether an equality impact assessment was carried out on the decision to remove funding from Railway Street Addiction Services.

(AQW 39189/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The first stage in the equality cycle is a screening exercise which will include an analysis to assess whether a full Equality Impact Assessment needs to be carried out. When the screening stage is completed the next stage may include the completion of a full Equality Impact Assessment.

At this point, some preliminary work on this screening exercise has commenced, but it is too early to say whether a full equality impact assessment is required.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department will no longer finance addiction services because these services are under the remit of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

(AQW 39192/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am obliged to ensure that my Department does not spend beyond the amounts allocated to it by the Executive. Protecting essential front line justice services must be my priority, but I will continue to do all I can to support valuable projects that can contribute to making communities safer, including those which are closer to the remit of other departments, where I have sufficient funds to do so.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in the absence of a discussion or assessment with a newly admitted prisoner's GP, and until such occurs, whether a mechanism is in place by which the Northern Ireland Prison Service can clarify if the prisoner is an addict of any description, or had abused drugs at some stage, or had attempted suicide or self harmed.

(AQW 39195/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) uses an assessment process to help identify these issues on the committal of new prisoners. This involves both NIPS and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust staff.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to transferring responsibility for teaching staff at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, Bangor to the Department of Education.

(AQW 39196/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Minister of Education and I have established a cross-Departmental Working Group, tasked with examining current arrangements for the provision of Education within Woodlands and bringing forward proposals for making appropriate

connections to mainstream and other specialist Education and Training services. As the age range of young people in Woodlands extends beyond compulsory school age, the Department for Employment and Learning have also participated in the Review.

The Working Group has met on a number of occasions and my Department will continue to engage with DEL and DE, as appropriate, pending formal receipt of the Working Group's proposals.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what access to, or provision of, educational courses or professional development is available to teaching staff at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, Bangor.

(AQW 39198/11-15)

Mr Ford: Teachers and Instructors at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre have access to a range of educational courses. However, they do not have access to the full range of professional development opportunities provided by local Education & Library Boards to their counterparts within mainstream education. This issue is under consideration by officials as part of the ongoing review of Education within Woodlands.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the issue of young shooters, following the meeting between his Department and relevant stakeholders on the 29 September 2014.

(AQW 39219/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the paper I published on 2 July 2014, I proposed that the firearms legislation should be amended to enable someone aged 12 or over to use a shotgun or air rifle for sporting purposes (not vermin or other live quarry) subject to supervision by someone aged 21 or over with three or more years' experience.

The responses to this proposal continued to show differing opinions. These were published on the Department's website. The meeting on the 29th September demonstrated that there remains a gulf between my proposal and the view of some, who are pressing for no, or a lower, age restriction and for no limit on the purposes for which the firearms may be used by a young person.

Officials undertook to consider the various views expressed including the possible introduction of a system of approved clay pigeon clubs. Officials will shortly commence discussions with those who attended the workshop.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice in the absence of a specialist independent investigatory body, and refusals by his Department to investigate, (i) to indicate where police officers can report, or seek an enquiry over, concerns in relation to the Police Federation for Northern Ireland and its relationship with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and its alleged failure to adhere to Police Association Regulations; (ii) whether he will review his Department's previous refusal to investigate these concerns in the interests of parity, duty of care, and transparency; and (iii) why his Department has not addressed these concerns.

(AQW 39310/11-15)

Mr Ford: Police officers should report any concerns in relation to the Police Federation for Northern Ireland through their regional representative or a Central Committee member in the first instance. Any allegation of misconduct by any police officer should be reported in line with the PSNI's internal policies and procedures.

I have no role in investigating matters relating to the internal workings of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland or the Police Service of Northern Ireland for which mechanisms already exist. These are matters 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.

I and officials in my Department have repeatedly encouraged these officers to raise their concerns through the appropriate channels, whether through their Federation or to the Chief Constable, to whom all serving officers are accountable. Contrary to the assertion, considerable effort has been made to assist these officers. I met personally with a number of them to hear their concerns at first hand, but it is inappropriate for me to interfere in matters which properly rest with others.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38475/11-15, whether he intends to extend the criminal legal aid regulations to allow the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission to seek partial recovery of funds in magistrates court as well as crown courts.

(AQW 39311/11-15)

Mr Ford: The administrative cost of supporting such a system in the magistrates' court, and the costs involved in enforcement and recovery, would potentially outweigh the monies recoverable. I currently have no plans to bring forward legislation which would enable the Northern Ireland Legal services Commission to seek recovery of costs at this court tier. However I will keep this issue under consideration.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38475/11-15, whether he will raise this instance with the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission for investigation.

(AQW 39312/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission has no role in investigating information provided by assisted persons in criminal cases in the magistrates' court. The Department may make an application to the court to revoke the legal aid certificate where it has evidence to suggest that an assisted person has:

- (a) wilfully withheld material information from the court;
- (b) knowingly made a false statement in furnishing information to the court; or
- (c) furnished to the court, due to error or mistake, a statement of means which was misleading to a significant extent.

The Department has no information on which to make such an application in this case.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38475/11-15, on how many occasions in each of the last four years the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission has (i) sought; and (ii) been granted an order seeking repayment of costs incurred under a legal aid certificate; and to detail the amount recouped in each instance.

(AQW 39313/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Criminal Legal Aid (Recovery of Defence Costs Orders) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2012 came in to force on 15 October 2012. Since that date three Orders have been sought by the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission.

One Order was sought in 2013 but following a full investigation into the defendant's means it was decided not to proceed with the application.

Two further Orders have been sought in 2014, one of which was granted. In this case an appeal against conviction has been lodged. If the conviction is upheld the Commission will proceed to have the Order executed. In the other case, following a full investigation into the defendant's means, the Commission decided not to proceed with the application.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38843/11-15, what the proposed new legislation will involve; and when it will become active.

(AQW 39342/11-15)

Mr Ford: The review of the legislation governing the referral of sentences by the Director of Public Prosecutions to the Court of Appeal on the grounds of undue leniency is currently underway. I plan to issue a consultation document in the New Year, following Justice Committee consideration.

Any change to the current provisions will be dependent on the outcome of the consultation.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what assessment has been made of the costs to his Department of not funding the Railway Street addiction service due to increased demand for other services funded by his Department; and to provide details of these assessments.

(AQW 39344/11-15)

Mr Ford: The complex relationship between addiction and offending behaviour makes any assessment of the cost, financial or otherwise, difficult.

I fully support early intervention and prevention work of this kind and recognise its long term benefit. During my time as Minister, I have actively worked to identify and promote such initiatives within and beyond the Justice system. However, the financial pressures faced by my Department mean that I can no longer protect front line services.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Justice whether a process is in place to recruit a Senior Education Officer for HMP Maghaberry. **(AQW 39352/11-15)**

Mr Ford: At present there is not a process in place to recruit a Senior Education Officer for Maghaberry Prison.

The management of both teaching and instruction staff at Maghaberry Prison is the responsibility of the Functional Head for Offender Rehabilitation.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Justice who is responsible for educational staff at HMP Maghaberry in the absence of a Senior Education Officer.

(AQW 39353/11-15)

Mr Ford: At present there is not a process in place to recruit a Senior Education Officer for Maghaberry Prison.

The management of both teaching and instruction staff at Maghaberry Prison is the responsibility of the Functional Head for Offender Rehabilitation.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38644/11-15 and in respect of the response "All offenders assessed, under PBNI's Risk of Serious Harm Policy and Procedures, as posing a significant risk of serious harm to the public will have their risk level and their response to risk management interventions regularly reviewed throughout the licence

period, until such time as they are assessed as no longer posing such a risk”, to clarify (i) how risk levels are assessed; and, (ii) what does risk management intervention entail.

(AQW 39431/11-15)

Mr Ford: Procedures for assessing risk levels are set out in the document “Risk of Serious Harm To Others Procedures” which is publicly available in the Guide to Information (Provision of Services) section of the Probation Board website www.pbni.org.uk.

Offenders on licence assessed as posing a risk of significant harm are regularly reviewed by PBNI to determine their risk levels. Reviews are held at least every 16 weeks, including multi-agency Risk Management Meetings. This process continues until the Risk Management Meeting concludes that the offender no longer poses a significant risk of serious harm. A risk management plan is produced to address the factors contributing to the risk of serious harm and will contain a range of interventions which will be tailored to the requirements of specific offenders. Such interventions can include:

- restricting where the offender may reside, contact with individuals, and use of alcohol; and
- attendance at relevant treatment programmes to address their offending behaviour, for example, programmes targeting sexual offending, domestic violence perpetration and substance abuse.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38781/11-15, in relation to the 64 staff who resigned, to detail (i) the shortest; (ii) the longest; and (iii) the average time between appointment and resignation.

(AQW 39432/11-15)

Mr Ford: In relation to the 64 staff who resigned, the shortest time period between appointment and resignation was six days. The longest time was two years one week and four days. The average time between appointment and resignation was approximately 53 weeks.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the (i) role; and (ii) salaries within the Northern Ireland Prison Service of (a) a Custody Prisoner Officer; and (b) a Prisoner Custody Officer.

(AQW 39433/11-15)

Mr Ford: The primary role of the Custody Prison Officer (CPO) is to contribute to the provision of a prison environment which is safe, secure and decent for both prisoners and staff. CPO staff are responsible for a range of operational and custodial duties in the prison environment and for maintaining aspects of order and discipline. The 2014 band minimum for new entrants is £18,725 per annum, increasing to £21,210 per annum following achievement of the required Certificate of Competence. Staff who were already working within NIPS and regraded to CPO are paid £22,229 per annum increasing to £23,230 per annum following achievement of the required Certificate of Competence.

Prisoner Custody Officers (PCO) work within the Northern Ireland Prison Service Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service and have responsibility for the conveyance of prisoners and the supervision of prisoners while in both Crown Courts and Magistrates' Courts. Current staff in the PCO grade are paid an hourly rate of £9.07.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38552/11-15, whether the figures apply exclusively to prison officers who were not part of the new intake.

(AQW 39434/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm the figures provided in response to AQW/38552/11-15 did not include any new intake prison officers.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether any Northern Ireland Prison Service facilities are under-staffed; and if so, what impact this has on (i) health and safety regulations; (ii) prison governance; and (iii) liability or premium adjustments in the event of an insurance claim.

(AQW 39487/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service is currently operating below target staffing levels, with overtime used to make up the shortfall. However, agreed procedures and processes are in place to minimise any impact on operational delivery. The Northern Ireland Prison Service operates within the public sector liability arrangements without need for commercial insurance.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) what were the terms of William Sloan's temporary release; (ii) whether he has had similar releases in the past; (iii) if so, how many; and (iv) whether any breaches occurred.

(AQW 39490/11-15)

Mr Ford: To release the information requested would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38781/11-15, in relation to the absences due to sickness, by how much does this deplete current on duty staff levels.

(AQW 39493/11-15)

Mr Ford: The level of absence due to sickness varies from day to day. Any impact on staffing levels is managed by use of the Regime Delivery Quota. Regime Delivery Quotas provide guidance on the type of regime that may be delivered should there not be a full complement of staff on duty.

The re-profiling and updating of shift patterns and staff profiles takes account of sickness absence. These are a normal part of prison operations reflecting the changing needs and requirements for regime delivery on a daily basis.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice why the Northern Ireland Prison Service chose to inform the public that William Sloan was unlawfully at large only by way of a post on its website.

(AQW 39494/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) protocol is to inform the PSNI of any prisoner unlawfully at large. NIPS then works with colleagues in the PSNI to locate the prisoner and return him to custody.

NIPS routinely updates its website with details of individuals unlawfully at large for information, not as a part of the immediate response.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) when a person was transferred to Burren House in preparation for release from custody; (ii) what were the terms of this person's day release; (iii) whether a full risk assessment was carried out prior to their arrest and charging; (iv) whether there had been any issues prior to this alleged incident; and (v) whether this person has been returned to Maghaberry or remains on bail at Burren House.

(AQW 39495/11-15)

Mr Ford: To release the information requested would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Justice to outline the IT problems on the Policing Board website that prevented people applying to be independent members of the new Policing and Community Partnerships; and what steps have been taken to ensure that applicants were not disadvantaged.

(AQW 39522/11-15)

Mr Ford: Responsibility for the process of recruitment for Independent Members of the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships rests with the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

The Policing Board has informed me that some technical issues regarding the online completion and submission of PCSP application forms were identified on 27 November by the company responsible for hosting the site. I understand that the problem, which arose from a security update to two browser software applications, was resolved on the morning of 28 November and did not affect all applicants.

The Policing Board advised all applicants who had commenced registration of the problem and informed them that the application could be completed using an alternative browser.

However, in recognition of the difficulties some potential applicants may have encountered, the Policing Board extended the closing date from 5.00pm on 28 November to 5.00pm on 1 December 2014 to ensure that those candidates who had registered on the webpage, but had not yet completed the electronic application, had an opportunity to do so. An email was issued to these candidates advising them of the extension.

I am satisfied that all steps were taken by the Northern Ireland Policing Board to ensure that applicants were not disadvantaged.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown of legal aid paid in the deportation proceedings in the case of Zouhair Maklouf, or in the absence of a complete total, an estimate of the costs.

(AQW 39558/11-15)

Mr Ford: Article 24 of the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (NI) Order 1981 precludes the release of information in relation to specific persons seeking or receiving legal aid for civil cases.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether consideration has been given to a mandatory checklist for the judiciary, through the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission which must be completed and signed off, in addition to the current application form, when satisfying qualifying criteria for legal aid, which would then be audited centrally to ensure full compliance and relative proofs have been presented and verified; and if not, will he consider introducing such a scheme.

(AQW 39559/11-15)

Mr Ford: When making an application for legal aid an applicant must submit a statement of means form as prescribed by the Legal Aid in Criminal Cases (Statement of means) Rules (Northern Ireland) 1999. In the form the applicant is required to provide details of any benefits to which he is entitled and details of employment (including evidence of income), property and savings when not in receipt of benefits. The applicant is also required to sign a declaration confirming that all the details are correct.

Where an applicant claims to be in receipt of benefits the Department of Social Development is required to confirm the details of any benefits that the applicant is receiving.

Financial eligibility is an area which I keep under review, but I have no plans to introduce a checklist for the judiciary.

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of Justice how many firearms applications have been processed in each of the last five years.
(AQW 39629/11-15)

Mr Ford: The operation of firearms licensing is a matter for the Chief Constable, as is the staffing of the PSNI's Firearms and Explosives Branch.

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of Justice how many staff have been allocated to process firearm certificates in each of the last five years.
(AQW 39630/11-15)

Mr Ford: The operation of firearms licensing is a matter for the Chief Constable, as is the staffing of the PSNI's Firearms and Explosives Branch.

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of Justice what was the average time taken to process firearm certificate (i) applications; and (ii) renewals in each of the last five years.
(AQW 39631/11-15)

Mr Ford: The operation of firearms licensing is a matter for the Chief Constable, as is the staffing of the PSNI's Firearms and Explosives Branch.

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the time taken to process firearm certificate applications and renewals compared to the rest of the UK.
(AQW 39632/11-15)

Mr Ford: The operation of firearms licensing is a matter for the Chief Constable, as is the staffing of the PSNI's Firearms and Explosives Branch.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the achievements of the staff from England that have been retained, transported and accommodated by the public purse to implement the Northern Ireland Prison Service staff reduction programme; and to provide a copy of the reports on the progress of this programme.
(AQW 39637/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not have a Staff Reduction Programme. However, the Programme to implement the 40 recommendations made in Dame Anne Owers' report on the conditions, management and oversight of all prisons in Northern Ireland has seen 21 recommendations signed-off as complete by the Prison Review Oversight Group, which I Chair. A further 16 recommendations have been referred to CJINI or RQIA, as appropriate, for independent assessment. This brings to 37 of 40 the number of recommendations either signed-off as complete or referred for assessment. I anticipate that the remaining three recommendations will be brought to the Oversight Group in March 2015.

The Oversight Group meets quarterly and provides a written update to the Justice Committee following each meeting. These reports, along with the Oversight Group's Annual Reports, are available on NIPS website and copies are placed in the Assembly library.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many times has case number 12/002192 at various courts in the Fermanagh-Tyrone Division been listed for trial commencement and either aborted or halted prior to opening; and to outline the reasons for the delay on each occasion.
(AQW 39639/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 19 June 2014 the Court ordered that there should be no further publication of any material relating to this trial. Consequently, I cannot provide the requested information at this stage.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice what recent discussions he has had with the Chief Constable regarding the level of resources required to deal with the dissident republican threat between now and 1 January 2015.
(AQW 39668/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have regular discussions with the Chief Constable, including on 3 December, about the threat and police resources. There is no doubt that there is a pressure on resources, but it is equally clear that the Chief Constable is focussing his effort where it is most required, including on dealing with the dissident republican threat.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice when police widows who were widowed and then remarried prior to the 1 January 1989, will receive the recognition to which they are entitled.
(AQW 39706/11-15)

Mr Ford: Having taken further legal advice, the Department clarified on 3 December 2014, that Section 30 of the Public Sector Pensions Act (NI) 2014 entitles all widows, regardless of when they remarried, to reinstatement of their pensions, except for the few widows in the 1949 pension scheme whose husband left the service before 1 April 1972. My Department

is currently considering the way forward for them. Section 30 took effect on 1 July and I have recently given approval for the Policing Board and the PSNI to commence payments to widows as soon as possible.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether he will instigate an enquiry into public protection arrangements following the release of Dwayne Mullan who has since been remanded back into custody; (ii) what rehabilitation he underwent in custody; (iii) why he was deemed fit for release; (iv) why the Dungannon Magistrates Court offences were not dealt with upon indictment; and (v) whether he will be categorised as dangerous under the 2008 (NI) Act.

(AQW 39726/11-15)

Mr Ford: The assessment of dangerousness under the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 is for the court to consider at the point of conviction and sentencing. Offenders who are sentenced to a determinate custodial sentence of less than 12 months imprisonment are released automatically once the requisite custodial period has been served. It is only where an indeterminate or extended custodial sentence is imposed by the court that Parole Commissioners must be satisfied that it is no longer necessary, for the protection of the public from serious harm, for an individual to be detained in custody beyond the requisite custodial part of the sentence.

The public protection arrangements apply to relevant sexual and violent offenders and I am currently enquiring into their application in the circumstances of this case and will respond on this point when those enquiries have reached their conclusion.

Decisions about the conduct of prosecutions are entirely a matter for the Public Prosecution Service and you may wish to direct your question about why specific offences were not dealt with on indictment to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Information about rehabilitative work undertaken by an individual in custody cannot be provided as disclosure of sensitive personal data would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to outline his Department's commitment to the implementation of the recommendations of the Scofield Report on police injury on duty awards.

(AQW 39859/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department is committed to take actions to address a number of issues raised in the Scofield report, including the provision of guidance to the Policing Board on case reviews, as well as carrying out a review of the policy intent and the legislation.

There are also steps for the Board to take in meeting its statutory responsibilities, including its role as decision-maker in the Injury Benefit scheme.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice when the recommendations of the Scofield report on police injury on duty awards will be implemented.

(AQW 39863/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department has agreed to take forward a number of actions in response to the Scofield report to the Policing Board which I set out in my response to AQW/39859/11-15. My Department has agreed to provide guidance to the Policing Board in relation to reviews by 19 December. It also plans to complete a review of the policy intent and to prepare draft regulations for consultation by April 2015.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to outline the future plans for the Northern Ireland Prison Service Museum.

(AQO 7255/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I have previously discussed with the Member, the Northern Ireland Prison Service has responsibility for many varied and important historical documents and artefacts of public interest. The Service is committed to preserving this history and to ensuring that materials are properly recorded and appropriately housed.

Discussions have taken place with a number of interested parties, including the National Museums of Northern Ireland. However, decisions have not yet been taken on long term future arrangements and progress will depend on competing priorities within the Prison Service.

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Justice to outline the number of cases of animal cruelty that have resulted in custodial sentences.

(AQO 7254/11-15)

Mr Ford: In recent years, animal cruelty offences have been prosecuted under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and, latterly, the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Between 2008 and 2013 there were 122 convictions for animal cruelty offences. Of these, 8 resulted in a custodial sentence. (None in 2008; 1 in 2009, 3 in 2010, 2 in 2011, 1 in 2012 and 1 in 2013.)

These figures are collated on the principal offence rule and include only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted. Similarly, the figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offence specified.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Justice for an update on his Department's Estates Strategy/HQ Accommodation Project. **(AQO 7256/11-15)**

Mr Ford: To ensure that the development of the Department of Justice Estate is taken forward in a joined up way, a DOJ Estate Strategy Group has been established. This work is aligned to the Executive's Asset Management Strategy and is supported by the Strategic Investment Board.

The Estate Strategy involves all of the Department's core directorates, Executive Agencies and Non Departmental Public Bodies.

There are two Projects within the Estate Strategy; dealing with Headquarters Accommodation; and Service Delivery Accommodation.

The objectives of the Projects are:

- to develop a safe and secure environment for all users of the justice system in Northern Ireland, through the estate strategy and use of enabling technologies;
- to identify, prioritise and address the medium to long term accommodation needs of the DOJ, its agencies and NDPBs;
- to identify opportunities for Justice bodies to co-locate or share accommodation;
- to ensure that the DOJ estate is fit for purpose for both users and staff; and meets utilisation and other agreed benchmarks; and
- to deliver Departmental savings.

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has to meet with the new Commissioner of An Garda Síochána. **(AQO 7257/11-15)**

Mr Ford: I thank the member for this question which enables me to formally congratulate Noirin O'Sullivan on her appointment as Garda Commissioner. I have already spoken to Ms O'Sullivan and I look forward to meeting her, in my role as Justice Minister, in the near future.

I have met Ms O'Sullivan many times and I know that she will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the post. The strength of the relationship of cross border co-operation is excellent and I have no doubt that this will continue under her leadership.

Mr Brady asked Minister of Justice how his Department ensures that the role of the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships is maintained through the transition to the new 11 council structure.

(AQO 7258/11-15)

Mr Ford: Policing and Community Safety Partnerships play a pivotal role in building confidence in the justice system, ensuring that the community can get involved in developing solutions to tackle crime, fear of crime, and anti-social behaviour in their local area.

The Northern Ireland Policing Board launched the process to appoint independent members to the PCSPs for each of the new Council areas on 6 November. Although the political members will be appointed by councils at their Annual General Meetings in March or April 2015, the process to appoint independent members will not be completed until early June 2015.

The new PCSPs cannot be reconstituted until both the political and independent members are appointed. To maintain continuity of front line delivery during this transitional period, existing PCSPs are being asked to review their Action Plans to identify those projects which have had most impact on community safety or policing issues and which should continue to receive PCSP funding in 2015/16. These projects will be amalgamated into transitional delivery plans for the new council areas which will be maintained by PCSP Managers until the new partnerships come into effect.

While this is not an ideal solution, these arrangements will ensure that the valuable work being done through local initiatives is protected during the transition.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of current staff morale within the Northern Ireland Prison Service. **(AQO 7259/11-15)**

Mr Ford: Prisons can be difficult places to work and as a result staff morale can change from day to day. I understand this and greatly appreciate the work of the dedicated staff of the Northern Ireland Prison Service who deliver frontline services in that context.

There are a range of ways staff morale is kept under review including mechanisms which facilitate staff engagement with senior management. This is done at a local level (full staff briefings) and as part of the front-line forum meetings. The Director General and Director of HR visit each prison as part of the front-line forum meetings which bring together a cross section of staff – this is in addition to the regular visits to the prisons by the leadership team.

Department for Regional Development

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to list any potential new footpath resurfacing schemes planned for the Bangor area, that have no timetable or funding available to do the work.

(AQW 35660/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's programme of potential new footway reconstruction schemes in the Bangor area is continually assessed with schemes prioritised relative to each other, with timescales for their implementation subject to funding availability.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what is his Department's response to complaints that the cycle lane on Upper Arthur Street, Belfast is being blocked by bins, delivery vehicles and road signs.

(AQW 38221/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's parking enforcement contractor, NSL, regularly visits Upper Arthur Street, as part of its overall schedule of beats. This year, in excess of two hundred Penalty Charge Notices have been issued to vehicles in this street. NSL will continue to visit Upper Arthur Street with a view to carrying out enforcement. When a complaint about bins blocking the cycle lane is received, my officials will speak to the relevant owner and advise them of their responsibility to ensure the bin is not placed in the cycle lane, and that once the bin has been emptied, it should be removed from the street immediately afterwards. Where ownership has not been established or where owners fail to cooperate with my officials, these bins, with the assistance of Belfast City Council, will be removed.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what degree of advertising will be undertaken to promote advantageous car parking charges for town centre shoppers in the run up to Christmas 2014.

(AQW 38864/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: All approved car parking promotions for the Christmas period 2014 will be communicated through Departmental Press Releases and contact with the local media.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the Waste Water Treatment Works in Co. Fermanagh that are at current capacity or will reach capacity in the coming years; and what plans are in place to upgrade these works.

(AQW 38902/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The attached table at Annex A identifies those waste water treatment works (WwTWs) within Fermanagh that are operating at 80% or greater capacity. It does not directly relate to the priority of works planned to be upgraded in any funding period. The estimate of 80% capacity is based on the design capacity of the works recorded in NI Water's Annual Information Returns compared with the population equivalent (PE).

NI Water plans to commit £3 million of capital expenditure to upgrade wastewater treatment works (WwTWs) in Fermanagh during the Price Control period between 2015 and 2021 (PC15). The programme is subject to, amongst other things, budgetary constraints and land acquisition issues. The table is colour coded to identify those WwTWs presently being upgraded and those identified for upgrade in the PC15 period.

Name of Works	Site Car ID	Facility Car ID	District Council Area	AIR14 Design PE	AIR14 Actual PE	Percentage of Actual Pe against Design Pe	WWTWs at 80% Plus Capacity	WWTWs Above 250Pe	WWTWs below 250Pe
Ardess	S02995	Ww002063750	Fermanagh	72	66	91	Y		Y
Belleek (Fermanagh)	S033024	Ww002063719	Fermanagh	2000	1756	88	Y	Y	
Blaney	S03028	Ww002063714	Fermanagh	15	18	120	Y		Y
Bohulkin	S03029	Ww002063669	Fermanagh	9	9	100	Y		Y
Brooke-borough (WWTW)	S03032	Ww002063677	Fermanagh	800	664	83	Y	Y	
Castle Archdale (WWTW)	S03041	Ww002063715	Fermanagh	1000	849	85	Y	Y	
Church Hill	S03050	Ww002063712	Fermanagh	34	69	202	Y		Y

Name of Works	Site Car ID	Facility Car ID	District Council Area	AIR14 Design PE	AIR14 Actual PE	Percentage of Actual Pe against Design Pe	WWTWs at 80% Plus Capacity	WWTWs Above 250Pe	WWTWs below 250Pe
Claddy (WwTW)	S03051	Ww002063395	Fermanagh	271	408	151	Y	Y	
Corry (WwTW)	S03063	Ww002063720	Fermanagh	14	12	86	Y		Y
Derryaghna	S03073	Ww002063690	Fermanagh	20	18	89	Y		Y
Derrylin (WwTW)	S03075	Ww002063666	Fermanagh	1139	915	80	Y	Y	
Drumgay (2)	S03091	Ww002063673	Fermanagh	24	39	163	Y		Y
Ederney (WwTW)	S03106	Ww002063683	Fermanagh	848	858	101	Y	Y	
Enniskillen	S03218	Ww002063686	Fermanagh	30652	24977	81	Y	Y	
Florence-court	S03114	Ww002063687	Fermanagh	320	289	90	Y	Y	
Garrison (WwTW)	S03115	Ww002063722	Fermanagh	550	663	121	Y	Y	
Kesh (WwTW)	S03140	Ww002063706	Fermanagh	3000	2682	89	Y	Y	
Kinawley	S03149	Ww002063689	Fermanagh	440	381	87	Y	Y	
Letterkeen	S03161	Ww002063707	Fermanagh	12	12	99	Y		Y
Lisbellaw (WwTW)	S03165	Ww002063699	Fermanagh	1675	1461	87	Y	Y	
Lisdoat (2)	S03167	Ww002063535	Fermanagh	17	16	95	Y		Y
Lisnarrick	S03170	Ww002063685	Fermanagh	200	290	145	Y	Y	
Lisnaskea (WwTW)	S03171	Ww002063734	Fermanagh	7000	6391	91	Y	Y	
Mullans (Fermanagh)	S03196	Ww002063713	Fermanagh	6	6	100	Y		Y
Newtown-butler (WwTW)	S03200	Ww002063658	Fermanagh	1350	1285	95	Y	Y	
Rosscolban	S03211	Ww002063716	Fermanagh	3	3	99	Y		Y
Rosscor	S03212	Ww002063721	Fermanagh	15	15	100	Y		Y
Rosslea (WwTW)	S03213	Ww002063655	Fermanagh	963	877	91	Y	Y	
Tempo (WwTW)	S03229	Ww002063700	Fermanagh	760	921	121	Y	Y	
Woaghterrerry	S03239	Ww002063663	Fermanagh	37	30	81	Y		Y
Legend		Completing 2014/15							
		Proposed projects 2015 -2121							

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development how he intends to promote the offer of five hours parking for £1 in Enniskillen car parks in the run up to Christmas.

(AQW 39119/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: All approved TransportNI car parking promotions for the Christmas period 2014 will be communicated through Departmental Press Releases and contact with local media.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has considered putting a bus lane on the hard shoulder of the M2 motorway from the Sandyknowles junction to Belfast city centre, at peak times, to help decrease travel time for commuters.

(AQW 39166/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Bus lanes are generally provided to improve journey times and reliability for bus passengers and help to make public transport an attractive alternative to travel by private car, particularly at peak times.

In 2008, a hard shoulder bus lane was provided on the M2 at Sandyknowes roundabout to allow buses to avoid the peak time congestion. However, I am pleased to say that, since the third lane was provided on the City bound carriageway from Sandyknowes, congestion levels have significantly eased and buses rarely need to avail of this facility.

Departmental officials are considering the benefits of installing a bus priority lane on the M2 City bound from Greencastle to Duncrue Street. This scheme may be of benefit to commuters during the construction of the planned York Street Interchange. However, as yet, no funding has been confirmed for either of these projects.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has considered using temporary bike lanes for periods of one week to test whether a change in road infrastructure would work in certain areas.

(AQW 39193/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The draft Bicycle Strategy identifies the need to begin the development of a cycling society by rolling out a number of pilot projects. It will be important to monitor the pilot projects to make sure that the full range of benefits and lessons learnt are identified.

The monitoring and evaluation of pilot projects will contribute to the delivery of more permanent, longer term interventions.

The detail of selected pilot projects (including their duration) will be developed at the Bicycle Strategy delivery plan stage.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) number of streetlights which have been replaced by LED lighting in each council areas; (ii) cost of each of these schemes; and (iii) predicted annual energy saving of each scheme.

(AQW 39233/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of where my Department has installed LED street lighting are shown in the table below:

Council Area	Number of LED Lights Installed	Cost of Scheme (£000s)	Predicted Annual Energy Saving (kWh)
Belfast	119	220	17,393
Castlereagh	130	420	4,350
Coleraine	100	129	10,540
Craigavon	3	0.3	410
Down	10	16	1,601
Dungannon	47	DSD- funded Public Realm scheme	1,484
Moyle	42	27	7,872
Omagh	7	N/A – Sample / trial lanterns	1,140
Strabane	14	DSD- funded Public Realm scheme	351
Total	472	812.3	45,141

It should be noted that Replacement LED street lighting schemes can involve either one-for-one replacement of lanterns on existing columns, or the complete renewal of the whole installation including columns, underground cables and associated works. The schemes listed above include both types of projects.

In general, a replacement LED lantern would typically cost in the range of £250 - £500, depending on the type and quantities involved. However, for full renewal of the entire street lighting installation, costs can range between £2000 - £3000 per street light, depending on the location, type of road, equipment required, reinstatement and traffic management costs.

Further LED street lighting has also been installed in a number of other Public Realm schemes, for which my Department has not yet formally taken over maintenance responsibilities.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to outline the rationale for the introduction of charges in off-street car parks on Sundays in the Coleraine area from December; (ii) what impact this will have on traders in the town centre; and (iii) how many town centre car parks will be included in this scheme.

(AQW 39250/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: A number of years ago, at the request of the then Coleraine Town Centre Partnership, my Department introduced a small charge to park in the two main town centre car parks in Coleraine, at Abbey Street and The Mall, on the Sundays leading up to Christmas. This step was taken in an effort to better manage the use of the car parks, discouraging all day parkers and leaving these spaces closest to the town centre available for shoppers. This charging on Sundays leading up to Christmas has been in operation each year since 2006.

The five remaining town centre car parks in Coleraine will still be free on Sundays and during normal charging hours, all the car parks will allow 5 hours parking for the reduced rate of £1.

My Department, in conjunction with the Council, is supporting the free 'Park & Ride' facility on the Saturdays leading up to Christmas and additional car park information signage has been introduced.

I am confident that the various measures, as outlined above, will provide a welcome boost for traders in Coleraine and encourage the public to continue to support their local economy and to shop local.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 34741/11-15, for an update on the proposed work on alleviating flooding in the Newcastle area.

(AQW 39253/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water is currently developing the detail design of a project to reduce the risk of flooding in the Mourneview Estate area of Newcastle. The project concept is being developed based on the installation of a new road drainage outfall and the enlargement of the combined sewer. Over the coming months NI Water will be undertaking topographical surveys, CCTV internal pipe inspections and ground investigation. In addition, NI Water will be seeking lands agreements and will also undertake consultations with TransportNI and DARD Rivers Agency.

Once the technical development and statutory approvals are completed, the project will be tendered with the aim of a construction start in summer 2015. The project will be jointly funded by NI Water and TransportNI.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Regional Development where the material excavated during the construction of the Belfast Sewers Project was dumped.

(AQW 39271/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The material excavated during the course of construction for the Belfast Sewers Project was disposed of at three locations; Belfast City Council's facility at Dargan Road, a contractor's facility in Cookstown and a facility on White Mountain.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the change between 2008 and 2013 in the average number of vehicles per day using the M2 countrybound lane at the (i) Fortwilliam; (ii) Sandyknowes; (iii) Antrim; (iv) A26, and (v) Randalstown exits.

(AQW 39287/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of traffic flow obtained from permanent count sites on the M2 are shown in the table below (the figures refer to the mainline flow and do not take account of vehicles leaving or entering at intervening junctions):

Location	2008	2009	2013	% age change
Counter 204 before Sandyknowes junction	(no information available)	31870	32250	+1.19%
Counter 205 after Sandyknowes junction	(no information available)	21840	21560	-1.28%
Counter 132 before Antrim (Rathbeg) junction	18930	-	20350	+7.50%
Counter 110 after Antrim (Rathbeg) junction	18490	-	19150	+3.57%
Counter 110 before A26 Dunsilly junction	18490	-	19150	+3.57%
Counter 111 after A26 Dunsilly junction	8780	-	10000	+13.89%

Note: All data relates to vehicles travelling on the M2 motorway in a Northerly Direction

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress of the Knockmore Link, Lisburn.
(AQW 39319/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Knockmore – M1 Link has been identified in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 as a non-strategic road scheme that is to be developer led and funded, either in full or in very substantial part. Any contribution from my Department towards the scheme would be subject to detailed economic appraisal, the availability of funding and inclusion within our major works programme.

My Department's priority remains on the strategic road network and it is therefore highly unlikely that funding would be justified for this scheme. At present no funding has been identified within the current budget and consequently the provision of a Knockmore Link does not appear in any TransportNI work programme.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail (a) the number of ecar charging points in each of the last three years; (b) the number of times that service contractors have been called out to repair or service the ecar charges in each of the last three years; (ii) whether the cost incurred by the Department each year for the provision of repair works for the ecar charging infrastructure was dependent on the number of call outs; (iii) to detail the total cost of repair and service call outs and works in each of the last three years; and (iv) for his assessment of the technical reliability of the ecar charging points.

(AQW 39347/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The ecar project consortium was established by Department for Regional Development in April 2012 and successfully secured funding, from the Office of Low Emission Vehicles and the European Union, along with matched funding from consortium members to create an electric car charge point network across Northern Ireland. The Consortium members included Department for Regional Development, Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE), Electricity Supply Board (ESB), Power NI, Donnelly Motor Group, Strategic Investment Board and 20 local councils.

The network was installed by NIE between March 2012 and July 2013 and provides full geographical coverage across Northern Ireland. Motorists are never more than 10 miles from a fast charge point or 30 miles from one of the 14 rapid chargers, which are installed along the main arterial routes in NI with a particular focus on cross border routes.

With regard to your specific questions:

(a) details of the number of ecar charging points in each of the last three years are set out in the table below:

Year	Public Charging Points
2011/12	88
2012/13	348
2013/14	348
	Network Total

(b) details of the number of times that service contractors have been called out to repair or service the ecar charges in each of the last three years are set out in the table below:

Year	Number of call outs	Number of annual service visits per charge post	Number of Charging events
2011/12	0	0*	400
2013/14	27	44*	3567
April 2014 to Sept 2014	121	174*	6174

* Service Contract allows for 1 service per charge post per year (each post contains two charge points).

(ii) The Department incurs no costs for the provision of repair works for the ecar charging infrastructure as NIE installed and has taken ownership of the charge points. Therefore it also manages and pays for any preventative maintenance and call out services on all of the charge points.

Charge points are linked by mobile communication technology to a Charge Point Management System (CPMS) which monitors the status of each charge point and provides information to a call centre. Should the CPMS detect a fault or a fault is reported to the call centre by a user the technology allows for remote repair or if this is not possible an engineer can visit the site. Since the installation of the public network over 10,000 charging events have taken place and fault reports remain at a relatively low level.

(iii) These costs are incurred by NIE and my Department does not maintain this information.

(iv) In terms of the technical reliability of the ecar charging points, my Department monitors the performance of the network and based on the number of faults set against a 250% increase in usage between 2013 and 2014, I am content with the overall performance of the infrastructure to date.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on installing domestic water meters since May 2007; and to detail the reasons for the spend.

(AQW 39380/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Under Article 81 of the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, NI Water is required to install meters on properties being connected to the public water supply for the first time. This requirement relates to both new domestic properties and existing properties obtaining first time water services. The meters are not currently read by NI Water but record the consumption for the individual properties.

The number of meters installed during each year since 1 April 2007 and the costs associated with the provision and installation are set out in the table below:-

Year	Number of meters installed at new domestic dwellings	Total cost incurred (Meter cost and installation cost)
2007 / 08	3,220	£144,481
2008 / 09	11,460	£523,837
2009 / 10	3,945	£167,070
2010 / 11	4,427	£144,098
2011 / 12	3,458	£112,557
2012 / 13	3,078	£100,188
2013 / 14	3,031	£112,639
Totals	32,619	£1,304,870

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Regional Development why his Department informed NI Water that it must “comply with legislation” by installing water meters.

(AQW 39417/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Under Article 81 of the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, which was introduced by Direct Rule Ministers, NI Water is required to install meters on properties being connected to the public water supply for the first time. The meters are not currently read by NI Water but record the consumption for the individual properties.

It is my intention to amend this legislation through the forthcoming Water Bill. I have instructed my officials to include a power in the Bill to make Regulations to enable Article 81 to be amended and I have circulated a draft Executive paper indicating my intention to make this amendment.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the breakdown of how the Executive intends to spend the £600,000 investment in the electric car infrastructure from the UK Government in January; (ii) the number of public ecar chargers which will be installed from this investment; and (iii) how much of that funding will be allocated to private organisations and individuals for ecar charging.

(AQW 39440/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

- (i) The Executive intends to spend up to £600,000 of grant funding from the Office of Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) on the supply, fit, installation, connection and commissioning of charge points in the public sector estate. Funding will also include all civil, mechanical and electrical costs required for site preparation, in addition to green surfacing and signage required to identify the dedicated car parking space for each charge point.
- (ii) 30 public sector host organisations applied to obtain this funding and include NICS Departments, Councils, Health Trusts, NI Ambulance Service, National Trust Regional Colleges, Translink and Invest NI. From the applications received, 85 suitable charge point locations have been identified as suitable to proceed at present.
- (iii) The OLEV funding is specifically designed to install charge points within the public sector estate and hence will not be allocated to private organisations or individuals.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development what funding will be available to local councils to support the roll out of the ecar charging network in off-street car parks when this transfers from the Department of the Environment.

(AQW 39441/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department will not be providing funding to local councils to roll out further ecar public charge points. All costs associated with the continued operation and maintenance of the ecar public charge points will lie with Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) as owner and operator of the infrastructure.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he will take to ensure that the lights at the entrance of the underpass at Madam’s Bank Road, Derry are repaired in the near future.

(AQW 39483/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The street lights in the proximity of the Madam's Bank Underpass have not been operating for the past two years following the theft of the service cables. Repairs were not carried out at the time due to a spate of cable thefts occurring at various locations across the province and also due to the fact the lights in this area were being regularly vandalised.

While I understand the desire of local representatives and the Police Service of Northern Ireland to restore the lights given the recent events in and around the underpass, as a result of the budget cuts arising from the outcome of the June and October monitoring rounds, my Department does not have sufficient resources to fund these street lighting repairs which would have to be undertaken by an external contractor. Therefore unfortunately we are currently not in a position to repair the defective street lights adjacent to the Madam's Bank Underpass.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what specifications or alterations are being considered, in the potential purchase of new train and bus stock, to accommodate passengers who wish to transport their bicycles by public transport. **(AQW 39511/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: Final specification for purchase of new trains will be the subject of public consultation. Each of the current Class 4000 three-carriage train set has two spaces for accommodation of up to four bikes, i.e. eight bikes per train. NI Railways will seek to strike the right balance between provision of cycle capacity and provision of passenger seats going forward.

In respect of buses discussions are on-going with my Department's Cycling Unit to collaborate on the feasibility of a trial whereby some bus services from Cairnshill Park & Ride facility will have exterior-mounted bike racks. This may influence future procurements.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to alter the policy on bringing bicycles on public transport. **(AQW 39514/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: NI Railways policy on carriage of bikes is that before 09:30 hours Monday to Friday bikes will not normally be carried. At those times trains are normally full, carrying substantial numbers of standing passengers and leaving no available space for bikes. Folding bikes can be carried at any time provided that they are in 'folded-down' mode.

I can further advise that on lightly loaded services, i.e. services operating in the opposite direction to peak commuter flow (out of Belfast each morning) conductors may apply discretion and permit cycles where capacity is available. This policy was consulted on and agreed with Sustrans.

Currently on buses, folding bikes can be carried on board at any time, again provided that they are in 'folded-down' mode.

My officials are engaging with Translink to ensure that the DRD Bicycle Strategy Delivery Plan is reflected in current policies around bringing bicycles on public transport. I can confirm that Translink are currently exploring opportunities to facilitate the carrying of conventional bicycles on specific bus routes on a pilot basis such as the Mourne Rambler and Cairnshill Park & Ride services. I hope to make a further assessment on completion of the pilot exercise.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development what proportion of Translink customers use Smartlink cards compared to those paying for journeys in cash. **(AQW 39515/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: For 2013/14 the percentage of Translink fare-paying smart/electronic passenger journeys compared to all fare-paying journeys was as follows:

- Metro 34%
- Ulsterbus 31%
- NI Railways 18%

Overall this accounts for around 30% of all journeys undertaken. Translink weekly, monthly and annual rail tickets are currently provided in paper format and are not included above. Translink do not issue paper weekly and monthly tickets on bus services.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether there are plans to sell off parts of the embankment along the Comber Greenway; (ii) if so, what process will be put in place to advertise this land; (iii) how much revenue is expected to be generated from such a sale; (iv) whether there will be a guaranteed minimum distance between the pathway and any fencing erected; and (v) what consultation will be undertaken with users of this public space. **(AQW 39523/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: I can assure the Member my Department is not intending to sell off parts of the Comber Greenway. It is my vision to give people the freedom and confidence to travel by bicycle and I am committed to promoting and developing the Comber Greenway as one of our premier walking and cycling routes in Northern Ireland.

My Department has entered into a number of short term licence agreements with a number of land owners along the Comber Greenway, who wanted to secure the rear of their properties from potential theft or vandalism.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how many meters were installed on water lines servicing (i) commercial and industrial; (ii) agricultural; and (iii) domestic properties in (a) 2007; (b) 2008; (c) 2009; (d) 2010; and (e) 2011. (AQW 39533/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Information relating to meters installed by Northern Ireland Water is recorded in two categories - non-domestic and domestic properties. It is therefore not possible to provide a breakdown of the non-domestic category because the information held on the NI Water database is not categorized in this way. The number of meters installed at domestic properties and the number of meters installed at non-domestic properties during the years 2007/8 to 2011/12 is set out in the table below.

Year	Number of meters installed at non-domestic properties	Number of meters installed at domestic properties
2007 / 08	2,154	3,220
2008 / 09	4,886	11,460
2009 / 10	933	3,945
2010 / 2011	1,115	4,427
2011 / 2012	814	3,458

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the talks with North Down Borough Council on the purchase of Portavoe Reservoir. (AQW 39642/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water met with both North Down and Ards Borough Councils to discuss the purchase of Portavoe Reservoir on 25 April 2014. At this meeting, while the Councils representatives expressed an interest in acquiring the reservoir, they indicated that any deliberations on the issue would be undertaken by the new North Down and Ards District Council post April 2015.

In May 2014, expressions of interest in a number of redundant reservoirs, including Portavoe, were invited from the public sector in accordance with the Department of Finance and Personnel's Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property in NI guidance document. An expression of interest was subsequently received from North Down Borough Council who stated that given the Local Government Reform and the recent election of a Shadow North Down and Ards District Council, any further deliberations on this issue will be undertaken by the new Council.

Following on from the expression of interest, the Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Services, working on behalf of NI Water, contacted North Down Borough Council again in October 2014 and the Council responded by telephone on 6 November 2014, requesting that they be allowed until April 2015 to have the matter considered by the new Council.

NI Water has confirmed that it is content to allow North Down Borough Council this additional time to consider the purchase of Portavoe Reservoir.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the current value of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners land and building portfolio. (AQW 39707/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Balance Sheet contained within the most recently published Accounts for the Belfast Harbour indicate that Tangible Fixed Assets are currently valued at £284,935,000.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development what proposed investments the Belfast Harbour Commissioners plan to make in the next two years. (AQW 39732/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Strategic Report contained within the Belfast Harbour Annual Report and Accounts 2013 outlines information in relation to investment planning. The timing and publication of detailed investment plans is a corporate matter for the Belfast Harbour Commissioners. Such plans may, from time to time, be discussed with relevant Government departments without prejudice to the requirement for commercial discretion.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to change the Blue Badge Scheme to a scheme similar to that recently introduced in Scotland. (AQW 39825/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has conducted a public consultation exercise on a number of proposed changes to the Blue Badge Scheme in Northern Ireland, including moving to the same central database and Blue Badge design and issue introduced in Scotland, as well as in England and Wales.

Scotland introduced the Blue Badge Improvement Service and the associated new Blue Badge in 2012. The Blue Badge Improvement Service provides a central database of badges to help authorities administer and enforce the Blue Badge scheme. Potential benefits of the new service to Northern Ireland would include:

- Secure printing, personalisation and distribution of the new Blue Badge design from a central database;
- More secure and readable Blue Badge to aid enforcement;
- Effective prevention of misuse and fraud;
- Access to the central database of all Blue Badges issued across the UK; and
- An online application form.

Recommendations from my Department's consultation are currently being finalised and will be made public as soon as practicable.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the reports that one city and 13 towns are set to lose their urban bus services next year, which towns will be affected; and how the removal of these services is likely to affect older people and people with disabilities who rely on these services.

(AQW 39879/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Set out below are the potential service reductions outlined by Translink in response to the budget potentially available next year. I would stress that these are indicative at this stage and no decisions have been taken. These are additional to income generation and efficiency and rationalisation measures which Translink are also proposing to make. These details will need to be revisited in light of the Executive's final decision on the 15/16 Budget.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ■ Potential withdrawal of the following town services: | ■ Newtownabbey |
| ■ Armagh | ■ Omagh |
| ■ Ballyclare | ■ Strabane |
| ■ Ballynahinch | ■ Potential service reductions and consolidation in the following towns: |
| ■ Banbridge | ■ Antrim |
| ■ Carrickfergus | ■ Ballymena |
| ■ Cookstown | ■ Bangor |
| ■ Downpatrick | ■ Dungannon |
| ■ Enniskillen | ■ Lurgan |
| ■ Limavady | ■ Portadown |
| ■ Magherafelt | ■ Newry |
| ■ Newcastle | |

If implemented, this would impact all users of these services including older people and people with a disability. It is possible that a detailed impact would be subject to Equality Impact Assessments.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Belfast Rapid Transit project.

(AQO 7263/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The implementation phase of the Belfast Rapid Transit project began in May this year.

Work has recently been completed on a new 520 space Park & Ride facility at Dundonald. This new facility became operational on Monday 1 December and is served by a new dedicated limited stop Metro 4X service during peak hours and by existing Ulsterbus services at other times. Bicycle parking facilities are also provided adjacent to the terminal building. Dundonald Park & Ride will form a key part of the new Belfast Rapid Transit system which is scheduled to start services in 2017.

Work is progressing on the sections of the Belfast Rapid Transit route on the Upper Newtownards Road between Sandown Road and Knock Road, and on the Falls Road between Grosvenor Road and Whiterock Road. The works have been well publicised in advance and details of the impacts on local traffic are available on my Department's TrafficwatchNI website.

I should point out that the roadworks associated with the Belfast Rapid Transit project on the Upper Newtownards Road and Falls Road are temporarily suspended for the period from Monday 24 November 2014 until Friday 2 January 2015 inclusive. This is in accordance with my Department's Christmas roadworks embargo.

In May this year I committed funding to enable the procurement of the rapid transit vehicles to commence. It will take approximately three years from procurement to delivery of the proposed fleet of 38 vehicles.

The new Belfast Rapid Transit system is scheduled to become operational in 2017, however, as identified in my Department's draft budget 2015-16, funding pressures may delay the operational date.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the timescale for the completion of a bypass at Dungiven.

(AQO 7271/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Dungiven bypass forms part of the scheme to provide 30 kilometres of dual carriageway between Londonderry and Dungiven, which is well advanced in its development. It has been through Public Inquiry and the Inspector has produced a report containing a number of recommendations. One of the recommendations was to examine a suggested route for the Dungiven bypass that was put forward by a third party on the final day of the public inquiry, and we are therefore quality assuring the route.

That work is continuing, and when I am satisfied that all issues have been appropriately reviewed, I will issue a Departmental statement.

Following this, progression of the project would, subject to final approval of the business case, be reliant upon funding being made available by the Executive.

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the intent of the Assembly to oppose water charges, why NI Water is installing water meters on private properties.

(AQO 7274/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Under Article 81 of the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, NI Water is required to install meters on properties being connected to the public water supply for the first time. This requirement relates to both new domestic properties and existing properties obtaining first time water services. The meters are not currently read by NI Water but record the consumption for the individual properties. It is my intention to amend this legislation through the forthcoming Water Bill.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress made to transfer off-street car parking to local councils in April 2015.

(AQO 7264/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In April 2013, the Executive concluded that district councils should become responsible for the future provision, ownership and management of off-street car parks, except for park and ride and park and share car parks, which will remain the responsibility of my Department.

The Off-Street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill, which is currently going through the Committee Stage, has a single clause to achieve the vision of the Executive. The Bill deals only with the transfer of powers from my Department to councils, to create and operate off-street car parks and to enforce parking conventions within them. The actual transfer of the car parks owned by my Department will be done by way of formal transfer schemes, made under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 which will take effect from 1 April 2015. A number of car parks operated by my Department are already owned by the councils and the leases for these car parks will be terminated on 31 March 2015.

The Member may be interested to know that, at this stage, it is my intention to transfer 29 free and charged car parks to the new Belfast City Council.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development why NI Water has installed 35,000 water meters on new residential properties.

(AQO 7267/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There have been 32,619 water meters installed at new domestic dwellings since 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2014, at a total cost of £1,304,870. This cost includes the supply of the meter and its' installation. The vast majority of these were installed under the previous Minister.

Under Article 81 of the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, NI Water is required to install meters on properties being connected to the public water supply for the first time. This requirement relates to both new domestic properties and existing properties obtaining first time water services. The meters are not currently read by NI Water but record the consumption for the individual properties.

It is my intention to amend this legislation through the forthcoming Water Bill. I have asked my officials to take a power in the Bill to make Regulations in order to allow us to amend Article 81. A paper seeking Executive approval was issued on 4 December and the Committee for Regional Development was also advised about my proposal.

It is interesting to note that this was not raised by any of those calling for a change to Article 81 during the consultation for the Water Bill which closed at the end of August.

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on the drafting of the Off-Street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill NIA 40/11-16.

(AQO 7268/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: No expenditure has been incurred by my Department in the drafting of the Off-Street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill.

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he is considering routes to the south of Dungiven as part of the proposed bypass project.

(AQO 7269/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dualling scheme, which includes a bypass at Dungiven, is well advanced in its development. It has been through Public Inquiry and the Inspector has produced a report containing a number of recommendations. One of the recommendations was to examine a suggested alternative route for the Dungiven bypass that was put forward by a third party on the final day of the public inquiry and we are, therefore, quality assuring the route. This work is continuing and when I am satisfied that all issues have been appropriately reviewed, I will issue a Departmental Statement.

Following this, progression of the project would, subject to final approval of the business case, be reliant upon funding being made available by the Executive.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to improve the management of the traffic flow at the railway crossing at William Street, Lurgan.

(AQO 7270/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am aware of the issues at William Street and accept the level crossing can, at times, cause delays to traffic. However, I am also aware of the significant engineering measures required to provide a bridge or tunnel to separate the road and the railway line and the impact such a proposal would have on surrounding buildings and properties.

The Member will be aware that options studies into the issue of the railway crossing at William Street, Lurgan, have been completed, in particular the Craigavon Urban Area Local Transportation Study, Technical Note 10: William Street Level Crossing, Lurgan, published in 2007.

Scheme appraisals such as this consider a wide range of factors in detail, including, for example, issues related to the environment, safety, economy, integration and accessibility. The report concluded that the significant costs of a grade separated scheme outweighed the benefits that may be forthcoming.

The scale of any grade separated scheme unfortunately precludes it from being taken forward by my Department as a road or rail scheme.

Translink has carried out some survey work and made some changes to the train timetable and signalling schedule which have helped to slightly reduce the level of traffic flow downtime.

Translink also commissioned an independent review of the situation and is currently considering the draft report produced before it is taken forward to Business Case stage.

Translink plans for an upgrade of the Lurgan rail station and improved Park and Ride facilities are dependent upon future budget allocations.

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the measures being taken by Transport NI to provide infrastructure and safety improvements to junctions on the Knockmore and Prince William roads in Lisburn.

(AQO 7272/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The improvement of the junctions along both the Knockmore and Prince William roads is linked to a number of major housing developments in the area, including the LD1 development, and this work is the responsibility of developers.

I am aware of representations from elected representatives about road safety concerns relating to the Knockmore and Prince William roads in Lisburn, in particular following the recent fatality involving a motorcyclist on Knockmore Road. I wish to take this opportunity to express my sympathy to the family, however, as I hope you will appreciate, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further until the PSNI investigation has concluded.

I met with the Member on Monday 8 December 2014, along with the two remaining developers and their transportation consultants Hoy Dorman, to discuss these issues.

I have asked my officials to liaise directly with Hoy Dorman regarding the improvement of four junctions namely, Ballinderry Road/Knockmore Road, Brokerstown Road/Knockmore Road, Prince William Road/Knockmore Road and Ballymacash Road/Prince William Road, in accordance with the Developer's commitments, as well as current road design standards. These improvements include signalisation of the junctions and provision of pedestrian facilities.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the funding allocations of the draft Budget for 2015/16, for an update on his proposed capital expenditure in County Fermanagh.

(AQO 7273/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The proposed Capital allocation for my Department in 2015-16 as set out in the Draft Budget is £325.8 million, some £72 million or 18% less than projected expenditure in 2014-15.

Although I have provided indicative allocations across the main spending areas of my Department in my Spending and Savings Proposals document, the final budget has not yet been resolved. Therefore, at this stage I am unable to provide you with details of planned Capital expenditure in Fermanagh.

Department for Social Development

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the knock on effect on the services his Department provides in relation to the closure of The Addiction Service, Railway Street, Ballymena.

(AQW 38631/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): My Department does not provide any funding to The Addiction Service in Ballymena. The loss of any such service to the area is however extremely regrettable.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 38301/11-15 and AQW 38300/11-15, to detail (i) the role of the official involved in the Lurgan Golf Club Neighbourhood Renewal Project who failed to declare a conflict of interest; (ii) the nature of the conflict of interest; (iii) the disciplinary action under the Northern Ireland Civil Service Code of Ethics that has been taken as result of the discovery of the conflict of interest and the failure to declare it; and (iv) how many conflicts of interests have been declared subsequent to the issue of the reminder to staff regarding the need for such declarations.

(AQW 39128/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information is as follows:

- (i) The official was part of a team involved in the development, appraisal and oversight of the delivery of the project, following its endorsement by the Lurgan Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership Board. The decision to provide funding was made by an independent Review Panel;
- (ii) The official was a playing member of Lurgan Golf Club;
- (iii) Internal discipline is a matter between employee and employer and for this reason details are confidential; and
- (iv) None.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost of Employment and Support Allowance appeals in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 39200/11-15)

Mr Storey: The costs of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) appeals are not separately identifiable.

However, the table below sets out the annual expenditure within TAS for 2012/13 and 2013/14, the total number of appeal outcomes and the number of ESA appeal outcomes.

Financial Year	Annual Spend £	Number of Appeal outcomes ¹	Number of ESA Appeals outcomes
2012/13	6,913,955	14,561	8,559
2013/14	8,857,185	18,290	12,193

¹ Appeals processed and disposed of.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) appeal hearings have resulted in the original decision not to award ESA being overturned, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 39201/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Chairman of The Appeals Tribunal records whether the decision made on appeal was either more or less advantageous than a previous decision. A more advantageous decision may increase the allowance or direct that a new award be made. The table below sets out the total number of decisions made by the Tribunal in 2012/13 and 2013/14 for Employment and Support Allowance cases and how many of these decisions were more or less advantageous to the appellant.

Year	Total number of Tribunal Decisions On ESA	More Advantageous Decision	Less Advantageous Decision
2012/13	8,559	2,855	5,704
2013/14	12,193	3,778	8,415

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost of Disability Living Allowance appeals in the last two financial years.

(AQW 39202/11-15)

Mr Storey: The costs of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) appeals are not separately identifiable.

However, the table below sets out the annual expenditure within TAS for financial years 2012/13 and 2013/14, the total number of appeal outcomes and the number of DLA appeal outcomes.

Financial Year	Annual Spend £	Number of Appeal Outcomes ¹	Number of DLA Appeal outcomes
2012/13	6,913,955	14,561	3,819
2013/14	8,857,185	18,290	3,799

¹ Appeals processed and disposed of.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQO 7073/11-15, to detail (i) the number of applicants; and (ii) the number of applicants deemed to be in housing stress in (a) 1 October 2013; and (b) 1 October 2012.

(AQW 39225/11-15)

Mr Storey: In relation to (i) and (ii) the table attached, supplied by the Housing Executive, provides the figures for the North Antrim parliamentary constituency at October 2012 and October 2013: -

	October 2012	October 2013
Total Applicants	2,206	2,315
Housing Stress applicants	1,266	1,252

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

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has any plans to ensure Winter Fuel Payments are extended to include people with a disability on a low income.

(AQW 39345/11-15)

Mr Storey: There are currently no plans to extend Winter Fuel Payments to include people with a disability on a low income. The purpose of Winter Fuel Payments is to help alleviate fuel poverty by providing support specifically to older people towards their winter fuel bills.

It is recognised that people with a disability on a low income can face extra costs due to their impairment. These costs can be related to a range of additional needs, including heating. General financial provision to provide a contribution towards the extra costs faced by people with long-term health conditions or disabilities is currently made through Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance. These benefits are non means-tested, non-contributory and tax free and recipients can choose to spend it according to their own priorities, including heating costs.

Additional help is available to low income individuals with a disability that are also entitled to income-related benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance through the support component and additional disability premiums.

Help is also available through Cold Weather Payments to those who are most vulnerable, and who are in receipt of specified benefits, during periods of very cold weather when they are faced with increased heating needs.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the annual cost of providing transport for (i) Disability Living Allowance; and (ii) Employment Support Allowance appeals.

(AQW 39346/11-15)

Mr Storey: The annual cost¹ to The Appeals Service in providing transport for Disability Living Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance appeals during the period April 2013 to March 2014 is detailed in the table below:

	DLA	ESA
April 2013 – March 2014	£346.76	£631.59

¹ Appellant transport expenses to attend tribunal hearings

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 37446/11-15, who pays for the costs associated with skip emptying; and to detail the total paid to date.

(AQW 39373/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive advises that they pay for the costs associated with the temporary provision of skips at Rathenraw. This includes the delivery and collection of the skips and disposal of the waste. The total paid to date is £780.00.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 37446/11-15, who pays for the maintenance and service of portaloos; and to detail the total paid to date.

(AQW 39374/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive advises that they pay for the maintenance and service of the temporary portaloos at Rathenraw and the amount spent to date is £2,310.00.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 37446/11-15, what power the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has to create temporary sites without planning permission.

(AQW 39375/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that it follows good practice guidance issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government which recommends that, where a body owes a duty to secure accommodation but an appropriate site is not immediately available, the housing authority may need to provide an alternative temporary solution until a suitable date or some other suitable option becomes available.

The Niner Report of 2003 recommends that the authority seeks to identify underused land where facilities can be provided, such as taps, refuse collection and portaloos. The Court of Appeal in the case of Cordona v Bedfordshire 2005 stressed that if a site could be identified, perhaps on the authority's own land, in the interim, this option should be exercised to allow more time for the process of locating a suitable pitch or site. The Housing Executive therefore seeks to deal with emergency housing needs by following recommended practice and procedure.

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Social Development what proactive steps his Department is taking in conjunction with the Housing Executive to create or find available housing for single men under the age of 30 in West Tyrone.

(AQW 39418/11-15)

Mr Storey: The West Tyrone Parliamentary Constituency spans both the Strabane and Omagh Districts Council areas. While the Housing Executive reports on waiting list figures across a range of households, their system is not designed to report on specific age groups.

The Housing Executive has advised that the current waiting list in respect of the single male category is as reported in the below table and that the allocation of houses to these applicants on the waiting list in the area will be addressed through the normal allocation process of re-lets of existing housing stock, refurbishment of empty properties and through new build proposals received from Housing Associations. There are new build units planned for the Strabane area over the 2014-19 period. Some of these units will be allocated to single household however the exact numbers are not available at this time. This will depend on the feasibility within the sites/opportunities brought forward by Housing Associations.

Age group	Single male 16-17	Single male 18-25	Single male 26-59	Total
Total applications	0	61	177	238
Housing Stress	0	30	79	109

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are plans to install gas in Housing Executive properties in Holywood.

(AQW 39442/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they have installed gas heating in 405 of their homes in Holywood. The Housing Executive advises that the remaining dwellings in Holywood have oil heating systems (apart from a few where tenants refused a change of heating) and these will be replaced with gas as they reach the end of their useful life, which is currently 15 years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are plans to install gas in Housing Executive properties in Kilcooley Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 39443/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they have installed gas heating in 451 of their homes in the Kilcooley estate and another scheme involving 59 properties will start before the end of the current financial year. The Housing Executive plan that the remaining properties in the Kilcooley estate which have oil heating systems (apart from a few where tenants have refused a change of heating), will be replaced with gas as they reach the end of their useful life, which is currently 15 years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are plans to install gas in Housing Executive properties in Bloomfield Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 39444/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they have installed gas heating in 213 of their homes in the Bloomfield estate. The Housing Executive advises that the remaining dwellings in the Bloomfield estate have oil heating systems (apart from a few where tenants refused a change of heating) and these will be replaced with gas as they reach the end of their useful life, which is currently 15 years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are plans to install gas in Housing Executive properties in Rathgill Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 39445/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they have installed gas heating in 182 of their homes in the Rathgill estate, Bangor. They advise that the remaining dwellings in Rathgill estate have oil heating systems (apart from a few where tenants refused a change of heating) and these will be replaced with gas as they reach the end of their useful life, which is currently 15 years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are plans to install gas in Housing Executive properties in Breezemount Estate, Conlig.

(AQW 39446/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they have installed gas heating in 88 of their homes in the Breezemount estate, Conlig. They advise that the remaining dwellings in Breezemount estate have oil heating systems (apart from a few where tenants refused a change of heating) and these will be replaced with gas as they reach the end of their useful life, which is currently 15 years.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 38200/11-15, to provide a breakdown of each capital receipt including (i) a description of each individual asset; (ii) its location; (iii) when it was sold; (iv) who purchased it; and (v) for how much it was sold.

(AQW 39476/11-15)

Mr Storey: Owing to the scale and sensitive nature of the numerous house and land sales made to individuals or groups, it is not practical to provide information in the detail required. However, the following table provides a further breakdown of the previous figures, followed by descriptions of the other receipt types, which I hope the Member will find helpful.

Receipt type	2011-12 £m	2012-13 £m	2013-14 £m	2014-15 £m
House & land sales	11.24	20.87	16.06	8.60
NIHE loan repayments	78.94	73.34	67.97	36.78
HA loan repayments	1.00	1.10	1.16	1.18
HA grant repayments	3.78	3.40	13.18	4.93
European Regional Development Fund receipts	-	-	3.00	1.36
Annual totals	94.96	98.71	101.37	52.85

- House and land sales capital receipts are generated by the sale of NIHE and DSD owned properties.
- NIHE loan repayments are repayments of long term loans taken out by the NIHE from the Consolidated Fund and local councils.
- Housing Associations loan repayments are in respect of loans issued by the Department before Associations were able to access private finance.
- Housing Association Grant Repayments are amounts that become due when a grant funded property is sold on. The majority of the Departmental receipts usually relate to stair-casing events in Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association (NICHA) properties.
- The ERDF receipt is European funding received for the Boiler Replacement programme. This amount goes directly to the NIHE to fund the programme.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what propriety interest his Department has in the premises at 148-152 Springfield Road, Belfast where Clonard Residents' Association operates; and if it historically had such an interest, what is the history of his Department's involvement with the premises and any transfer of interest relating thereto.

(AQW 39508/11-15)

Mr Storey: An examination of existing records shows that the Department for Social Development took a lease on the first floor of the building at 148 to 158 Springfield Road, Belfast on 30th October 1999. A right of way through the ground floor entrance and stairs is part of that lease. The lease was taken at a peppercorn rent from Arthur Rooney and Anthony Rooney trading as Rooney Brothers. Clonard Residents' Association occupies part of this premises and sub-lets part to another community group, Clonard Neighbourhood Development Partnership.

Given the time that has elapsed since the development of 148 to 158 Springfield Road in 1999, limited information remains on the process by which DSD came to have a lease on the premises. It is clear, however, that the Department's original intent in part-funding the development, approving a grant of some £280,000 to Clonard Residents' Association in 1998, was to provide a 999 year lease to the Association for the first floor at a peppercorn rent for its use and to let for income. All relevant policy, procedural and value for money approvals were obtained in the course of the appraisal of the project. It would appear that

in the absence of agreement between the Association and Rooney Brothers the Department took the lease as a temporary measure to complete the development of the premises.

The Department has initiated discussions with the property owners and Clonard Residents' Association to consider the reassignment of the lease on the premises to Clonard Residents' Association.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what departmental records show as to Belfast Regeneration Office's (BRO) involvement with premises at 148-152 Springfield Road, Belfast, including (i) what assistance was afforded; (ii) to whom assistance was provided; and (iii) why assistance was provided in respect of the said premises, or any part thereof.

(AQW 39512/11-15)

Mr Storey: In 1998 grant funding of £280,000 was awarded to Clonard Residents' Association through the EU Peace and Reconciliation Funds and Making Belfast Work (MBW) to part-fund the regeneration of the site at 148-152 Springfield Road, Belfast. In keeping with MBW objectives the funding was also to be used to provide Clonard Residents' Association with premises at a peppercorn rent to use as its own offices or to let for income.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development what action can be taken against landlords who fail to register properties as Houses in Multiple Occupation with the Housing Executive.

(AQW 39520/11-15)

Mr Storey: In accordance with the Statutory Registration Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in Northern Ireland, the landlord is responsible for ensuring that their HMO is registered with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

If a landlord is found to be operating an HMO, without having registered it with the NIHE, they may be guilty of an offence. The NIHE will refer a case to the courts, where they believe an offence has taken place, and this could result in the landlord being prosecuted and facing a fine of up to £20,000.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 38245/11-15, what research was undertaken to measure the effects on the construction industry of the consultation on developer contributions for affordable housing; and what ongoing research was conducted on the construction industry during the consultation period.

(AQW 39537/11-15)

Mr Storey: My answer dated 18 November 2014 in response to AQW 38245/11-15 detailed the research undertaken to measure the effects on the construction industry of the proposed policy on developer contributions for affordable housing. No additional research was carried out to measure possible effects on the construction industry, or indeed any other sector, of undertaking the consultation.

The consultation period gave the Department a valuable opportunity to research the views of a wide range of consultees on the broad principles behind developer contributions, as well as on the various options for a model scheme. The construction industry was represented both as attendees at, and on the panel of speakers of, the Department's consultation engagement event, attended by over 110 stakeholders. Officials also engaged specifically with a representative body of the construction industry in Northern Ireland, discussing the consultation proposals at an event for their members.

This research during the consultation period, in addition to the formal consultation responses received, was crucial in enhancing the Department's understanding of the comments and concerns of stakeholders. While a developer contributions policy for Northern Ireland has been under consideration for a number of years, this is the first time it has been subject to a full and formal public consultation process.

The Department's commitment to reflecting on, and examining, all the views received before moving forward on this policy is evidenced in the recent decision to commission new up-to-date and Northern Ireland specific research as to the likely economic impact, both positive and negative, of the various options for developer contributions schemes that could be implemented here. This research will involve broad engagement with stakeholders and other interested parties to seek their input and utilise their expertise.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what publicity will be utilised to encourage private sector landlords to enrol in the Landlord Registration Scheme by February 2015.

(AQW 39601/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department takes a multifaceted approach to increasing awareness of the Landlord Registration Scheme and highlighting the requirement to register by 25 February 2015.

The current publicity campaign comprises of advertising across bus t-sides, street liners, television, online and printed media. The key messages are that:

- All private landlords are required to register by 25 February 2015;
- All tenants should check that their landlord is registered; and
- Tenants should report unregistered landlords to their local Council.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development what measures are in place to protect housing tenants from eviction, as a result of their landlord facing financial difficulties, and which ensure that tenants are given sufficient notice of changes in circumstance by the property owner.

(AQW 39606/11-15)

Mr Storey: The protection for a tenant, whose landlord is facing financial difficulty, depends on the terms of the mortgage agreement. However, where a landlord takes out a mortgage and makes the lender aware that a tenancy exists, or will exist in the accommodation, the lender could be bound by the lease. As such, if the lender gains possession of the property they may be obliged to let the lease run on until the end of the existing contractual period and accept rent from the tenant.

There is a process to be followed to end a tenancy legally. The tenant is not required to leave the property until the correct notice to quit period expires and if he/she refuses to leave at this time the landlord can only gain possession by obtaining a court order.

Once a landlord obtains a possession order from the courts they must apply to the Enforcement of Judgements Office to have it enforced. The Enforcement of Judgements Office has protocols in place which aim to keep tenants involved in cases of repossession.

Should any tenant be worried about the future I would urge that they seek advice as early as possible. The nidirect website as well as organisations such as Housing Rights Service and Citizens Advice can help tenants facing eviction

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in each constituency were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39607/11-15)

Mr Storey: The table below details the number of Disability Living Allowance recipients in each of the last three years broken down by constituency.

Constituency	Aug-12	Aug-13	Aug-14
Belfast East	9,080	9,290	9,450
Belfast North	15,060	15,290	15,750
Belfast South	8,580	8,720	8,910
Belfast West	17,680	17,740	18,040
East Antrim	7,540	7,750	7,920
East Londonderry	8,650	9,010	9,340
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	9,800	9,080	9,390
Foyle	13,970	14,160	14,430
Lagan Valley	7,980	8,110	8,380
Mid Ulster	10,460	10,680	11,050
Newry And Armagh	12,480	12,610	12,870
North Antrim	8,750	8,990	9,350
North Down	6,470	6,620	6,780
South Antrim	8,280	8,460	8,680
South Down	11,330	11,590	11,820
Strangford	7,750	7,900	8,090
Upper Bann	13,050	13,130	13,460
West Tyrone	13,080	13,270	13,600
Unknown	810	2,190	2,590
Total	190,790	194,580	199,880

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

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to his Department's recent review of the allocation of social housing in Northern Ireland, for an update on the outcomes of this assessment.

(AQW 39735/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Department is currently preparing proposals resulting from the review of social housing allocation policy. It is expected that these will be presented to the Social Development Committee prior to public consultation early next year. A summary of the responses to the independent reports prepared by the University of Cambridge and Ulster University as part of this review is available at <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hsddiv-housing/allocations-research.htm> .

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development what steps can be taken to support the thirty staff currently employed in the Lisahally Processing Unit; and whether other duties from the Civil Service can be utilised to ensure jobs are retained.

(AQW 39767/11-15)

Mr Storey: I am extremely disappointed by the decision by the Department for Work and Pensions to close the Remote Storage Unit in Lisahally. This is part of their wider strategy to move all remote storage across Great Britain to a central unit in Manchester. Whilst my officials are looking across both the Social Security Agency and the wider Northern Ireland Civil Service as to what opportunities are available for the staff impacted by this decision and the potential to relocate work, opportunities are extremely limited in the current financial environment. Officials are also in discussion with the Department for Work and Pensions on the timing of the closure of the Unit. The Social Security Agency will continue to work closely with the Agency Trade Union Side with regard to the impact of this decision for staff.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development whether he intends to allow cost of living increases for staff in community voluntary sector organisations, in line with a 2.2 per cent cost of living increase agreed by the National Joint Council from January 2015.

(AQW 39815/11-15)

Mr Storey: It is for voluntary and community sector organisations, as employers, to decide whether they are going to allow a cost of living increase for staff in their employment.

In terms of these voluntary and community sector organisations which receive funding from my Department , funding decision take account of individual project circumstances, the National Joint Council pay scales and the amount of funding which is available to my Department.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 38631/11-15, with these services no longer being provided, whether any additional pressures will be placed on any of the services his Department or its arm's-length bodies provide.

(AQW 39828/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department does not provide any funding to The Addiction Service in Ballymena. It is therefore not expected that any additional pressures will be placed on any of the services my Department or its arm's-length bodies provide.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Easton asked the Assembly Commission what is the estimated final cost of the Assembly roof project.

(AQW 39482/11-15)

Mr Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The estimated construction cost of the refurbishment and upgrade of Parliament Buildings roof was £5.4m, excluding Vat and professional fees.

Following a tender exercise, the Assembly Commission appointed Tracey Brothers in April 2014 to carry out the works for the tender sum of £4,928,564.

The works are scheduled for completion in May 2015 and are currently on target for completion within the agreed tender sum.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 19 December 2014

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that AQO 5995/11-15 was due for answer in the Assembly chamber on 3 March 2014, why they have not yet provided an answer; and when the question will be answered.
(AQW 33966/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): We would refer the member to the answer to AQO 5995/11-15 which was provided on 17 November.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the North West Gateway Initiative has produced social and economic benefits for Limavady since its inception.
(AQW 38283/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A range of projects and co-operative activities between departments and other bodies have contributed to the aims of the North West Gateway Initiative since its establishment in 2006. While there has been no analysis of the impact of this initiative on specific towns in the North West the local area has benefited from the investment in health, education and infrastructure.

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what policies are in place in the Equality Commission if an officer in charge of a case applies for an adjournment at tribunal due to personal circumstances, or is it a matter for the officer's personal discretion.
(AQW 38548/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and, as such, is independent from Government and Ministers in respect of its operation.

The Industrial Tribunal proceedings are governed by the Constitution and Rules of Procedure. The conduct of individual cases within these rules is a matter for the specific Tribunal Chairperson.

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the failed case brought by the Equality Commission against Mr Stuart Dawson and his business, (i) for a full breakdown of the costs, including legal advices and representation; (ii) whether Mr Dawson's costs will be met by the Equality Commission as well as any potential damages for the stress caused by this ordeal; and (iii) if so, for an estimate of these costs.
(AQW 39117/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and is independent from Government and Ministers in respect of its operation. As such, the issues you have raised are a matter for the Equality Commission.

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Equality Commission has remit to test the law; and if so, to detail where this is contained within their constitution or guidelines.
(AQW 39184/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Commission has powers under each of the anti-discrimination statutes to assist individuals with actual or prospective complaints. This power is set out in each of the anti-discrimination statutes - for example Article 75 of the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 says:

"(1) Where, in relation to proceedings or prospective proceedings under this Order... An individual who is an actual or prospective complainant or claimant applies to the Commission for assistance under this Article, the Commission shall consider the application and may grant it if they think fit to do so on the ground that (a) the case raises a question of principle; or (b) it is unreasonable, having regard to the complexity of the case, or to the applicant's position in

relation to the respondent or another person involved, or to any other matter, to expect the applicant to deal with the case unaided; or by reason of any other special consideration."

Similar provisions are found in the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, the Equality (Disability, etc.) (Northern Ireland) Order 2000, the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 and the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006.

Each application for assistance is considered individually by the Commission and in reaching its decision whether to grant assistance, it assesses each of the statutory grounds and in addition considers a number of strategic objectives which are detailed in its Policy on the Provision of Legal Advice and Assistance. This Policy is available on the Commission's website.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 38282/11-15, to detail (i) the organisational structure of the North West Gateway Initiative; (ii) the number of officials from each Department contributing to its functioning; and (iii) any associated staffing costs.

(AQW 39386/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The North West Gateway Initiative is overseen jointly by officials in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as part of a range of other duties. Other Government Departments provide information, as required, on projects relevant to the NWGI from within their existing staffing resources. Information is not held on the number, or related costs, of staff who may be involved in this work.

Ms Fearon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the urban villages element of the wider Together: Building a United Community strategy.

(AQO 7223/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: One of the seven headline actions committed to within Together: Building a United Community is the development of four Urban Villages, to create and stabilise change within areas of our community.

We announced the first two Urban Villages on 20 March 2014 as Colin Town Centre and Lower Newtownards Road.

Stakeholder engagement is progressing regarding development of these locations. The Colin Town Centre village is well developed with an existing masterplan having been launched. Work is progressing to develop the urban village concept for the Lower Newtownards Road and extensive stakeholder engagement is planned for the coming months.

OFMDFM has provided £350k to initiate and enable progression of developmental work on both Urban Villages.

Governance structures are in place and resources have been secured from the Strategic Investment Board to assist with both projects.

Each urban village area will be recognised as a zone for development and the Department for Social Development has convened project Boards to coordinate and oversee the planning, design and delivery of all aspects of the urban villages. These will be supported by the Urban Villages Strategy Board, chaired by Junior Ministers and the Urban Villages Programme Board, chaired by the DSD Senior Responsible Owner for the programme.

Decisions on the remaining two urban villages have yet to be made.

Mr Dunne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of the Social Investment Fund in North Down.

(AQO 7225/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: North Down is part of the South Eastern Zone. Projects prioritised within the Zone's area plan include two aimed directly at social exclusion and dereliction in North Down. These are Northern Ireland Housing Executive Community Houses and Community Operated Sports Facilities. Neither has funds committed through Letter of Offer to date.

North Down will also benefit from a number of projects designed to help residents across the whole zone, for example Transitions Support Programme - Early Intervention; the Community Led Employment & Training Programme, and the Youth Intervention Project. The revenue project, Transitions Support Programme - Early Intervention has £2.5 million committed to date and the Lead Partner is working with officials to get the project up and running.

Details of all projects prioritised within the funding allocation for each of the nine social investment fund zones are available on the OFMDFM website.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the total level of capital receipts generated by her Department in each year since 2011; (ii) each individual asset; (iii) its location; (iv) when it was sold; (v) by whom it was purchased; and (vi) for how much it was sold.

(AQW 39499/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The total proceeds from the sale of capital items generated by DARD for the following three financial years since 2011 is:

- 2011/12 £689,242
- 2012/13 £49,936
- 2013/14 £101,491

Details of individual asset sales are in the attached spreadsheet, a copy of which has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether planned deforestation is taking place of the woods at Ballysallagh; and if so, to outline the reasons.

(AQW 39661/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is no planned deforestation in the Forest Service managed woods at Ballysallagh Forest. Forest Service is currently felling an area of trees at Cairn Wood to reduce the risk of infection from the plant disease *Phytophthora ramorum* spreading to other tree and shrub species. This area will be re-established with a mixture of broadleaved and conifer trees.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the grants available from her Department for community groups.

(AQW 39775/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There will be no further calls for funding under the current Rural Development Programme 2007-13 as all funds are fully committed and the Department is moving towards closure.

Our proposals for the new Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 include a measure that would be available to community groups, which will make funding available for applications from community group projects.

My Department has finalised the draft Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and in October 2014, formally submitted it to the European Commission for consideration. The measures that would be applicable to community groups will be delivered on the ground by new Local Action Groups and it is hoped that animation for applications can start in April/May 2015. The date for the opening of any calls will depend on the programme being signed off by the European Commission and on getting the necessary business case approvals.

There are currently no calls for applications open under the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation programme although funding continues across a range of initiatives, and a Programme will be available in 15/16.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total spent on each of the (i) capital; and (ii) other projects which have not proceeded since May 2007, including the loss resulting from each project.

(AQW 39796/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department has not incurred any expenditure on capital in other projects* that have not proceeded since May 2007.

*Projects in excess of £1m that require DFP approval.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to increase the price that farmers receive for milk.

(AQW 39891/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The dairy sector makes an important contribution to the local economy and employment in rural areas. I am therefore very concerned about the current weakness in dairy prices and the pressures facing dairy farmers. My officials and I are committed to doing all that we can to help at this difficult time. There is little doubt that the fall in prices is attributable to the increase in EU and global production combined with the Russian ban on imports. These matters are outside my control and as pricing is a commercial matter it is not something on which I can directly intervene.

However, following the introduction of the Russian import ban, I wrote to the DEFRA Secretary of State expressing my concerns and pressing her to lobby for appropriate support for the dairy sector. I also met with Commissioner Ciolos and requested that the Commission explores alternative markets for products.

Given the doubts that many have expressed about the effectiveness of the intervention system, I believe it is now time to review whether it provides an adequate safety net. I therefore wrote again to the DEFRA Secretary of State in advance of discussions at the December EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council to ask her to press for further EU support for the industry. I am disappointed that Commissioner Hogan has rejected calls for additional crisis management measures at this time and I am seeking an early meeting with him to press the case again for further support for the industry.

In the meantime, my officials have been working with dairy exporters on finding alternative markets and a dairy international trade working group has been established with DAFM for discussing mechanisms for facilitating third country trade across the island of Ireland. My Department's dairy advisers have also been disseminating information on managing cash flow. In addition, I met with the Ulster Farmers' Union in late November to discuss their concerns and chaired a joint meeting with the local banks on 18 December to explore what can be done to assist farmers with cash flow.

I can assure you that we will continue to work closely with the local dairy industry to help ensure that it is competitive and profitable. This will include work on research, education, training and technical support as well as the financial assistance proposed under the next Rural Development Programme, including the proposed Farm Business Improvement Scheme. The draft Programme is currently with the European Commission for approval.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to help to reduce the price that farmers pay for fertilizers.

(AQW 39892/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Fertiliser prices are driven by the interplay of international market influences that are clearly outside of my sphere of influence or my remit. However, my Department is working with farmers to help them minimise their requirements for chemical fertiliser inputs through a range of measures including training workshops, provision of online nutrient management planning calculators and capital grant support. While this will not affect the price of fertilisers, their more efficient use will reduce their total cost to farmers below what it might otherwise have been, as well as benefiting the environment.

In this context, the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) has now delivered Nutrient Management Planning workshops to over 2000 farmers. These workshops focus on the interpretation of soil analysis, the nutrient value of slurry and manure, chemical fertiliser requirements to reaching target crop yields, understanding the implications of the Nitrates Directive and hands-on use of online nutrient management calculators. These calculators are available through the RuralNI website and help farmers assess the nutrient value of slurry applications.

Research at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) has demonstrated that spreading slurry by a trailing-shoe system gives a 26% improvement in total nitrogen utilisation compared with conventional splash plate method. The resulting improved grass yield is equivalent to that achieved by applying chemical nitrogen fertiliser at a rate of 44 kg per hectare.

Therefore, my Department has provided capital grant support to farmers to encourage uptake of advanced slurry spreading equipment such as the trailing shoe system under the Manure Efficiency Technology Scheme (METS). This equipment achieves greater nutrient efficiency from slurry and, therefore, reduces chemical fertiliser requirements and input costs for farmers. To date, some 300 advanced slurry spreading machines have been supported through METS and associated training has been delivered by CAFRE.

In addition, through the Grass / Clover Monitor Farm technology project, CAFRE encourages farmers to use clover in grass swards to fix atmospheric nitrogen. This is particularly relevant on beef and sheep farms where the use of chemical fertilizer is generally lower than on dairy farms.

CAFRE technologists and advisers continue to work with farmers to help them reduce costs by improving nutrient efficiency. Good nutrient management planning allows fertilizer costs to be controlled on farm and includes soil analysis to ascertain crop requirement, the use of organic manures produced on farm or available from other livestock farms and the judicious use of inorganic fertilizers to achieve target crop yields.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list the areas in North Down in which her Department plans to increase the tree population.

(AQW 39893/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Woodland cover in North Down is 8.6% of land area compared with an average of 8% in the north of Ireland. I remain committed to increasing the extent woodland cover by providing support to landowners under the Rural Development Programme to encourage creation of new woodland. During the Programme period 2007-2013 funding of about £11 million supported the establishment of over 1,500 hectares of new woodland. This Programme is now closed to new applicants.

Stakeholders have told us that they wish to see support continuing for creation of a wide range of woodland types, that new woodland is particularly suited to land of limited agricultural productivity and that forestry schemes should be integrated, where possible, with the delivery of Agri-environment Schemes.

On 14th October 2014 a draft Rural Development Programme was submitted to the European Commission, the draft programme includes proposals to support woodland creation.

Following the Executive agreeing the 'Draft Budget 2015-16' and a very difficult financial environment, I am consulting the public on spending and savings proposals within DARD. The budget consultation proposes to ensure that all legacy forestry commitments are maintained. However the consultation also proposes that given the significant financial position it would not be financially prudent to introduce new commitments, including forestry, at this stage and therefore proposes to delay the introduction of new resource commitments under the Rural Development Programme until 2016/17.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many herds or flocks in each constituency have been made non-operational in the last two years.

(AQW 39894/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on herds / flocks is kept on the Department's database the Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS).

The table below provides the number of herds or flocks made non-operational in the north of Ireland in the past two financial years based on Divisional Veterinary Office areas. APHIS does not record information on a constituency basis.

Divisional Veterinary Office	Herds / Flocks Made Non-operational	
	2012-2013	2013-2014
Armagh	122	63
Ballymena	109	91
Coleraine	175	95
Dungannon	104	74
Enniskillen	125	257
Mallusk	94	79
Londonderry	59	61
Newry	307	366
Newtownards	123	155
Omagh	398	111
Total	1,616	1,352
Total for 2 years		2,968

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many cases of cattle smuggling across the border have been reported in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39973/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Cattle smuggling is invariably associated with the substitution of false domestic identities into the illegally imported or exported cattle. As such, accurate and reliable reporting or recording of smuggling is difficult and in the absence of verification, DARD does not classify or record cases under the category of smuggling. DARD does however keep a record of illegal cattle import and export cases that can be verified or where there was sufficient evidence to undertake an investigation. In 2012 there were seven cases investigated, in 2013 there were four cases and in 2014, to date, there have been seven cases investigated.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many cattle have been culled due to disease in the last twelve months, broken down by disease type.

(AQW 39975/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Over the period 1 December 2013 to 30 November 2014 the number of cattle compulsorily slaughtered for the purposes of disease control were as follows:-

- Bovine Tuberculosis – 10,241
- Bovine Brucellosis – 18
- BSE - 1

This includes cattle that tested positive to a Departmental test plus some in-contact animals that are identified and removed due to disease risk but are not positive to a diagnostic test. Subsequent laboratory analysis concluded that no cattle were affected with either Brucellosis or BSE.

Data is not available on any animals culled by herd keepers because of production diseases such as clinical Mucosal Disease, Bovine Viral Diarrhoea, etc.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many sheep have been culled due to disease in the last twelve months, broken down by disease type.

(AQW 39977/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In 2014, the Department required the slaughter of one sheep that was suspected of being diseased. The suspected disease was scrapie (a degenerative disease that affects the nervous systems of sheep and goats), and the sheep was slaughtered under the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy Regulations (NI) 2010.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many poultry have been culled due to disease in the last twelve months, broken down by disease type.

(AQW 39978/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: 24,286 broiler breeders coming from 3 poultry flocks have been culled due to salmonella in the last twelve months.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has considered implementing the proposals contained within the Committee for Finance and Personnel's Report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector that are applicable for her Department and its agencies.

(AQW 40008/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department already utilises the excellent range of flexible working policies and technologies that are available within the NICS. Flexible working will make a particular contribution to meeting the challenges of the relocation programme. DARD will continue to keep pace with developments and technological solutions in this regard, and introduce new arrangements as the need arises.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much departmental grant funding has been awarded to farmers in North Down, in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 40041/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has awarded grants of £177,063 in the 2013/14 financial year and £343,549 in the 2012/2013 financial year. Subsidy schemes such as Single Farm Payment and Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowances are not included in these figures and some information is based on scheme year rather than financial year.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much compensation was paid to farmers in North Down who lost livestock due to heavy snowfall, in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 40047/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A total of £1,215.00 issued to a small number of farmers in North Down under the Agricultural Hardship Payment Scheme (AHPS) in the financial year 2013 /2014.

No further hardship payments have issued in respect of farmers in North Down in financial year 2014/2015.

Under protection afforded by the Data Protection Act I am obliged not to release the actual number as to do so may allow the individuals to be identified.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many incidents of stolen livestock have been reported in the North Down area, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 40049/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

	2012/2013	2013/2014
Number of incidents	88	123

The above table only records the number of incidents involving missing or stolen cattle in the Newtownards Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO) area. The whole of the North Down area is in the Newtownards DVO area.

APHIS does not differentiate between missing or stolen cattle. Information involving any other missing or stolen livestock is not recorded on APHIS at present. APHIS does not record information on a constituency basis.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department has any plans to keep a central register of people who are banned from keeping animals.

(AQW 40092/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Officials from my Department are currently working closely with colleagues from the Department of Justice on the Review of the implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011, which I established earlier this year.

The Review is considering a range of proposals including the proposal to create a central register of those convicted of animal welfare offences.

The Review Steering Group is due to provide an interim report to me and to the Justice Minister in January; this will include emerging recommendations based on the analysis of the evidence to date. The interim report will also be brought to the attention of MLAs and posted on the DARD website. I expect that the Review Steering Group will provide a final report around Spring 2015.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures her Department has in place to ensure that court orders banning people from keeping animals are implemented and enforced.

(AQW 40093/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011(the Act) introduced a duty of care in respect of all protected animals and provides enforcement powers to allow action to be taken to prevent suffering. Responsibility for enforcing the Act sits with:

- DARD in respect of farmed animals;
- Local Councils in respect of domestic pets and horses; and
- the PSNI in respect of wild animals, animals fighting, and welfare issues where other criminal activities are involved.

In relation to farmed animals, DARD Veterinary Service carry out targeted inspections to premises linked to a disqualified herd-keeper. If there is information to suggest that a disqualified herd-keeper is keeping animals, inspectors will collect evidence and submit this to the courts using the Public Prosecution Service (PPS).

In relation to non-farmed animals, Council Animal Welfare Officers actively monitor any Court Orders as a result of successful prosecutions by the Councils where Disqualification Orders have been granted. If the Disqualification Order is breached and it is confirmed that animals are present, then legal action will be taken through the courts.

In the case of PSNI - when a Disqualification Order has been granted by the courts, a copy of the Disqualification Order is obtained by police. A "flag" is placed on the police computer system against the offender, highlighting the nature of the Disqualification Order and length of time it is active. It is the responsibility of the original investigating officer to ensure the Disqualification Order is being complied with.

Any reports to police regarding a breach of a Disqualification Order would be followed up and investigated by police. Any offences revealed would be reported to the PPS for consideration.

As you are aware, I have initiated a review of implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 which is being taken forward with the Department of Justice. The Terms of Reference are available on my Department's website. The Review is considering the implementation of the Act under the following four themes: Sentencing; Delivery Structures; Working Together; and Serving the Public and will consider the policies for enforcement of Disqualification Orders by DARD, the Councils and the PSNI. I expect that an Interim Report from that Review will be available on the DARD website by the end of January 2015 with the Final Report due to be published in the Spring.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list the community voluntary groups in East Londonderry that have received funding from her Department since 2011.

(AQW 40099/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Please see below list of Community/Voluntary groups in the East Londonderry constituency that have received funding from my Department since 2011.

Axis 3 Rural Development Programme

Rural Area Partnership in Derry (R.A.P.I.D.)	Clady
Gortnaghey Community Association	Dungiven
Riding for the Disabled Association (Coleraine & District Group) Limited	Coleraine
Class Ltd (Co Londonderry Agricultural Show Society Ltd)	Limavady
Eagle Glen Community Partnership Ltd	Garvagh
Castlerock Community Association	Castlerock
Garvagh Development Trust (GDT)	Garvagh
Garvagh Museum Ltd	Garvagh
Greysteel Community Enterprises	Greysteel
Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Partnership	Coleraine
The Bushmills Trust	Bushmills
Rural Challenge Programme	
Age Concern Causeway	Coleraine
Hands That Talk (3 Projects)	Dungiven
Dromboughil Community Association	Limavady
Gortnaghey Community Association	Limavady
Destined Ltd	Feeney
Rural Childcare Programme	
Glenullin Childcare Trust – Appletree Childcare	Garvagh
Rural Community Development Support Service	
Rural Area Partnership in Derry (RAPID)	Clady

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the review of the implementation of animal cruelty legislation.

(AQW 40137/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Review of the implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 is being overseen by a Steering Group, comprising officials from DARD and DOJ, and is considering the implementation of the 2011 Act under the following four themes: Sentencing; Delivery Structures; Working Together; and Serving the Public.

The Review held five Discussion Sessions with a wide range of animal welfare stakeholders during late July and early August. Each session was well supported and useful information was exchanged. Five Working Groups have been involved in reviewing information from stakeholders, gathering evidence and producing emerging findings.

While I had hoped that an interim report would have been available by the end of November, I understand that due to the scope of the work involved, and the considerable volume of information generated by the Working Groups, the Review team needs some additional time to consider each of the issues thoroughly. I am content that this is appropriate given the importance of the issues.

I now expect to receive an interim report in mid-January 2015 setting out the emerging findings and a final report with recommendations will be published later in 2015.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the level of cut in the budget of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission in her Department's budgetary proposals.

(AQW 40138/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In accordance with agreed guidance issued by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (Loughs Agency) is required to make efficiency savings of 4% for each year of its' 2014-2016 Corporate Plan cumulating in overall savings of 12% up to 2016.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to Single Farm Payment eligibility, when her Department will provide a specific and clear definition of active farming.

(AQW 40140/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Direct Payments Delegated Regulation (EU) No 639/2014 provides a clear definition of the active farming requirements. It states that the allocation of entitlements under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), and therefore direct payments, should go to those who can demonstrate that they satisfy the requirement of enjoying the decision making power, benefits and financial risks in relation to the agricultural activity on the land for which such allocation is requested.

During 2014, my Department has made it consistently clear through direct correspondence with farmers, articles in the farming press, farmers' meetings and by the publication of information on the DARD website that in this means that in 2015, a landowner will not be able to establish BPS entitlements on land which is let out in conacre unless there are exceptional circumstances which enable the landowner to demonstrate that he or she can satisfy the requirements outlined above. Rather, the entitlements are to be established by the person who is actually farming the land. These provisions also apply to arrangements which are similar to conacre lettings.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the full time equivalent number of staff in (i) her Department; and (ii) each of her Department's arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 38699/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

(i) The full time equivalent number of staff in my Department in each of the last five years is provided in the table below:

Table 1

Date	Number of FTE staff
1 April 2010	289
1 April 2011	277
1 April 2012	279
1 April 2013	283
1 April 2014	286

The full time equivalent number of staff in each of my Department's arm's – length bodies in each of the last five financial years is provided in the table below:

(ii) **Table 2**

Name of Arm's Length Body	Date	Number of FTE staff
Libraries NI		
	1 April 2010	666
	1 April 2011	645
	1 April 2012	630
	1 April 2013	616
	1 April 2014	606
National Museums NI		
	1 April 2010	322
	1 April 2011	313
	1 April 2012	307
	1 April 2013	299
	1 April 2014	287
NI Museums Council		
	1 April 2010	5
	1 April 2011	5
	1 April 2012	6
	1 April 2013	6
	1 April 2014	5
Armagh Observatory		
	1 April 2010	19.7
	1 April 2011	20.4
	1 April 2012	20.4
	1 April 2013	18.7
	1 April 2014	17
Armagh Planetarium		
	1 April 2010	10.5
	1 April 2011	10.7
	1 April 2012	10.7
	1 April 2013	11.9
	1 April 2014	12.3
Waterways Ireland		
	1 April 2010	344
	1 April 2011	341
	1 April 2012	328
	1 April 2013	323
	1 April 2014	321
Sport NI		
	1 April 2010	142
	1 April 2011	140
	1 April 2012	141

Name of Arm's Length Body	Date	Number of FTE staff
	1 April 2013	143
	1 April 2014	135
NI Screen*		
	6 September 2010	23
	5 September 2011	26
	3 September 2012	66
	1 April 2013	58
	1 April 2014	50
Arts Council NI		
	1 April 2010	55.89
	1 April 2011	57.08
	1 April 2012	49.97
	1 April 2013	47.54
	1 April 2014	46.6
Foras NaGaeilge **		
	31 December 2009	7
	31 December 2010	6
	31 December 2011	7
	31 December 2012	8
	31 December 2013	8
Ulster Scots Agency**		
	31 December 2009	16.77
	31 December 2010	18.77
	31 December 2011	19.77
	31 December 2012	15.77
	31 December 2013	15.77

* Northern Ireland Screen only holds files for April 2013 and April 2014. The information for the previous three years has been extracted from "Statistics of Trade and Employment" surveys.

** Foras Na Gaeilge and Ulster Scots Agency figures are for calendar year ending 31 December each year, figures provided are for the last five years from 31 December 2009.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what geographical area of the North West the Londonderry office will cover.

(AQW 38727/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The DCAL North West Office, established on 1st April, provides a direct link from central government to communities and organisations on the ground right across the North West including Derry, Coleraine, Limavady, Dungiven and Strabane.

The team are there to ensure DCAL understands community needs, is working with communities to tackle challenges and maximise our services' impact.

The Head of the North West Office and her team are actively engaging with partners on cultural development, community planning, economic strategy development and community cultural development.

The Team provide support and guidance to councils and community organisations. This ranges from input on policy development, particularly as community planning proposals develop, to on the ground assistance for communities to establish cultural plans and bid for funding.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what percentage of Departmental Expenditure Limits is spent on salaries; and (ii) how she intends to reduce this spend in order to make efficiency savings.

(AQW 38735/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Salaries are the single largest cost in the Department, Libraries NI and National Museums. It is also a material cost in other arm's length bodies. In the Department's case, salary costs account for around 50% of its budget.

It is recognised, therefore, that delivering the required level of savings in 2015/16 will mean significant reductions in the salaries bill across the DCAL family. This is likely to be the case across many other departments as well. For this reason, the Executive is formulating a workforce restructuring plan which will include consideration of recruitment freezes, the suppression of existing vacancies, pay restraint and a voluntary exit scheme.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the events planned by her Department or its arm's-length bodies, including the arrangements in place to commemorate the 700th Anniversary of Edward the Bruce's arrival in Ulster.

(AQW 38757/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The MAG Ulster-Scots Academy which is funded by my Department commissioned the Ulster Historical Foundation to research the 700th anniversary of Edward Bruce in Ireland and recommend how it could be developed as a tourism initiative.

The Foundation made several recommendations including the development of a travelling exhibition, tourism trail and mobile app. The potential for a series of high profile events to coincide with the anniversary of key milestones in the 1315 invasion campaign, such as the Landing at Larne in May, the Coronation of Edward Bruce as King of Ireland at Carrickfergus in June, the Battle of Connor (outside Antrim) in September and his eventual death and burial in 1318 at Faughart in Co Louth were also identified.

On the basis of this research, my Department has made funding available for a partnership project between the MAG Ulster-Scots Academy, the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Ulster Historical Foundation to produce a Bruce tourism trail, map and mobile enabled website, interpretative signage on trail sites and a six panel pop up travelling exhibition.

A 28 page booklet on the Bruces in Ireland, along with the Bruce tourism trail, were launched at Bannockburn Festival on 28 June 2014 and promoted at the Bruce Festival in Dunfermline on 12 and 13 July 2014, with over 3,000 copies distributed. The booklet will be circulated to both tourist information centres and libraries here in the near future. The Bruce tourism trail will have 20 sites connecting Scotland, Ulster and the south of Ireland.

My officials have shared the Ulster Historical Foundation report with the Ulster-Scots Agency, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Tourism Ireland, Carrick, Larne and Ballymena Councils and the new Mid and East Antrim District Council and are in discussions with them regarding the development of commemorative events. A number of potential partnership activities are currently being developed with the above partner organisations and with Trinity College Dublin and Louth County Council.

Libraries NI will be marking the anniversary with exhibitions, supporting resources, themed booklists and talks to highlight the impact of Bruce's arrival on our shared history, principally in Larne and Carrickfergus libraries.

The 700 year anniversary presents an excellent opportunity to maximise the tourism potential for north-south and east-west connections and capitalise on the worldwide interest in the Bruce story generated by the anniversaries of the Bruce invasion of Ireland and the Battle of Bannockburn.

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much her Department has spent on interpreting services for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss, in the last five years.

(AQW 38764/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Over the last 5 financial years my Department has spent £21,936.34 on interpreting services for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss. The amount of funding provided each year is detailed in the table below:

Year	Spend
2010/11	£1015
2011/12	£485.60
2012/13	£537.49
2013/14	£1383.25
2014/15	£17,500
Total	£21,936.34

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to the business case presented as part of the application for funding for the Carl Frampton World Title Fight, how this event (i) promoted equality; and (ii) contributed to tackling poverty and social exclusion.

(AQW 38792/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The business case for funding of the Carl Frampton World Title fight was approved by my Department on the basis that it committed the fight's promoter to providing a number of events to young people and aspiring boxers from across our communities.

These included a boxing celebration event which was held at the Ulster Hall on 25 October 2014. All Boxing clubs affiliated to the Irish Amateur Boxing Association were invited to send young boxers to the event. Over 300 young boxers from 50 boxing clubs, based in urban, rural and some of our most socially deprived areas, attended the event with their coaches.

The young boxers and their coaches had an opportunity to take part in a coaching session and the boxers had the chance to spar with Carl Frampton, his coach Shane McGuigan and the other local boxers who were involved on the night of the World Title Fight.

In addition to learning new skills from some of our elite boxers the young boxers and their coaches attended a talk on health and wellbeing, lifestyle and the importance of nutrition and diet.

A further event is scheduled for the New Year called "Happy Hearts" which is a health and well-being programme. This programme will be delivered by the promoter on a cross-community basis to a range of primary schools covering every county in the north of Ireland and which are located in disadvantaged areas.

The initial feedback from coaches who attended the boxing celebration event was that it had been excellent and that it would inspire the young boxers who attended as it was "a day they would remember for a long time".

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much cultural awareness funding has been distributed in each year since 2011; and how much has been allocated to each recipient organisation in each year.

(AQW 38884/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The objectives of the Cultural Awareness Strategy, launched in July 2012, are being delivered by The Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland (GOLI) and the Ulster Council of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). My Department provides funding of up to £37,500 per annum for each of the two organisations' projects over the 3 years of the Strategy which is due to end on 31 March 2015. The amount of cultural awareness funding claimed in each year since 2011, per organisation, is detailed in the table below:

Year	Organisation	Spend
2011/12	GAA	0
	GOLI	0
2012/13	GAA	£37,470.90
	GOLI	£27,756.95
	Total	£65,227.85
2013/14	GAA	£25,052.82
	GOLI	£37,500
	Total	£62,552.82
2014/15	GAA	0
	GOLI	0

No funding has yet been paid in 2014/15.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the next meeting of the Interdepartmental Charter Implementation Group is due to take place.

(AQW 38885/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The next Meeting of the Interdepartmental Charter Implementation Group is due to take place in January 2015.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) to detail the basis on which 22 miniatures by the Belfast artist Anne Marjorie Robinson were donated to the Belfast Municipal Museum and Art Gallery by her brother as a memorial to the artist; (ii) when they were donated; and (iii) any conditions that were attached to the donation.

(AQW 38887/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: National Museums has informed me that the 22 miniatures by the Belfast artist Anne Marjorie Robinson were donated by the artist's brother, John B. Robinson, to the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery in 1925 on the basis that they be displayed as a memorial to his late sister.

The donor requested that, when on display, the miniatures be accompanied by the wording: 'Donated by the Artist's Brother, John B. Robinson as a Memorial'.

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the safety certificates, confirming compliance with legislation governing spectator safety at sports grounds, for (i) Ravenhill; (ii) Windsor Park; and (iii) Casement Park were signed off by the relevant authorities.

(AQW 38895/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Belfast City Council are the body responsible for issuing safety certificates for sports grounds under The Safety of Sports Grounds (NI) Order 2006. It should be noted that certificates may be amended or replaced at anytime depending on arrangements at individual stadia.

Kingspan Stadium received their updated general safety certificate from Belfast City Council in April 2014. This updated safety certificate is for 18,198 spectators.

Windsor Park and Casement Park will not receive their updated general safety certificates for the new stadia until their redevelopments are completed.

Prior to the redevelopment of Casement Park, the respective safety certificate issued by Belfast City Council on 30th September 2010 was 31,661. The current interim safety certificate for Windsor Park issued in 11th September 2014 is for 10,536.

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AWQ 38176/11-15, for a breakdown of the allocation of the £2.8 million that was allocated to her Department in the October Monitoring Round for City of Culture Legacy Projects.

(AQW 38917/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Building on DCAL's significant investment in the North West to date, DCAL bid to the Executive in this financial year for additional funding to maximise ongoing development of a social and economic legacy from City of Culture 2013.

£2.8 million in capital funding was allocated to the Department in the October Monitoring Round to support a strategic development programme in the North West.

The funding, which includes allocations for the North Coast Sports Village, boxing projects and a community cultural development programme, seeks to achieve the following:

- Provide support for identified sporting and cultural facilities which align with my Department's key objectives;
- Provide equipment for community and festival organisations to contribute to longer term sustainability; and
- Provide creative, cultural and sporting equipment for communities to increase skills and encourage social enterprise.

Funding allocated to date is as follows:

Project	Amount (£)
Gasyard – An Druma Mor	up to 22,000
An Gaclarás – Refurbishment of the Manse at 35 Great James Street, Derry	up to 150,000
Nerve Centre Derry – Extension of FabLab space at Magazine Street	up to 280,000
Mobile FabLab – Wider North West outreach	up to 90,000

Any refurbishment projects are relatively small scale and will be completed by 31 March 2015.

As business cases for the programme are still being finalised, I will be making further announcements in due course.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding is available from her Department for the construction of new leisure centres.

(AQW 38948/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can advise that responsibility for provision of leisure services, including the construction of new leisure centres, rests with Councils under the Recreation and Youth Service (NI) Order 1986.

Article 10 within the order gives provision for each District Council to provide leisure facilities within its area:

'Each District Council shall secure the provision for its area of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities and for that purpose may, either alone or together with another district council or any other person

Nevertheless, my Department and Sport NI will continue to work with Councils to assist with the provision of sport facilities, where a need is shown, the development is in line with the Department's priorities and that funding is available.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the art pieces by Belfast artist Anne Marjorie Robinson which are currently in the possession of National Museums Northern Ireland; and which pieces are currently on display in the Ulster Museum.

(AQW 38965/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: National Museums has informed me that it currently has 32 artworks by Anne Marjorie Robinson in its Art Collections. The details of which are set out at Annex A. None of these items are currently on display in the Ulster Museum.

Annex A

Artworks by Anne Marjorie Robinson (1858-1924) in National Museums Collections

No.	National Museums ID Number	Object Name	Title	Materials
1	BELUM.U97	Painting	Self-Portrait	Oil on canvas
2	BELUM.U1127	Drawing	Cavehill from Belfast Harbour	Watercolour on card
3	BELUM.U2256	Sculpture	Fate, Love and Life (c1913)	Bronze
4	BELUM.U2276	Sculpture	A Study from Life (c1911)	Plaster
5	BELUM.U4515	Drawing	Unknown in Widow's Weeds	Watercolour on ivory
6	BELUM.U4516	Drawing	Man in Elizabethan Ruff	Watercolour on ivory
7	BELUM.U4517	Drawing	Reverie (1914)	Watercolour on ivory
8	BELUM.U4518	Drawing	Girl with Long Dark Hair	Watercolour on ivory
9	BELUM.U4519	Drawing	Lady in Broad Brimmed Hat and Fur Coat	Watercolour on ivory
10	BELUM.U4520	Drawing	Bearded man in White Tie	Watercolour on ivory
11	BELUM.U4521	Drawing	The Gipsy	Watercolour on ivory
12	BELUM.U4522	Drawing	Lady with Red Hair	Watercolour on ivory
13	BELUM.U4523	Drawing	Lady with Dark Hair	Watercolour on ivory
14	BELUM.U4524	Drawing	Woman in Picturesque Costume Peeling a Vegetable	Watercolour on ivory
15	BELUM.U4525	Drawing	Seated Man in Red Coat	Watercolour on ivory
16	BELUM.U4526	Drawing	Reverie	Watercolour on ivory
17	BELUM.U4527	Drawing	The Fortune Teller	Watercolour on ivory
18	BELUM.U4528	Drawing	Head of a Girl in Orange	Watercolour on ivory
19	BELUM.U4529	Drawing	Young Girl with Red Plaited Hair	Watercolour on ivory
20	BELUM.U4530	Drawing	An Early Victorian	Watercolour on ivory
21	BELUM.U4531	Drawing	A Study' (Girl with Brown Plaited Hair)	Watercolour on ivory
22	BELUM.U4532	Drawing	The Velvet Cap	Watercolour on ivory
23	BELUM.U4533	Drawing	A Study (White-haired Lady)	Watercolour on ivory
24	BELUM.U4534	Drawing	Man with White Pointed Beard	Watercolour on ivory
25	BELUM.U4535	Drawing	Girl in Empire Dress with Black Bonnet	Watercolour on ivory
26	BELUM.U4536	Drawing	Dark-haired Girl in Black Evening Dress	Watercolour on ivory
27	BELUM.U4828	Painting	Brigid, the Mary of the Gaels	Pencil on white paper
28	BELUM.U4829	Painting	St. Cecilia	Pencil on white paper
29	BELUM.U4830	Drawing	Brigit	Pencil on white paper
30	BELUM.U5004.1	Painting	Brigit Feeding The Poor (1918)	Oil on canvas
31	BELUM.U5004.2	Painting	It Was Brigit Wove the First Cloth In Ireland (1918)	Oil on canvas
32	BELUM.U5004.3	Painting	The Baptism of St. Brigit By Angels (1918)	Oil on canvas

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the (i) South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society; (ii) Tyrone Cultural Society; and (iii) North Antrim Historical Society have received any funding from her Department or its arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 39013/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department and its associated arm's length bodies have not provided funding to either South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society; Tyrone Cultural Society; or North Antrim Historical Society.

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department will allocate to assist athletes who wish to participate in the 2015 Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles with travel and accommodation costs.

(AQW 39042/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, an arms-length body of my Department, has worked extensively with Special Olympics Ireland over the last six months to develop a Business Case for funding in 2015/16 which includes provision for support for athletes and coaches from the north of Ireland attending the 2015 World Games.

The provision and allocation of future funding is dependent on the outcome of the Business Case that my Department has recently received. This is being considered along with other Departmental partners.

My Department has provided £459,000 for the period 2011-2015 to Special Olympics Ireland. In conjunction with DHSSPS, DSD, DE and OFMDFM the total funding provided was £2.296m. All of these Departments have indicated a willingness to consider support beyond 2015.

That funding has supported the development of systems and provided opportunities for those involved in Special Olympics in the north of Ireland. It will also support a series of training events and information evenings for athletes, volunteers and family members going to the World Games in Los Angeles.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of staff employed (i) directly by her Department; and (ii) by its agencies, who currently earn less than the living wage.

(AQW 39061/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) My Department does not employ any staff who earn less than the current living wage rate of £7.85 NET per hour.
- (ii) As DCAL comprises the core Department only and does not have any agencies the response to this part of the question is also nil.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding each boxing club has received in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39075/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, is responsible for the distribution of funding to sport in the north, including boxing. From April 2011 to date, Sport NI awarded a total of £1,277,396 Exchequer and Lottery funding to boxing clubs directly and also indirectly through the Irish Amateur Boxing Association.

Funding has been awarded by Sport NI through a variety of programmes and I have arranged for these details to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to the Newtownards Library, to detail (i) whether her Department measures how many people gained employment opportunities as a result of availing of computer courses offered by the library; (ii) her assessment of the impact of the library's work with the Alzheimer's Society group at St. Mark's Church; (iii) her assessment of the impact of the library's outreach programme in the community; and (iv) her assessment of the impact of Library NI's Health in Mind initiative in the Newtownards area.

(AQW 39097/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The main purpose of the computer courses offered by Libraries NI is to encourage greater participation in library services and assist people to enhance their ICT skills. Consequently, neither my Department nor Libraries NI maintain statistics on how many participants gain employment directly as a result of these courses. However, Libraries NI has established a partnership arrangement with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) under which Job Clubs are operated in a number of libraries to assist people seeking employment. The DEL Minister, Stephen Farry MLA, has publicly recognised the positive impact that these, and other library services, have in improving job prospects for those seeking employment.

I am pleased that Libraries NI staff attend the Newtownards Alzheimer's Society "Memories Café" in St Mark's Church where people affected by Alzheimers can meet to talk and receive support. I am delighted that Libraries NI continues to develop a relationship with the group and is currently facilitating storytelling and reminiscence sessions. These sessions are aimed at people in the early stages of Alzheimer's and Dementia and offer them an opportunity to relive past memories, engage with other people and, hopefully, reduce the potential for social isolation. The fact that some participants have now joined the library and are participating in its activities is a testament to the success of the initiative.

I have always encouraged Libraries NI to develop outreach programmes in the community in Newtownards and elsewhere. These programmes, including to nursery groups, schools, residential care homes and churches, reduce barriers to accessing the library and its services and help libraries to engage with people in areas of social need that they serve.

I am satisfied that Library NI's Health in Mind initiative in the Newtownards area is contributing positively to wider government initiatives aimed at improving mental health. The range of programmes that Libraries NI offers, such as the 'Laughter Yoga' sessions, 'Read Aloud' and personal resilience workshops, provide participants with an opportunity to meet, socialise, develop coping mechanisms and share experiences with other individuals who may also experience mental health issues.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of (i) pre-school children; (ii) primary school pupils; and (iii) parents who have availed of Newtownards Library formal Early Years initiatives in each of the last three years. **(AQW 39098/11-15)**

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI has informed me that the requested information was not collected formally until 2012/13.

The number of (i) pre-school children, (ii) primary school pupils; and (iii) parents/carers who have availed of Newtownards Library formal Early Years initiatives is set out in the relevant table at Annex A.

Annex A

- (i) Pre-school children (0 – 4 years).
(iii) Parents/Carers attend Rhythm and Rhyme sessions.

Programme	2012/13		2013/14*		2014/15* (Apr-Oct)	
	Sessions	Numbers	Sessions	Numbers	Sessions	Numbers
Nursery School / Nursery Unit class visits		-	1	10	3	37
Rhythm & Rhyme	17	206 children	21	330 children	11	186 children
		148 parents / carers		299 parents / carers		164 parents / carers
Rhyme Challenge				-	-	
Total	17	354	22	639	14	402

- (ii) Primary age children (5 – 11 years)

Programme	2012/13		2013/14*		2014/15* (Apr-Oct)	
	Sessions	Numbers	Sessions	Numbers	Sessions	Numbers
Class visits - primary and special needs	11	277	28	736	17	421
Summer Reading Challenge	N/A	79	N/A	56	N/A	105
Storytime	11	90	13	139	7	47
Total	22	446	41	931	24	573

* Statistics for 2013/14 and 2014/15 are provisional and may be subject to change once appropriate validation procedures have been applied to the data.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 38648/11-15, (i) when Foras na Gaeilge decided to publish decisions taken at Board Meetings in English; (ii) when it started to publish decisions taken at Board Meetings in English; (iii) whether it considered a request to publish full minutes of meetings in English as well as Irish; (iv) if so, when it considered such a request; and (v) why it decided to refuse such a request. **(AQW 39174/11-15)**

Ms Ní Chuilín: Foras na Gaeilge has published the minutes of its Board Meetings in Irish, its statutory working language, on its website since 2007.

Foras na Gaeilge considered a request to publish the Minutes of its Board Meetings in English, having particular regard for the statutory position of the Irish language. Consequently, at a meeting of the Board of Foras na Gaeilge on 20 November

2009, it was decided to thereafter publish full Minutes of Board Meetings in Irish, and to publish any decisions taken by the Board, in English,

simultaneously, on its website. This decision was taken following assurance from the Sponsor Departments that this was not in breach of their statutory duty.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what training has been provided through the Irish Language Broadcast Fund (ILBF); (ii) who provides the training; and (iii) how many people have been trained, in each year since the ILBF started.

(AQW 39176/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have arranged for the details requested regarding training provided through the Irish Language Broadcast Fund to be placed in the Assembly Library. The table details a number of different training initiatives – work placements, a Skills Development Bursary and training courses. Please note that the total figure for number of attendees may include individuals who have attended more than one course.

Annex A

(i) ILBF Trainee Work Placements

Financial Year	Number of Trainees	Company Placements
2005 - 2006	8	Big Mountain Productions, Stirling Television, Imagine Media, Tobar Productions, Ulysses, BBC, Westway, Ikandi, Zoogon, Tús Úr Productions.
2006 - 2007	12	Newgrange, Ulysses, Westway, Tobar, Tús Úr, BBC NI, NvTv, PlayTone, Joe Marcus Editing, Stirling TV, Newgrange, Westway, Vinegar Hill, Nerve Centre, Besom, Channel 9, Imagine Media, Zoogon, Sonas Productions
2007 - 2008	12	Big Mountain Productions, Stirling Television, Imagine Media, Tobar Productions, BBC NI, Zoogon, Waddell Media, NvTv
2008 - 2009	6	Stirling Television, Imagine Media, Tobar Productions, Zoogon, Waddell Media, NvTv, BBC NI
2009 - 2010	10	Big Mountain Productions, Stirling Television, Imagine Media, Nuacht 24, Tobar Productions, Waddell Media, Jaffa Productions, Nuacht 24, The Picture House, Tobar Productions
2010 - 2011	11	NVTv, Tobar Productions, Waddell Media, Bóthar Ard, Stirling Productions, Nuacht 24, The Picture House, BBC NI, Below the Radar, Big Mountain, Imagine Media
2011 - 2012	13	NVTv, Tobar Productions, Waddell Media, Bóthar Ard, Stirling Productions, Nuacht 24, The Picture House, BBC NI, Below the Radar, Big Mountain
2012 - 2013	11	NVTv, Bóthar Ard, Below the Radar, Big Mountain, Tobar, Imagine Media, Clean Slate, Waddell Media
2013 - 2014	13	Below the Radar, Imagine Media, Stirling, Doubleband, Big Mountain, Sonas Productions, Offline Central, Clean Slate
2014 - 2015	8	Below the Radar, Imagine Media, Stirling, Doubleband, Big Mountain, Sonas Productions, Offline Central, Indee Productions, NVTv
Number of Trainees to date:	104	

(ii) ILBF Skills Development Bursary Fund

Financial Year	People	Name of Course	Provider
2005-2006	1	Shooting on DV	NFTS
2006-2007	1	Developing Pre-School Content(Workshop)	FÁS
2006-2007	1	Company Secretary Course	BBC
2006-2007	1	Developing Pre-School content(Course)	FÁS
2006-2007	1	Assistant Producer Foundation Course	BBC

Financial Year	People	Name of Course	Provider
2007-2008	1	Developing Interactive Narrative content	MEDIA Plus Project (Sagasnet)
2007-2008	1	Desktop Editing for Avid Xpress	BBC - Elstree
2007-2008	1	Continuing Drama	TAPS
2007-2008	1	Directors Masterclass & Doc. Masterclass	FÁS
2007-2008	1	Directors Masterclass & Doc. Masterclass	FÁS
2008-2009	1	Preparing & Presenting Documentary Proposal	PACT
2008-2009	1	Digital Multi-Skilling for Emerging Directors	FÁS
2008-2009	1	Practical Skills for Writers	FÁS
2008-2009	1	Flash Intro, Dreamweaver Adv & Photoshop	Mullan Training
2008-2009	1	Creative Thinking Techniques	FÁS
2008-2009	1	Health & Safety	FÁS
2008-2009	1	Creative Thinking Techniques	FÁS
2009-2010	1	Graphic Art	Fás
2009-2010	1	Animation	Village Productions, London
2009-2010	1	Berlin Conference	Berlin Media Centre
2010-2011	1	Single Camera Training	Clean Slate
2010-2011	1	Shooting & Directing 360	DV Talent
2010-2011	1	Location Lighting 2	BBC Academy
2010-2011	1	Avid Media composer	VET
2011-2012	1	Production Guru	University of Salford
2012-2013	1	DSLR Workshop FAS Screen Training Ireland	FAS Screen Training Ireland
2012-2013	1	MA Script Writing (part time) QUB	Queens University
2012-2013	1	MA Script Writing (full time) QUB	Queens University
2012-2013	1	Series producer for Television FAS Screen Training Ireland	FÁS Screen Training Ireland
2012-2013	1	Directing Workshop	FÁS Screen Training Ireland
2012-2013	2	Shooting Skills & FCP 7	FÁS Screen Training Ireland
2012-2013	1	Essential Interviewing Skills	Robert McKee (London)
2012-2013	1	Robert McKee Story Seminar Robert McKee (London)	Robert McKee (London)
2013-2014	1	Subtitling	TMI
2013-2014	1	MA Documentary Practice	University of Ulster, Coleraine
2013-2014	1	Audio Training with Phitz Hearne	Phitz Hearne
2013-2014	1	Accommodation costs for course in London	Robert McKee
2013-2014	1	Storytelling & Creative Thinking	Greasán na Meán
2013-2014	1	TV Production Management	Waddell Media
2014-2015	1	Adobe After Effects for Editors	VET

Financial Year	People	Name of Course	Provider
2014-2015	1	Storytelling for Directors	Screen Training Ireland
2014-2015	1	Aerial Filming	BNUC-S
2014-2015	1	Postgraduate Certificate in Digital Media Communication	University of Ulster
Total Number of Individuals	44		

(3) **ILBF Training Courses:**

Financial Year	Number of Attendees	Name of Course	Course Provider
2005-2006	10	Television Induction Course	BBC NI
2005-2006	10	ILBF Presenters' Course	Peter Finnegan Public Speaking
2005-2006	12	Course for Irish language producers/directors	BBC NI
2006-2007	12	Television Induction Course	BBC NI
2006-2007	8	Producing Factual Programmes	NFTS
2006-2007	5	Researching for TV	BBC
2006-2007	4	Assistant Producer Foundation	BBC
2006-2007	11	Training Opportunities in Scriptwriting	Barbara Slade Screen Writer
2007-2008	6	Script Adaptation	Micheal O Cathain
2007-2008	12	Television Induction Course	BBC NI
2007-2008	12	Advanced Production Course	BBC NI
2007-2008	12	Being Freelance	Notassuch Films/Skillset
2008-2009	4	Script Adaptation	Zoogon
2008-2009	4	Single Camera Directing Course	BBC NI
2008-2009	7	Job Shadowing, Hollyoaks	Lime Pictures
2008-2009	2	Television Induction Course	BBC NI
2008-2009	3	Advanced Production Course	BBC NI
2008-2009	6	Production Management Course	Pat Greenland
2009-2010	10	Television Induction Course	BBC NI
2009-2010	6	Production Skills	Andrew Vale
2009-2010	10	Advanced Production Course	BBC NI
2010-2011	10	Television Induction Course	BBC NI
2010-2011	4	Single Camera Directing	BBC
2010-2011	6	Script Writing Course	Alison Lumb
2010-2011	10	Advanced Production Course	BBC NI
2011-2012	12	ILBF Training, Production & Broadcasting	Raidió Fáilte
2011-2012	8	Television Induction Course	BBC NI
2011-2012	4	Single Camera Directing	BBC NI
2011-2012	8	Advanced Production Course	BBC NI
2011-2012	4	Production Guru	Christine Pyke

Financial Year	Number of Attendees	Name of Course	Course Provider
2011-2012	5	Developing Ideas – NI Screen	BBC Academy training
2012-2013	2	Camera Training Course	Clean Slate
2012-2013	10	Radio Broadcast Training	Raidió Fáilte
2012-2013	7	Television Induction Course	BBC NI
2012-2013	7	Advanced Production Course	BBC NI
2012-2013	8	Presentation Skills	BBC Academy training
2012-2013	3	TV Production, Direction & Presentation Training	Park Studios
2012-2013	8	Digital Transitions	Keane Vision
2013-2014	4	Single Camera Directing	BBC NI
2013-2014	6	Television Induction Course	BBC
2013-2014	6	Advanced Production Course	BBC
2013-2014	7	CV Skills	Notassuch Films
2013-2014	10	Presentation Skills	BBC Academy training
2013-2014	10	Radio Broadcast Training	Raidió Fáilte
2013-2014	3	Ideas Development and Pitching Course	Macha Media
2013-2014	4	Shooting with the Canon XF305 and Editing Skills with Avid for Skillset	Skillset /Paroussi Consulting
2014-2015	4	Single Camera Directing	BBC NI
2014-2015	10	Digital Media Workshop and Mentoring	Mercury Insights
	8	Sound Training Course	Clean Slate
Number of Attendees	354		

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37400/11-15, when the report will be published. (AQW 39221/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has received a report from AFBI on the circumstances of the incident. My officials are currently considering the issue and is intended to make the report available by the end of December

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of recent budget cuts announcement within her Department, whether the planned redevelopment work at the Brandywell Stadium will proceed. (AQW 39241/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of plans to redevelop the Brandywell Stadium. No formal funding application has been received by my Department.

I intend to submit a bid to the Executive to secure funding in the next CSR for a Sub Regional Stadium Programme. The Executive previously endorsed the development of sub-regional stadia as a priority area of spend in the next CSR period beginning 2015-16. A sub-regional stadia programme is a logical channel for any potential funding application as the Brandywell would be one of a number of eligible venues across the north of Ireland. My Department is currently preparing a Strategic Outline Case for submission to the Executive to support the case for funding.

No decision has been taken on specific stadia that will benefit from this funding.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the Project Design Team for the Brandywell Project has been appointed. (AQW 39243/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of plans to redevelop the Brandywell Stadium. No formal funding application has been received by my Department.

Queries around the appointment of design teams should be raised with the project promoter Derry City Council.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 38379/11-15, how many projects in the East Londonderry area are currently being considered for allocation of funding, which was awarded to her Department through the October monitoring round.

(AQW 39247/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Building on DCAL's significant investment in the North West to date, DCAL bid to the Executive in this financial year for additional funding to maximise ongoing development of a social and economic legacy from City of Culture 2013.

£3.8 million in both resource and capital funding was allocated to the Department in the October Monitoring Round to support a strategic development programme in the North West.

My priority is to address poverty and social exclusion and to deliver cultural led economic and social development in the North West. Whilst many of the projects which will receive funding are based in the Derry area, the additional funding will also strategically extend DCAL's impact across the wider North West with a focus on enhancing capacity, building networks and embedding sustainability in Coleraine, Limavady, Strabane and their rural surrounds.

Two projects which have already received considerable funding in your constituency include the Stendhal Festival in Limavady and the North Coast Sports Village in Coleraine.

As business cases for other projects are still being finalised, I will be making further announcements in due course.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 38381/11-15, when she will receive the outcome of Sport NI's review of the business case for the development of sports and community facilities in Dungiven.

(AQW 39248/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The business case for the development of sports and community facilities in Dungiven has been considered by Sport NI and comments have been provided to Limavady Borough Council in this regard.

Officials from my Department and Sport NI will continue to work with the Council to develop the business case. I remain committed to seeking to provide the £2.5M funding sought by Limavady Borough Council, which will be subject to budget availability and the approval of the business case which must include confirmation of partnership funding for the project.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of the Audit of Inequalities and Equality Action Plan launched by the Ulster Scots Agency, whether there is a similar plan under the auspices of Foras na Gaeilge.

(AQW 39289/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The North South Language Body has an Equality Policy which is adhered to by both Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency. The Audit of Inequalities should have been carried out jointly by both Agencies; however the Ulster-Scots Agency commenced the Audit independently and published its own Equality Action Plan for consultation on 13th November 2014. The consultation closes on 13th February 2015.

Foras na Gaeilge will carry out its Audit of Inequalities in 2015 and from this it will produce an Equality Action Plan which will then go to public consultation.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown on the spend by her Department on investigating the NI Events Company, including the costs of accountancy investigations and the cost of the investigation by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

(AQW 39307/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Spend by my Department on investigations into the financial deficit, financial management and administration of the NI Events Company, including accountancy investigations, is as follows:

- £123,000.00 - Audit of the financial affairs of the Company and comprehensive review of all the circumstances surrounding the deficit accumulated by it.
- £6,055.00 – Review of the Company's financial transactions.

In addition, £37,029.20 was spent by my Department on interim support to the management of the Company and a review of existing contracts and commitments.

It is not appropriate for me to provide information on the cost of the investigation of the NI Events Company carried out by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, as this is a matter solely for that Department to answer.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the Ulster-Scots Education Project commenced; and when it is planned to have teaching materials ready for use in schools.

(AQW 39324/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Ulster-Scots Education Project commenced on 4 September 2013. Work is well advanced on the development of Ulster-Scots curricular materials for Key Stages 3, 4 & 5. The teaching materials are being piloted in schools during this academic year and will be available for general use in schools in the second half of 2015.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure where the term 'Ulster-Scots' appears in the exhibits and displays in the Ulster Museum.

(AQW 39325/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: National Museums has informed me that the term 'Ulster-Scots' is used in the 'Home Rule to Partition' section of its new Modern History gallery at the Ulster Museum. It appears within the context of a group of items reflecting the cultural revival associated with the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The relevant specimens are a book and postcard. The book entitled 'The Scot in Ulster 1888', written by John Harrison, was first published in the late 1800s and early 1900s as a series of articles in 'The Scotsman'. This book is displayed alongside a postcard 'The Ulster Scot', produced by the Ulster Publishing Company.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what post-project reviews and evaluations of the displays and exhibitions in the Ulster Museum were carried out after the reopening of the Ulster Museum in October 2009; and by whom these were carried out.

(AQW 39326/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: National Museums has informed me that after the Ulster Museum reopened in October 2009, a full Post Project Evaluation (PPE) of the project was overseen by the Director of Learning and Partnership at the organisation. The PPE included independent peer reviews of the nature and history galleries which were undertaken by Professor David Livingstone, Professor of Geography and Intellectual History, Queens University Belfast and Professor Elizabeth Crooke, Professor of Museum and Heritage Studies, University of Ulster.

In October 2013, Jane Coyle, arts journalist, performing arts critic and screenwriter, carried out a peer review of the 'William Scott Centenary' exhibition, which was published on the Culture NI website.

In March 2014, Dr Fearghal McGarry, Reader in Modern Irish History, and Professor Mary O'Dowd, Gender History, both of the School of History and Anthropology Queens University Belfast, carried out a peer review of the 'The Ulster Crisis: Irish Home Rule and the Ulster Covenant' exhibition. The review was submitted to and accepted by the editor of Museum Ireland, the annual journal of the Irish Museums Association. It is to be published in the 2013 edition of the journal in the 2014-2015 business year.

In addition a number of reviews have been carried out by specialist evaluators:

- 2012 'Plantation to Power Sharing' and 'Dinosaurs' were reviewed by the Centre for Interpretation Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands.
- 2014 'Modern History' (front-end evaluation for new gallery) was reviewed by the Social Research Centre.
- In 2014 two reviews were contained in the Museums Journal – 'Art of the Troubles' and 'Elements' reviewed by Oonagh Murphy, Arts Manager, Writer and Lecturer.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 38544/11-15, how the Together: Building a United Community Sports Connect Initiative will facilitate contact between young people from a different background and reconciliation.

(AQW 39333/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The facilitation of contact between Young Leaders from different backgrounds will be central to the Sport Connects training programme. Sport Connects involves a range of both good relations and practical skills programme elements.

Good Relations and Reflection Workshops focusing on key good relations messages that can be promoted through the Young Leaders future coaching and engagement within the community will be a core element of the training. These Workshops will be delivered alongside practical sessions around Effective Leadership Coaching, First Aid, Positive Behaviour Management and Engaging Sessions.

The Young Leaders collective involvement in this training and their roles in the delivery of the pilot project will aim to lead to a greater understanding of diversity within the community and an improvement in attitudes between young people from different backgrounds whilst increasing community cohesion, confidence, and employability prospects.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37342/11-15, to list the members of the Management Board of the Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies.

(AQW 39334/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The members of the Management Board of the Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies were:

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| ■ Professor J Wilson (Chairman and Director of the Institute of Ulster- Scots Studies) | ■ Professor J Allen |
| | ■ Dr A Aughey |

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| ■ Professor D Bamford | ■ Dr W Kelly |
| ■ Dr J Gillespie | ■ Mr W McCullough |
| ■ Professor O Hargie | ■ Professor A Sharp |
| ■ Mr J Hegarty (Ulster-Scots Agency) | ■ Professor R Welch |

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 37342/11-15, to detail the members of the Advisory Board of the Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies, identifying which of them were appointed by the University of Ulster and which were appointed by the Ulster-Scots Agency.

(AQW 39335/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The members of the Advisory Board of the Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies were jointly appointed by the Ulster-Scots Agency and the University of Ulster. The members were:

- Professor John Wilson (Chair)
- Mr Stan Mallon
- Dr. W Kelly
- Professor J Allen
- Lord Laird

The Ulster-Scots Agency was represented on the Advisory Board by Mr Stan Mallon and Lord Laird and the University of Ulster was represented by Professor John Wilson, Dr. W Kelly and Professor J Allen.

The Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies officially closed on 30 June 2011. Some of the work it carried out was transferred to the Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies (CISS). The Ulster-Scots Agency has no connection with the CISS.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the previous arrangement for translation services as referred to in paragraph 8.1 of the minutes of the Interdepartmental Charter Implementation Group meeting on 21 November 2013.

(AQW 39337/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The previous arrangements for translations services refer to the DCAL contract to provide a translations service for the Irish Language, in order to meet the UK's commitments for translation to and from Irish, within the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what impact the closure of the Ulster Orchestra would have on Northern Ireland's representation and role in Proms in the Park.

(AQW 39350/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department, together with the Arts Council, continue to liaise with the Orchestra and its sponsors to develop and refine potential operating models and alternative funding mechanisms which would enable the Orchestra to safeguard its future.

If a new sustainable operating model emerges from this process, I will give it serious consideration and, subject to receiving assurance that it can be delivered, I will engage with Executive Colleagues to assess how the Executive might support it.

I expect to receive a detailed proposal for the way forward on 5th December 2014.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the future of the Orchestra while discussions to safeguard its future remain ongoing.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the role of the Ulster Orchestra in promoting youth orchestras and music education; and how this role would be fulfilled should the Ulster Orchestra close.

(AQW 39351/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The education and outreach work undertaken by the Ulster Orchestra (UO) compliments and adds value to the work of the Education and Library Board (ELB) Music Services. For example the UO provides teaching services through the education system from early-years and Key Stage 1 to 3rd level education and provides coaching to the Ulster Youth Orchestra musicians.

The UO also offers interactive educational workshops for nursery, primary and special educational settings. It also provides a variety of activities and workshops for post-primary and adults with special educational needs.

Given its financial uncertainty the Orchestra must develop a robust and sustainable business model. Officials from my Department have, together with the Arts Council, been liaising with the UO and its other funders to discuss potential operating models and alternative future funding mechanisms to enable it to continue its important cultural and educational contributions in the North.

Provided a long term and sustainable business model can be identified, I will give it serious consideration and, subject to receiving assurance that it can be delivered, I will engage with Executive Colleagues to assess how the Executive might support it.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she will measure 'need' when she prepares to negotiate for an extension of the Irish Language Broadcast Fund and the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund 'on the basis of need'.
(AQW 39436/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Although broadcasting powers remain a reserved matter I am committed to ensuring that the specific characteristics and needs of the North are fully considered in the development of all broadcasting policy.

The most pressing need at present with regard to the Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Broadcast Funds is to ensure that a longer term commitment, at a higher level of funding, is made by DCMS to both of the Funds in order to protect them, provide stability to our local production sector, and allow production and training to continue without interruption and loss of momentum.

Ed Vaizey MP has current Ministerial responsibility for the funds. He is aware that the Funds have made a significant and valuable contribution to the creative industries here in the north. However, commitment to funding levels beyond 2016 will be a matter for the new British Government following the general election. There is a need for early negotiation to safeguard the future of the Funds, and I will engage with the new Ministerial team as soon as practicable after they take up office.

I have asked to meet the spokespersons for the main political parties in Britain and intend to raise the matter of the importance of the language Broadcast Funds at those meetings.

Given the positive impact that both of these funds have on the screen and creative industries, I will continue to press DCMS for a long term commitment to both Funds and an increase as a minimum linked to inflation.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what role the Ulster Orchestra has in any bid for European City of Culture.

(AQW 39458/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department is not aware of the role the Ulster Orchestra would have in any potential bid for European Capital of Culture.

My Department will continue to support the development of culture, arts and leisure with the aim of promoting equality, and tackling poverty and social exclusion. In doing this, DCAL and its arms length bodies contribute to culturally and economically vibrant cities in the North of Ireland.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 38461/11-15, AQW 38481/11-15 and AQW 38459/11-15, to detail the capital projects in Derry City that will be funded by the recent £2.8m City of Culture Legacy allocation in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 39479/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The £2.8m allocated to DCAL in the October Monitoring Round for the capital programme focuses on providing support to organisations which are already established and who have staff and running cost income from other funders to facilitate DCAL supported equipment. Small refurbishment projects are also included which provide DCAL with an opportunity to contribute to projects which are lead by other funders.

The programme seeks to achieve the following:

- Provide support for key, inescapable commitments in relation to sporting facilities – the North West Sports Village and boxing clubs;
- Contribute to larger scale capital projects where other funders are in the lead and DCAL will not be responsible for associated resource consequential – including An Culturlann, Gasyard, Rosemount Factory and Nerve Centre;
- Provide equipment to community and festival organisations who would otherwise have to rent equipment, thus reducing future costs and contributing to longer term sustainability;
- Provide creative, cultural and sporting equipment to communities in partnership with DSD and local councils to assist community organisations in increasing skills and establishing social enterprises.

As previously stated, business cases for the programme are still being finalised therefore I will be making further announcements in due course.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the terms of reference and criteria under which the Sports Council will select capital build proposals in 2015/16, including the weighing that will be given for (i) performance or medal winning; and (ii) community capacity.

(AQW 39535/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The new £17.5 million Lottery sports facility investment will be taken forward by Sport NI and aims to provide integrated sport facilities that meet the needs of community participants and high performance athletes within the same multi-sport environment.

The strategic approach to the Lottery funded Capital Programme will be informed by the following:

- the emerging findings of the Sports Facilities Strategy which Sport NI is currently developing;
- the District Council Area Reports covering the 11 new Council areas; and
- input from various Governing Bodies for sport.

The focus will be on:

- meeting the needs of high performance athletes in sports that are most likely to succeed on an international/world level;
- accommodating the needs of community participants in integrated high performance training facilities; and
- the identification of delivery partners who have the capability to operate large scale sustainable facilities.

The context for this proposed approach is the Sport Policy Leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS) study which articulates nine pillars that comprise an integrated sports development system. The SPLISS Report highlighted weaknesses in the north of Ireland's sporting provision and identified the need for an increase in the number of high performance sport training facilities across the north of Ireland.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what progress is being made in offering further assistance to ensure the continuation of the work carried out by the Ulster Orchestra.

(AQW 39664/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Officials from my Department, together with the Arts Council, continue to liaise with the Orchestra and its sponsors to develop and refine potential operating models and alternative funding mechanisms which would enable the Orchestra to safeguard its future.

If the Orchestra presents a new sustainable operating model, I will give it serious consideration and, subject to receiving assurance that it can be delivered, I will engage with Executive Colleagues to assess how the Executive might support it.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many paintings and sketches by William Conor are held by National Museums Northern Ireland; and how many are currently on display in the Ulster Museum.

(AQW 39697/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: National Museums has informed me that it currently has 1292 paintings and sketches/drawings by William Conor in its Art Collections. The details of which have been placed in the Assembly Library.

None of these items are currently on display in the Ulster Museum. However, William Conor's paintings were on display at the Ulster Museum in 2010 when they were included in the exhibition 'Visions: A Celebration of Art from the Ulster Museum'.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the Ulster Past and Present mural by the artist William Conor was last on display in the Ulster Museum.

(AQW 39701/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: National Museums has informed me that the 'Ulster Past and Present' mural by William Conor was on permanent display in the Ulster Museum until 2006 before the building was closed for redevelopment. It is currently in storage.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the level of cuts proposed to the budget of the Ulster-Scots Agency by her Department's budgetary proposals.

(AQW 39907/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform set the efficiency savings for all North South Implementation Bodies at 4% per year for the 2014, 2015 and 2016 years resulting in a cumulative total of 12% using the 2013 figure as the baseline.

Both agencies of the North South Language Body - Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency imposed 7% efficiency savings in 2014 and a one percent (1%) efficiency saving has been agreed between the sponsor departments for 2015. This will result in the agencies realising the agreed 8% cumulative figure required for 2014 and 2015 years; and bring them back on course to meet the cumulative total of 12% required by 2016.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has considered implementing the proposals contained within the Committee for Finance and Personnel's Report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector that are applicable for her Department and its agencies.

(AQW 39912/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The report produced by the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector is a very comprehensive document that contains many useful observations and proposals. The NICS has recognised for some time the benefits that flexible working can bring.

The NICS has been proactive in implementing a range of alternative working patterns to assist staff in achieving a good work-life balance. This was noted by the Committee when it deemed the NICS an exemplar organisation in this respect.

The NICS has also been extremely proactive in exploiting new technology to support flexible working practices. There are numerous examples of the use of emerging technologies to promote flexible and agile working across the NICS. These include Secure Remote Access; NetworkNI (which is now available at all NICS sites); access to the BlackBerry Service; and Unified Communications (which is a key enabler for flexible and agile working).

I believe it is imperative that we continue to explore new ideas and technologies that could help us deliver high quality services in the most efficient way. While the NICS already has an excellent range of flexible working policies and technologies available for departments to utilise as their business needs require, we will continue to keep pace with developments in relation to flexible working and will introduce new policies and technologies, as the need arises.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she will answer AQW 38717/11-15 and AQW 38716/11-15. (AQW 40022/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Both AQWs were answered on 10 December 2014.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why Cinemagic International Film and Television Festival has been asked to prepare for cuts of up to 50 per cent as part of the 2015/16 draft budget.

(AQW 40060/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: NI Screen has been successful in recent years in bidding for additional funding over and above its baseline figure to support the activities of creative organisations like Cinemagic.

NI Screen has been given an indicative budget for 2015-2016 of £1million. This is less than its current baseline of £1.13m and its overall budget for 2014-2015 which was £1.9m, as it included additional funding of £1 million.

When the additional resources are included, NI Screen's indicative baseline for 2015-2016 is approximately 50% less than the overall budget made available in 2014-2015.

NI Screen has advised its funded organisations, including Cinemagic, the current working assumption for 2015-2016 is to prepare for the possibility of a 50% cut to budgets. However, the draft budget consultation process is still ongoing.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what is the level of cut in the budget of Foras na Gaeilge in her Department's budgetary proposals.

(AQW 40095/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform set the efficiency savings for all North South Implementation Bodies at 4% per year for the 2014, 2015 and 2016 years resulting in a cumulative total of 12% using the 2013 figure as the baseline.

Both agencies of the North South Language Body - Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency imposed 7% efficiency savings in 2014 and a one percent (1%) efficiency saving has been agreed between the sponsor departments for 2015. This will result in the agencies realising the agreed 8% cumulative figure required for 2014 and 2015 years; and bring them back on course to meet the cumulative total of 12% required by 2016.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what is the level of cut in the budget of Waterways Ireland in her Department's budgetary proposals.

(AQW 40096/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform set the efficiency savings for all North South Implementation Bodies at 4% per year for 2014, 2015 and 2016 resulting in a cumulative total of 12% using the 2013 figure as the baseline.

A 4.8% efficiency saving was imposed on Waterways Ireland in 2014 and a 3.2% efficiency saving has been agreed between the sponsor departments for 2015. This will result in Waterways Ireland achieving the agreed 8% cumulative figure required across 2014 and 2015; and keep them in line to meet the 12% savings required by 2016.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when Portavoe reservoir will be restocked.

(AQW 40161/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Portavoe Reservoir was restocked by my Department with 1,500 rainbow trout in two stockings of 750 fish on 11 November and 8 December 2014.

Department of Education

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact of establishing regional criteria for assessing children with special educational needs.

(AQW 39263/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The establishment of the regional criteria for assessing children with special educational needs (SEN) brought, for the first time, a consistent approach to the identification of SEN with all boards adopting the agreed common descriptors for children and young people within particular categories of SEN. This has enabled more accurate comparisons of prevalence rates for areas of SEN which has proved useful for provision planning and for the monitoring and evaluation of pupil outcomes. It has also been less confusing for parents who previously had to contend with different descriptors depending on which board their child resided in.

Furthermore the Good Practice Guidelines, which accompanied the Regional Criteria, provided clear advice and suggested interventions for schools to use in order to improve outcomes for pupils within different categories of SEN. This has promoted early intervention and has also provided schools with a common framework and a clearer understanding of the level of need that may require an assessment from the educational psychologist.

In view of the above I am content that the criteria are an effective tool for assessing children with SEN and they will continue to be kept under review and amended as necessary.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education when will he approve the advertisement for the appointment of the Interim Chief Executive of the Education Authority.

(AQW 39420/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Following an amendment made at Consideration Stage, the Education Bill places a duty on the Education Authority to commence a process to appoint a permanent Chief Executive within one year of the date of the Authority's first board meeting. The requirement for an interim Chief Executive to be in place on or before the establishment of the Authority on 1 April 2015 precludes the possibility of a lengthy recruitment process.

I have therefore considered how best to secure the stability of the Authority and ensure that work is progressed from the outset to embed new structures and processes. I have determined that this may best be delivered by the appointment of the Chief Executive Designate of ESA as Chief Executive on an interim basis until such time as the Authority appoints a permanent Chief Executive. The appointment will take effect early in the New Year, at a date to be agreed after the Education Bill receives Royal Assent.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education, in order to assist schools in planning, to detail budgets that will be allocated to schools in the next three years.

(AQW 39650/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools have been provided with an indicative budget for the Department of Education, and illustrative core per pupil cash values for the 2015/16 year, based on the ongoing Budget Consultation for 2015/16. The NI Executive block budget, and thereafter all Departmental budgets, beyond this period are not known at this time. Further guidance will be issued to schools once decisions have been made following the current consultation.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what information he can provide to schools regarding budgets over the next three years.

(AQW 39670/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools have been provided with an indicative budget for the Department of Education, and illustrative core per pupil cash values for the 2015/16 year, based on the ongoing Draft 2015-16 Budget Consultation. The NI Executive budget, and thereafter all departmental budgets, beyond this period are not known at this time. Further guidance will be issued to schools once decisions have been made following the current consultation and the Executive have agreed the final 2015-16 budget.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how schools can reasonably be expected to affect continuous improvement in the face of recent and anticipated budget cuts; and for his assessment of whether parents are being adequately prepared for the effect that cuts may have.

(AQW 39671/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There is no doubt that the proposed reductions to the Education budget as part of the Executive's 2015-16 Draft Budget will pose major challenges right across the Education Sector. It is important that in meeting these challenges the key issues of raising standards and delivering frontline services are maintained wherever possible. As part of my Department's draft budget proposals I have carefully considered my priorities and will use the finite resources available to the greatest effect.

I recognise the challenges schools will face and the importance of maximising the impact of finite and increasingly constrained resources. A key element of the process in determining how best to use resources will be through effective school development planning; and the focus must remain on raising standards and improving outcomes. My Department and the managing authorities will also be working to support schools in this challenging fiscal environment.

The announcement of the Executive's 2015-16 Draft Budget on 3 November 2014 triggered the commencement of the public consultation period, the closing date for which is 29 December 2014. The public consultation period on my Department's proposals runs concurrently with the public consultation on the Executive's Draft Budget having been published on 25 November 2014. During this time the Department are engaging with the Assembly Education Committee and key stakeholders across the education sector, with a view to building a consensus on mapping the way forward for education next year.

I am keen to ensure that parents have a channel through which they can provide not only their views on the impact of the budget proposals but also their suggestions as to alternative approaches on the delivery of education for the 2015-16 financial year. Boards of Governors will want to ensure their pupils' parents are kept informed and will, like me, continue to encourage parents, and others across the north of Ireland, to participate both in the overall consultation on the Executive's Draft Budget and on my Department's Draft Budget consultation.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 35335/11-15, when he intends to publish the final report on the Review of Home to School Transport Policy.

(AQW 39728/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The final report on the Independent Review of Home to School Transport was published on 12 December.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of new teaching posts in (i) controlled; and (ii) voluntary sector primary and post-primary schools, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39752/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education is not the employer of teachers and therefore does not hold this information.

However, the number of new teaching posts over the last 3 academic years in the controlled sector has been provided by the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), as the employing authorities for controlled schools and is shown in the table below. Neither the Department nor the ELBs hold this information for the Voluntary Grammar schools, as each school is an employer in their own right.

Controlled Sector	New Teaching Posts		
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Post-Primary	130	127	153

The Delivering Social Change Signature Programme to improve literacy and numeracy aimed to provide employment for recent graduate teachers, and support for pupils who are at risk of underachievement in communication and using maths at Key stage 2 and in English and maths at GCSE. To date 63 teachers have been placed in controlled post-primary schools since September 2013 on a two year fixed contract.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education what percentage of the Government's Military Covenant his Department has adopted as a policy; and what percentage has been implemented.

(AQW 39799/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is represented on the NI Service Children in Education Forum (NISCEF). This forum meets bi-annually to discuss issues affecting the education of children of British Service Personnel.

My Department can consider requests, from oversubscribed schools, for temporary increases of their approved admissions and enrolment numbers to accommodate children who otherwise would not have access to a school of their preferred management type within reasonable travelling distance of their home address.

Schools receive an additional factor for each full-time pupil designated in the school census as being of a Service Personnel family.

Separately, I understand that schools, with children of British Service Personnel, can apply to a £3m Support Fund, administered by the Ministry of Defence in London.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what consideration has been given to a dedicated school bus for pupils in the Ards Peninsula travelling to schools in Bangor.

(AQW 39806/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) is required to provide transport assistance only for those pupils who are eligible in accordance with the terms of the Department of Education Circular 1996/41 (updated September 2009).

While the Board has a statutory duty to provide transport assistance for eligible pupils, the Board must always utilise the most cost effective means of transport available to it. To meet this duty for eligible pupils residing in the Ards Peninsula area attending schools in Bangor, the SEELB informs me that these are provided with Translink Sessional Tickets and current demand can be adequately met on Translink's existing Ulsterbus Service Routes. Pupils travel to Newtownards where they transfer to a Bangor Service Route to continue their journey to school in Bangor. The Board advises that the majority of pupils using public transport must transfer bus services in order to arrive in school on time, and in this respect transport arrangements for pupils travelling from the Ards Peninsula to Bangor are not unusual.

Transport arrangements for ineligible pupils fall to their parents.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the grants available from his Department for community groups.
(AQW 39835/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In 2014/15, under the West Belfast Community Project, the Department of Education has made grants totalling £260,000 available to the West Belfast Partnership Board and the Greater Shankill Partnership Board.

The Department also indirectly funds community groups via other organisations. This includes £1,881,580 during 2014/15 to support the Community Education Initiatives Programme.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the total spent on each of the (i) capital; and (ii) other projects which have not proceeded since May 2007, including the loss resulting from each project.
(AQW 39836/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Ministerial Statements to the Assembly in 2010, 2012, 2013 and 2014 included 69 capital projects to be taken forward. Only one of these projects has not proceeded. A new primary school was announced in 2013 to service Islandmagee and the surrounding area to include Mullaghduh and Kilcoan primary schools.

Due to area planning considerations the NEELB decided not to progress the scheme and this resulted in the proposed project for 'Islandmagee and the surrounding area' being withdrawn from the approved list of capital projects. The site for the Islandmagee School was purchased in 2006/2007 financial year at a cost of £955,449 and to date fees amount to £890.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education whether he has considered implementing the proposals contained within the Committee for Finance and Personnel's Report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector that are applicable for his Department and its agencies.
(AQW 39909/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The report produced by the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector is a very comprehensive document that contains many useful observations and proposals. The NICS has recognised for some time the benefits that flexible working can bring.

The NICS has been proactive in implementing a range of alternative working patterns to assist staff in achieving a good work-life balance. This was noted by the Committee when it deemed the NICS an exemplar organisation in this respect.

The NICS has also been extremely proactive in exploiting new technology to support flexible working practices. There are numerous examples of the use of emerging technologies to promote flexible and agile working across the NICS. These include Secure Remote Access; NetworkNI (which is now available at all NICS sites); access to the BlackBerry Service; and Unified Communications (which is a key enabler for flexible and agile working).

I believe it is imperative that we continue to explore new ideas and technologies that could help us deliver high quality services in the most efficient way. While the NICS already has an excellent range of flexible working policies and technologies available for departments to utilise as their business needs require, we will continue to keep pace with developments in relation to flexible working and will introduce new policies and technologies, as the need arises.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils in North Down that received free school transport in each of the last five years.
(AQW 39913/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has provided the information detailed in the table below in respect to pupils eligible for transport assistance in North Down for each of the last five years:

2010/11	1,674
2011/12	1,672
2012/13	1,611
2013/14	1,632
2014/15	1,629

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the budget available for the professional development of teachers.
(AQW 39914/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Well trained and motivated teachers are essential in the drive to raise standards in our schools. It is the employers of teachers that have primary responsibility for their continuing professional development (CPD). It is therefore a matter for schools to identify and prioritise the CPD their teachers require.

The education budget continues to provide for a very significant investment in teacher CPD in order to support employers in discharging their responsibilities and to help develop teachers and school leaders to be more effective. The full quantum of funding available cannot easily be broken down. Many preventative and capacity building programmes include a significant

element of CPD and schools and Area Learning Communities have flexibility in using the funding delegated to them to offer CPD opportunities. Five Baker days and up to five school development days are also available to support staff development.

In addition to the above, I have made some £14.2m available for CPD in the 2014/15 financial year, as detailed in the table below. It should be noted that these figures also include an element for school support and training for non teaching staff which it is not possible to segregate out.

Curriculum Advisory and Support Services	£8.8m*
Regional Training Unit	£1.2m
Other, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Middletown Centre for Autism ■ Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment ■ Higher Education Institutes 	£4.2m

* Forecast spend

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) short; (ii) medium; and (iii) long term plans for the Early Years Capacity Building Programmes currently being delivered by each Education and Library Board.
(AQW 39947/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The special educational need (SEN) Early Years Pilot has been operating across all Education and Library Boards for 3 years finishing in September 2014.

Interim feedback from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), about the pilot, has indicated some positive results and the future shape of supports for SEN children in early years settings will be influenced by the outcomes of the final ETI evaluation and supporting Board evidence, both due by the start of 2015.

In order not to lose the momentum in capacity building in early years settings, funding was provided to each Education and Library Board to make interim arrangements until the end of March 2015.

By that stage it is planned that the evaluation and other supporting evidence will have been considered and options developed for the way ahead.

My draft budget proposals for 2015/16 include provision to continue with this important work.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education why the advertisement by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools for a Principal for St Mary's High School in Brollagh is a temporary vacancy ending in August 2015.
(AQW 39972/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department is not the employer of teachers. In this case, the relevant employer is the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

CCMS have advised that the long term future of St Mary's High School (St Mary's) in Brollagh is under review, with consideration currently being given to exploring the development of cross-border collaboration. A pilot scheme is presently being developed by key stakeholders on both sides of the border.

Over recent years, this post has been filled by a series of temporary arrangements whilst the future of the school remained under review. To provide adequate time to assess the outcome of the pilot programme on the development of a cross-border collaborative scheme, the Board of Governors of St Mary's took the decision to appoint a Principal on a temporary basis and to keep this decision under regular review.

Short listing and interviews for the post are scheduled to take place in January 2015.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 38873/11-15, how many lessons were observed during the twelve inspection visits.
(AQW 39980/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As stated in the answer to AQW 38873/11-15, 12 joint lesson observations have taken place during formal inspection visits.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 36274/11-15, what is the total grant which has been allocated to Coláiste Feirste.
(AQW 39982/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The total amount of grant has not been finalised at present. I have, however, set a maximum amount of £70,000 per year for a period of up to three years to allow the school time to establish a long term solution to the transport needs of pupils from north Belfast attending the school.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of post-primary school pupils that are in receipt of free school transport in Strangford, broken down by school, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39983/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education & Library Board has informed me that the information requested is not held in the format required and an exercise to produce it would result in disproportionate cost. In addition, information generated by such an exercise may not be fully accurate due to the dissonance between post code boundaries and political constituency boundaries.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many requests for free school transport have been received and rejected by South Eastern Education and Library Board during the 2013/14 academic year.

(AQW 39984/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has informed me that it received 5,432 applications for school transport assistance during the 2013/2014 academic year. 874 of these applications were turned down by the Board as they did not meet the criteria in accordance with Department of Education Circular 1996/41 (updated September 2009).

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the attendance rates of primary school pupils in Strangford, broken down by school, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39986/11-15)

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

Attendance rate at primary schools in Strangford Assembly Area, 2010/11-2012/13

School Name	Percentage of half days attended		
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Loughries Primary School	95.8	97.3	96.3
Grey Abbey Primary School	94.9	95.3	95.2
Carrickmannon Primary School	97.1	97.4	95.5
Newtownards Model Primary School	94.5	94.8	94.7
Kirkistown Primary School	95.7	96.2	95.9
Castle Gardens Primary School	95.4	96.2	95.4
Victoria Primary School (Ballyhalbert)	93.4	94.0	93.8
Portavogie Primary School	93.9	94.5	94.7
Ballywalter Primary School	92.6	93.9	93.7
Ballynahinch Primary School	94.8	95.5	96.3
Derryboy Primary School	96.5	96.5	95.8
Comber Primary School	95.4	95.3	94.8
Killyleagh Primary School	93.2	92.1	94.1
Victoria Primary School, Newtownards	94.9	95.5	94.5
Moneyrea Primary School	96.7	97.4	97.4
Alexander Dickson Primary School	94.5	95.6	95.7
Londonderry Primary School	95.2	95.5	95.0
Carrowdore Primary School	95.4	94.4	94.7
West Winds Primary School	93.0	91.5	93.0
Andrews Memorial Primary School	96.6	96.7	97.0
Academy Primary School	96.8	96.7	97.2
Killinchy Primary School	96.1	96.4	96.4
Abbey Primary School	95.3	95.6	94.9
St Caolan's Primary School, Ballynahinch	96.9	96.2	95.9
St Joseph's Primary School, Crossgar	95.3	94.8	94.0

School Name	Percentage of half days attended		
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
St Mary's Primary School, Comber	92.9	93.4	92.3
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballynahinch	94.5	93.9	94.3
St Mary's Primary School, Saintfield	95.4	94.1	95.1
St Finian's Primary School, Newtownards	95.5	96.5	95.6
St Patrick's Primary School, Portaferry	96.9	97.4	97.1
St Mary's Primary School, Killyleagh	95.5	95.9	94.8
St Mary's Primary School, Kircubbin	95.5	96.3	95.8
St Mary's Primary School, Portaferry	94.4	95.3	95.4
Kircubbin Primary School	95.9	93.9	94.4
Portaferry Integrated Primary School	95.0	92.9	93.6
Millennium Integrated Primary School	96.8	96.8	96.5
Drumlins Integrated Primary School	95.4	95.0	95.6
Regent House School	95.4	95.5	96.0
Strangford Assembly Area	95.3	95.5	95.3
North of Ireland	94.9	95.2	94.9

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 38893/11-15, to detail the nature or purpose of the expenditure for each year.

(AQW 39992/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below provides details of the purpose of the Department's expenditure in relation to Ulster-Scots:

Year	Expenditure	Purpose of Expenditure
2003-2004	£69.95	Translation of Post Primary Information leaflet.
2005-2006	£49,000	Funding allocated to the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment supported the publication of Ulster-Scots primary school materials for an interactive website covering primary learning resource. It was created in partnership with Stranmillis College and included the language, history and culture of Ulster-Scots.
2006-2007	£50.61	Translation of Good Behaviour leaflet and the printing of a document.
2007-2008	£162.26	Translation of Parents leaflet and the printing of documents.
2008-2009	£260.61	Translation of letter regarding Seat Belts on School Buses; Primary & Post Primary leaflet for Parents and Pupil Record and Reporting Regulations Circular.
2009-2010	£35.00	Translation of Education and Skills Authority Implementation Programme.
2012-2013	£173.95	Translation of Proposed Increases to Contributions for Members of the NI Teachers' Pension Scheme consultation document.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what assistance he can provide to Creavery Primary School in its application to increase its enrolment numbers, given the significant over subscription for 2015, and the quality of the education provided as detailed in the recent school inspection report by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

(AQW 40011/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There is currently no application with the Department for an increase in the school's enrolment number for 2015. The admissions process for the 2015/16 school year will commence in January 2015. During the process the school can apply for a temporary (for one-year) variation to its enrolment number should it have more applications for admission to the school than places available. There is no such request currently with the Department.

You should note that the school submitted several temporary variation requests to the enrolment number in respect of the 2014/15 school year and three additional places were approved.

The North Eastern Education and Library Board may, as managing authority, bring forward a Development Proposal to increase the school's enrolment permanently. No such proposal is under consideration by the Board.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how many applications have been made by Creavery Primary School for temporary variation in enrolment in the last five years; and of these applications, how many have been approved by the North Eastern Education and Library Board.

(AQW 40012/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Decisions on requests for temporary variations of school enrolment numbers are made by the Department and not the Education and Library Board.

During the last five school years, five separate applications have been made by Creavery Primary School for temporary increases of enrolment numbers, of which two were approved, giving a total of three additional places.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what measures are in place to ensure the accessibility of mainstream youth clubs for deaf young people who use sign language; and how many sign language users currently access mainstream youth clubs and how many of the youth work staff within these settings have British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language qualifications.

(AQW 40027/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Youth clubs are open and inclusive to all young people. Whilst, there are no specific measures in place for deaf young people who use sign language, individual Education and Library Boards work with the NI Deaf Youth Association where a need is identified.

The number of sign language users across registered youth groups is not held and ELBs do not routinely collate information on the number of youth work staff holding British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language qualifications.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to detail the schools which have closed following development proposals in each of the last three years, including (i) any debt which was associated with each of the schools; and (ii) what happened to the debt.

(AQW 40063/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would refer the Member to my answer to AQW 38393/11-15, tabled by Michelle McIlveen MLA and published in the Official Report on 21 November 2014.

Under the terms of the Common Funding Scheme for the Local Management of Schools, any budget deficit held by a closing school must be accounted for in full by its Funding Authority (while a surplus at closing is returned to Centre Funds of the Funding Authority). In the case of a school being discontinued to facilitate amalgamation, any closing deficit is accounted for by its Funding Authority, while a closing surplus is carried forward to the new amalgamated school.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) when the report 'Languages for the Future – Northern Ireland Languages Strategy' was commissioned by his Department; (ii) how the Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area studies was procured to prepare the report; and (iii) when the report was completed and given to his Department.

(AQW 40064/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Strategy was commissioned by my Department on 30 June 2006. It was agreed by the Minister for Education in December 2005, that as Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster were setting up a new joint Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies which had, as one of its objectives, the production of a NI Languages Strategy, DE could engage with them to agree a contract under which the two universities would undertake to develop a draft Languages Strategy. The report was formally presented to me on 18 September 2012.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education whether he has accepted or endorsed the report 'Languages for the Future – Northern Ireland Languages Strategy'; and what action he has taken on the basis of the report.

(AQW 40066/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I regard the 'Languages for the Future Northern Ireland Languages Strategy' as informing the work of my Department in regard to language policy. The report is not confined to language policy in education and as such it is not appropriate for me to endorse the report fully.

On the basis of the 'Languages for the future Northern Ireland Languages Strategy' report, I have agreed to provide funding for the formation of a Languages Council/Forum which was one of the main recommendations contained in the 'Languages for the Future – NI Languages Strategy' report. The Council will help in the development of policy, take forward the cause of languages and maintain the current momentum of support for the role of languages in the north of Ireland.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the report 'Languages for the Future – Northern Ireland Languages Strategy', particularly whether it meets the requirements of the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or

Minority Languages in relation to the Ulster-Scots language, including the requirement to take 'resolute action' to promote the Ulster-Scots language.

(AQW 40067/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I see the 'Languages for the Future Northern Ireland Languages Strategy' as informing the development of policy within the Department. As Education Minister I have looked carefully, within the resources available to me, at how best to move forward on those recommendations within the report that are focused on the teaching and learning of modern languages in schools.

The Languages for the Future strategy recommends that the provision of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages are fully applied and 'That an awareness of, and respect for, Ulster-Scots traditions be encouraged, and steps taken to examine ways of employing Ulster-Scots linguistic and cultural icons.' I regard this as meeting the requirements of the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education how much of his budget has been allocated to departmental administration in the last five years.

(AQW 40069/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The amount of budget which has been allocated to Departmental Administration in the last five years has been detailed in the table below based on the final outturn of the Department:

Year	£k
2009/10	19,695
2010/11	17,775
2011/12	18,228
2012/13	18,164
2013/14	18,419

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education how many (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary pupils are currently in receipt of a Notice in Lieu with respect to special and/or complex educational needs, broken down by Education and Library Board.

(AQW 40078/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that the number of pupils, who were issued with Notes in Lieu in respect of special or complex educational needs, during the period 1 December 2013 to 30 November 2014, is as follows:

	Primary	Post-primary
BELB	*	0
NEELB	23	*
SEELB	*	*
SELB	*	*
WELB	*	*
Total	31	10

Denotes fewer than five pupils suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education how many (i) primary; and (ii) post primary pupils are currently statemented for special or additional needs, broken down by Education and Library Board.

(AQW 40080/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information provided in the table below has been extracted from the 2013/14 school census. While the 2014/15 school census took place on the 10th October this year, finalised figures will not be available until February 2015.

Primary and post-primary pupils with a statement of special educational needs, 2013/14

School type		Belfast	Western	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern	Total
Primary	No	762	738	818	1,095	1,351	4,764
	%	3.0%	2.5%	2.1%	3.0%	3.3%	2.8%

School type		Belfast	Western	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern	Total
Post-primary	No	887	1,128	1,005	1,141	1,609	5,770
	%	3.0%	4.4%	3.2%	4.6%	4.9%	4.0%

Source: NI school census

Notes:

1. Figures include pupils at stage 5 on the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.
2. Figures relating to primary include nursery units, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education why the North Eastern Education and Library Board has moved to a single contractor arrangement for maintenance in view of the dissatisfaction experienced elsewhere with such arrangements. **(AQW 40084/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The Procurement Board, the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD), the Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) and the Construction Industry Forum (CIFNI) recognise the use of Term Service Contracts for Maintenance as best practice.

The North Eastern Education and Library Board's (NEELB's) operation of Term Service Contracts for maintenance complies with CPD procurement guidance and is in line with recommendations made to the Contracting Authorities in the north of Ireland by the Audit Office and the Assembly's Public Accounts Committee, as well as the recommendations made by an earlier independent review of the NEELB's Procurement Practice and Contract Management. For these compelling reasons, NEELB, following a tendering process, has moved to the implementation of the Term Service Contracts for maintenance in April 2014.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education to detail all the community and voluntary groups in East Londonderry that have received funding from his Department since 2011. **(AQW 40089/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has not directly provided funding to community and voluntary groups in East Derry. The Department has however provided funding via other organisations.

Details of community and voluntary groups that have received funding indirectly from the Department through other organisations are included in the table below.

Community/Voluntary Group	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Aghadowey Y.C.	√	√	√	√
Churchlands Y.C.	√			
Coleraine R.D.A.	√	√	√	√
Crisim Y.C.	√	√	√	√
Garvagh Y.F.C.	√	√	√	√
Hazelbank Y.C.	√	√	√	√
Kilrea Y.F.C.	√	√	√	√
Macosquin Yth Fellowship	√	√	√	√
Main Street Y.C.	√	√	√	√
The Cornerstone Y.C.	√	√	√	√
Aghadowey B.B.	√	√	√	√
Dunboe B.B.	√	√	√	√
1st Garvagh B.B.	√	√	√	√
Macosquin B.B.	√	√	√	√
Dunboe G.B.	√	√	√	√
Garvagh G.B.	√	√	√	√
Hazelbank G.B.	√	√	√	√
Macosquin G.B.	√	√	√	√

Community/Voluntary Group	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
1st Aghadowey Scouts				√
1st Castlerock Scouts	√	√	√	√
15th Derry CSI	√	√	√	√
Aghadowey Guides	√	√	√	√
3rd Coleraine Guides	√	√	√	√
Kilrea Guides	√	√	√	√
Ballysally Pres. Y.C.	√	√	√	√
Coleraine Gateway	√	√	√	√
Coleraine Y.F.C.	√	√	√	√
Coleraine Youth Group	√	√	√	√
Millburn Comm. Assoc			√	√
Phoenix ADHD Project			√	√
Snatch Y.C. (Ballyrashane)	√		√	√
The House Y.C.	√	√	√	√
Windyhall Y.C.	√	√	√	√
1st Coleraine B.B.	√	√	√	√
2nd Coleraine B.B.	√	√	√	√
5th Coleraine B.B.	√	√	√	√
Ballysally G.B.	√	√		√
Ballywatt G.B.	√	√	√	
New Row G.B.	√	√	√	√
St Patrick's G.B.	√	√	√	√
Terrace Row G.B.	√	√	√	√
1st Coleraine Scouts	√	√	√	√
Coleraine Girl Guide Assoc	√	√	√	√
7th Coleraine Guides	√	√	√	√
Coleraine Army Cadets	√	√	√	√
Coleraine Bapt. Campaigners	√	√	√	√
Powerhouse Y.C.	√	√	√	√
1st-3rd Portstewart B.B.	√	√	√	√
Burnside G.B.	√	√	√	√
Portstewart Pres. G.B.	√	√	√	√
1st Portstewart Scouts	√	√	√	√
Portstewart Guides	√	√	√	√
Holy Trinity Y.C.	√	√	√	√
Portrush B.B.	√	√	√	√
Ballywillan G.B.	√	√	√	√
Portrush Pres. G.B.	√	√	√	√
Ballywillan C.G.B.	√	√	√	√
Ballywillan C.L.B.	√	√	√	√
Portrush Sea Cadets	√	√	√	√
(1st) Dungiven Boys Brigade		√	√	√

Community/Voluntary Group	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
1st Ballykelly Boys Brigade	√	√	√	√
1st Balteagh Boys Brigade	√	√	√	√
1st Banagher BB	√	√	√	√
1st Roe Valley Cubs / Scouts	√	√	√	√
25th Derry Scouts		√	√	√
Ballykelly District Guide Association	√	√	√	√
Ballykelly Girls Brigade	√	√	√	√
Ballykelly Presbyterian Church Y C	√	√	√	√
Balteagh GB	√	√	√	√
Balteagh Presbyterian Church Youth Club	√	√	√	√
Banagher Girls Brigade	√	√	√	√
Benedy Youth Club	√	√	√	√
Benbradagh			√	
Bovalley Community Association Youth Club	√	√	√	√
Bovevagh Girls Brigade	√	√	√	√
Burnfoot Community Youth Club	√	√	√	√
Claudy Guides (1st)	√	√	√	√
Coolessan Community Association	√	√	√	√
Craigbane Youth Club	√	√	√	√
Cumber Upper Youth Group	√	√	√	√
Drumachose BB	√	√	√	√
Drumachose GB	√	√	√	√
Drumahoe Platoon Army Cadet Force	√	√	√	√
Drumsurn Community Association Youth Club	√	√	√	√
Dungiven Girls Brigade 316th	√	√	√	√
Dungiven Young Farmers Club	√	√	√	√
Enagh			√	
Eglinton ACF	√	√	√	√
Eglinton Scout Group	√	√	√	√
Faughanvale BB (1st)	√	√	√	√
Faughanvale Guide Units 1st	√	√	√	√
Feeny CA			√	
Gortnaghey Youth Group	√	√	√	√
Largy Presbyterian Church YC	√	√	√	√
Learmount Drop-In Centre	√	√	√	√
Lettershandoney & District Development Group	√	√		
Limavady ACF	√	√	√	√
Limavady Baptist Church Campaigners	√	√	√	√
Limavady BB 1st	√	√	√	√
Limavady BB 2nd	√	√	√	√
Limavady GB 1st	√	√	√	√
Limavady GB 2nd	√	√	√	√

Community/Voluntary Group	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
New Beginnings YC (RVRA)	√	√	√	√
Newbuildings ACF	√	√	√	√
St Ann's Brigin, Faughanvale	√	√	√	√
St Canice's Girl Guides	√	√	√	√
St Theresa's Brigin	√	√	√	√
The Glens Community Association	√	√	√	√
Ballykelly Community and Youth Association	√	√	√	√
Currynrierin YC	√	√	√	√
Foreglen YC	√	√	√	√
Lettershandoney Youth Club	√	√	√	√
Limavady Christian Drop-In Centre	√	√	√	√
Roe Valley Scout and Guides	√	√	√	√
St Mary's YC, Altinure	√	√	√	√
Upper Cumber Youth Club	√	√	√	√
Aghadowey Pre-School Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Appletree Childcare	√	√	√	√
Castlerock Community Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Crows Nest Community Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Harpurs Hill Community Early Years	√	√	√	√
Macosquin Community Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Millburn Community Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Portrush Community Pre-School Playgroup	√	√	√	√
West Bann Development (Dev Worker)	√	√	√	√
Banagher Community Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Drumsurn Parent & Toddler	√	√	√	√
Lifestart Limavady	√	√	√	√
Little Diamonds Community Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Little Rascals Community Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Magilligan Community Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Orchard Community Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Straidarran Community Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Aghadowey PG	√	√	√	√
Apple Tree Childcare	√	√	√	√
Castlerock Community PG	√	√	√	√
Causeway Pre-School		√	√	√
Crows Nest Community PG	√	√	√	√
Garvagh Pre-Sch PG	√	√	√	√
Kilrea Community PG	√	√	√	√
Little Acorns Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Macosquin Community PG	√	√	√	√
Millburn Community PG	√	√	√	√
Naiscoil Ghleann an Iolair			√	√

Community/Voluntary Group	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Playhouse Activity Centre	√	√	√	√
Portrush Pre-School PG	√	√	√	√
Sandelford Special School	√	√	√	√
St Columba's Pre-School PG	√	√	√	√
St Colum's Pre-School Centre	√	√	√	√
St Malachy's PG	√	√	√	√
Stepping Stones Creche, Coleraine	√	√	√	√
Sunshine Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Watt Fun Community PG	√	√	√	√
Banagher Community Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Greysteel Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Little Rascals's PG	√	√	√	√
Magilligan Community PG	√	√	√	√
Naiscoil Leim an Mhadaidh	√	√	√	√
Orchard Community Playgroup	√	√	√	√
Roe Vally Community PG	√	√	√	√
Roundabout Playgroup	√	√	√	√
The Dry Arch Centre	√	√	√	√
Coleraine Education Community Project				√

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of broadband access speeds at schools; and to detail internet speeds at (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools in East Antrim.

(AQW 40141/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Improving the broadband access speeds (bandwidth) available to schools is a key aspect of the current C2k Education Network (ni) contract. All schools have now received their enhanced bandwidth under this contract.

Under the previous C2k contract primary schools had an average bandwidth of 0.5MB. Primary schools with fewer than 500 pupils now have a minimum of 4MB and primary schools with 500 plus pupils have a minimum of 10MB.

Similarly, bandwidth in post-primary schools has increased from 2MB to a minimum of 10MB for schools with fewer than 500 pupils and a minimum of 100MB for schools with 500 plus pupils.

As part of the C2k contract all schools are eligible to an automatic bandwidth upgrade should their demand exceed certain levels of usage within a calendar month. C2k monitor all schools and upgrade their bandwidth if usage dictates. The following are the maximum bandwidths available by school type/size:

- Primary Schools (< 500 pupils) 10MB
- Primary Schools (500+ pupils) 100MB
- Post-Primary Schools (< 500 pupils) and Special Schools 100MB
- Post-Primary Schools (500+ pupils) 200MB

As schools use the new C2k services more and more and increasingly stream content, it is recognised that they will need to have an upgrade in bandwidth.

If a school reports any performance issues via the C2k service desk, this is investigated to determine if the bandwidth is an issue. C2k and Capita have reviewed the service desk calls received from schools in the East Antrim area during the current school term and only one school has raised an issue in relation to the internet. It was determined that this was due to the school's high location on the North Coast and the microwave dish solution that had to be put in place. A second microwave dish has been supplied to alleviate the unique location/weather related issues.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education if, in determining the allocation of annual funding to a school, any consideration is given to whether the school has its own sports pitches or hires pitches for use by the pupils.

(AQW 40165/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The arrangements for funding of schools are outlined in the Common Funding Scheme, available on the Department's website www.deni.gov.uk/schools and [infrastructure/schools_finance/common_funding_scheme_2014-15](http://www.deni.gov.uk/infrastructure/schools_finance/common_funding_scheme_2014-15).

As detailed in the scheme, schools are funded on a range of measures and associated factors, none of which take account of whether or not a school has its own sports pitches.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education which mainstream schools in the Southern Education and Library Board area offer autism specific support class placement for (i) Key Stage 1; ii) Key Stage 2 only; (iii) both Key Stage 1 and 2.

(AQW 40216/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board has advised that autism specific support class placement is offered in the following ten mainstream schools for Key Stage 1 pupils:-

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ■ Christian Brothers PS, Armagh | ■ St Joseph's Convent PS, Newry |
| ■ Cookstown PS | ■ St Joseph's PS, Bessbrook |
| ■ Dungannon PS | ■ Kilkeel PS |
| ■ Edenderry PS, Portadown | ■ Primate Dixon PS, Coalisland |
| ■ St Mary's PS, Banbridge | ■ Armstrong PS, Armagh |

At Key Stage 2 these schools offer Learning Support Centre provision as part of an inclusive programme aimed at reintegrating them back into mainstream classes.

Department for Employment and Learning

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given the recent report published by Barclays which estimated that local shoppers will buy £41m worth of goods online annually by 2018, what discussions he has had with the local Higher Education and Further Education providers on the provision of a dedicated qualification in eCommerce to help local businesses maximise the opportunities presented by the internet.

(AQW 39279/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Skills Solutions Service have worked with People 1st, the Sector Skills Council for Retail, Hospitality, Tourism, Leisure and Transport sector to develop and pilot a new Qualifications and Credit Framework Level 2 Award in Digital Skills. The pilots were delivered in Cookstown and Bangor with twenty small independent retailers achieving a Level 2 Award in Digital Marketing Using Social Media. Plans to roll out provision across Northern Ireland have been placed on hold pending resolution of funding availability.

This short accredited qualification is a brand new, tailor-made suite of training programmes specifically designed to help small businesses develop their knowledge of the internet, social media and the benefits of getting their business online. From developing a website to using email marketing and social media, the Digital Skills programme equips small businesses with the confidence, skills and tools they need to benefit from the rapid growth of e-tailing and ultimately increase their bottom line.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the new build teachers block at the Magee campus of the University of Ulster.

(AQW 39531/11-15)

Dr Farry: The economic appraisal for the new teaching block at the Magee campus of the University of Ulster is in discussion between officials as there are a number of outstanding issues that remain to be addressed. Once these matters have been addressed it will be passed to me for approval. Following this it will be submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel for its approval as the request for funding is in excess of £5m.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much it costs his Department each year to educate students from the Republic of Ireland; and how much is received from the Republic of Ireland for these students, for each of the last three years.

(AQW 39611/11-15)

Dr Farry: The funding cost to my Department for educating students from the Republic of Ireland attending higher education institutions and further education colleges in Northern Ireland, for each of the last three academic years for which this information is available, is as follows:

Academic Year	Higher Education Institutions	Further Education Colleges	Total
2010/11	£10,235,846	£7,757,384	£17,993,230
2011/12	£8,050,555	£8,095,009	£16,145,564
2012/13	£6,628,260	£7,120,887	£13,749,147

The amounts shown for higher education institutions exclude funding for post-graduate research students and certain other

post-graduate students. Due to the funding methodology used, it is not possible to calculate an exact figure for ROI-domiciled students within these categories. However, the cost of these students is estimated to average £1.6m per annum over the last three years.

In common with other EU countries, the Republic of Ireland does not contribute to the financial costs associated with the provision of education in Northern Ireland, which is a right of EU citizens accessing services, including education, across borders.

To put the above costs into perspective, the numbers of Republic of Ireland-domiciled enrolments at Northern Ireland institutions and colleges are as follows:

Academic Year	Higher Education Institutions	Further Education Colleges	Total
2010/11	4,285	4,484	8,769
2011/12	3,520	4,557	8,077
2012/13	2,835	4,253	7,088

The numbers of Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled on HE courses in the Republic of Ireland are as follows:

Academic Year	Students Enrolled
2010/11	1,030
2011/12	965
2012/13	980

My Department does not hold information in relation to the numbers of Northern Ireland-domiciled students enrolled on further education courses in the Republic of Ireland. I understand this data from the Republic of Ireland will not be available until new monitoring systems are in place in 2017.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether the projections his Department is using for potential job creation associated with a reduction in Corporation Tax are premised on any assumptions relating to increased skills levels. **(AQW 39649/11-15)**

Dr Farry: Previous research completed in May 2011 by the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment's (DETI) Economic Advisory Forum estimated the economic impact that a reduction in the rate of Corporation Tax to 12.5% could have on the Northern Ireland economy in terms of jobs created.

Over and above this research, I had identified a need for further focused research to determine what supply-side steps needed to be taken to prepare for and secure the maximum economic benefits from a lower Corporation Tax rate. Therefore my Department commissioned research on the impact of a lower rate in Northern Ireland on the demand for skills and employability, ensuring consistency and read across with the original DETI commissioned work. This research was published in June 2012.

The research showed that skills and employability foremost are central to securing the full economic benefits offered by a lower Corporation Tax rate environment. In terms of skills levels, the research showed that over the next two decades in the low tax scenario, the stock of jobs requiring postgraduate qualifications is forecast to rise fastest, whilst the stock of jobs requiring no qualifications is forecast to fall most.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether higher education institutions have any plans to prioritise academic or vocational course as a response to the needs of the local economy. **(AQW 39655/11-15)**

Dr Farry: The Higher Education Strategy, Graduating to Success, recognises the need for higher education in Northern Ireland to be responsive to the needs of the economy.

A key issue for the sector is in rebalancing the profile of higher education so that the qualifications offered more closely reflect economic needs. The Strategy also acknowledges that provision needs to be flexible in order to respond to the differing needs of students.

Neither the Department nor the higher education sector prioritise between academic or vocational courses as both routes are equally recognised in increasing the number of people with higher level qualifications required to grow the Northern Ireland economy. As well as offering traditional higher education routes, higher education providers are also engaged in the development and delivery of 'vocational' higher level qualifications such as Foundation Degrees and Higher Level Apprenticeships.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students from the Republic of Ireland are currently availing of further and higher education in Northern Ireland Regional Colleges; and at what annual cost.

(AQW 39663/11-15)

Dr Farry: The most recent figures available, for the 2012/13 academic year, show that 2,879 students from the Republic of Ireland were taking higher and further education courses at further education colleges in Northern Ireland, at a cost to my Department of £7,120,887.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people in each constituency are enrolled in apprenticeships.

(AQW 39694/11-15)

Dr Farry: As of July 2014 occupancy in the ApprenticeshipsNI programme across all Northern Ireland constituencies was 6,296.

The most up-to-date analysis of apprenticeship occupancy, by constituency, as produced by my department, is included at Annex A.

The full statistical analysis of apprenticeships can be found on the NIdirect website at:

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/publications/r-and-s-stats/apprenticeshipsni-statistical-bulletins/appsni-sept07-jan14.htm>

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what impact the proposed cuts to higher education will have on young people of school leaving age and the availability of university places in Northern Ireland in their chosen course.

(AQW 39696/11-15)

Dr Farry: The proposed reduction in the budget available to my Department will impact on the number of places available in both higher and further education institutions in Northern Ireland. The universities have stated publicly that the proposed reductions could result in the loss of around 1,000 university places. These are places that would normally be available for first year students. They have also indicated that there may need to be staff reductions of up to 650 posts in addition to reducing the number of students enrolled. This will inevitably mean that the range of courses on offer at the universities will also reduce.

Those young people seeking to gain a place at a university here will find the competition for places much stronger and their range of course options will be more limited. Many will only be able to enter higher education by taking up a place elsewhere in Great Britain at a greater personal cost to themselves and their families. This is detrimental to our economy as we know that around 40% of those individuals will not return to Northern Ireland once they have graduated. Some may try to find a place at one of our further education colleges but there is a possibility that up to 16,000 places will be lost that would normally be available for 16-19 year olds.

The overall picture for our young people is bleak if the proposed budget reductions are agreed. However, I am working to mitigate the impact of these reductions on young people. We need to invest in both higher and further education to ensure the continued delivery of highly skilled workers for our indigenous employers and to attract more foreign direct investment. On a more human level we need to ensure that there are adequate opportunities for our young people to acquire the skills necessary to take up high value employment in our economy.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action has been taken by the Belfast Metropolitan College to recover the John Luke mural that was formerly in the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education complex at Millfield up until 2003 and to ensure that it is back in public ownership and accessible to the public.

(AQW 39702/11-15)

Dr Farry: In July 2000 the, then, Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (the college) signed a contract with Northwin to provide a new Millfield campus under a PFI agreement, and at that date Northwin took control of the Millfield site, which had the John Luke Mural painted on one of its walls.

The terms of the PFI contract between Northwin and the college specified that the mural was "to be removed by others". When the new campus was delivered in 2002 a demolition contract was awarded, by Northwin, to Eastwoods without any reference to the terms of the PFI contract regarding how the mural was to be removed. A standard demolition contract was used which included salvage clauses that Eastwoods claimed gave them ownership of the mural. This was disputed by the college, but after protracted negotiations ownership was conceded to Eastwoods on consideration of legal advice.

The college has made a number of approaches to Eastwoods seeking to take the John Luke Mural back into college ownership. However, none of these approaches have been successful. An application was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2001 to remove the mural from the old Millfield site and donate it to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. However, this application was unsuccessful when the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum was unable to provide firm proposals with regard to displaying the mural.

The mural was moved from the Millfield campus to the Paint Shop at Titanic Quarter in February 2003. It was subsequently moved to Walter Graham's Haulage, Airport Road, Belfast and, as far as I understand, it remains at this site.

My Department has responsibility for further education colleges, and approved the college's request to sign the PFI contract. Departmental officials also had various discussions with the college as the negotiations around the relocation and ownership of the John Luke Mural progressed, and the Department remains willing to consider any proposals that the college brings forward in relation to the mural.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how the John Luke mural that was formerly in the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education complex at Millfield up until 2003 passed out of the ownership of the Institute.
(AQW 39703/11-15)

Dr Farry: In July 2000 the, then, Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (the college) signed a contract with Northwin to provide a new Millfield campus under a PFI agreement, and at that date Northwin took control of the Millfield site, which had the John Luke Mural painted on one of its walls.

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Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether cuts to higher education funding will lead to a need for prioritisation of vocational or academic courses.
(AQW 39748/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not prioritise between academic or vocational courses as both routes are equally recognised in increasing the number of people with higher level qualifications required to grow the Northern Ireland economy.

At this stage my Department cannot make final decisions on how the cuts will be managed until the public consultation has been completed and the detail of the cuts has been confirmed.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the grants available from his Department for community groups.
(AQW 39776/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning is the Managing Authority for the European Social Fund (ESF). The Strategic Aim of the ESF Programme for 2014-2020 in Northern Ireland is to combat poverty and enhance social inclusion by reducing economic inactivity, and to increase the skills base of those currently in work and future potential participants in the workforce.

The Programme will fund activity to enhance and extend employment opportunities, in particular for those groups at a disadvantage in the labour market; these include those who are unemployed, including long term unemployed, or economically inactive.

There will also be a focus on supporting Young people aged 16-24 who are not in employment, education or training and on people with a disability.

The total value of the new ESF Programme is €513.4m. This amount is made up of €205.4m (40%) from the European Union, which requires 60% match funding of €308m.

ESF funding is awarded on a competitive basis. Applications are objectively assessed by an independent assessment Panel and any application that meets the required threshold will be considered for funding. The call for applications opened on Friday 28th November with a closing date of 9th January 2015. Comprehensive guidance notes were provided for all potential applicants on the Department's website.

The Department has also administered the Collaboration and Innovation Fund, which has provided funding of over £9 million to organisations from the community, voluntary and educational sectors. This has provided support, between December 2012 and March 2015, to young people who are not in employment, education or training. Further support for this type of activity will be via the 2014-20 European Social Fund programme.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether the £10,000 loan for post-graduate students, announced by the Chancellor in his Autumn Statement, will apply in Northern Ireland or to Northern Ireland students in Great Britain; and if not, whether he has any plans to introduce such a scheme.

(AQW 39777/11-15)

Dr Farry: As student finance is a devolved responsibility, the loans for post-graduate students announced by the Chancellor in his Autumn Statement will apply to English students (and EU students resident in England) studying in UK higher education institutions.

My Department will be considering the merits of establishing a similar scheme in Northern Ireland as part of its review of higher education funding in the Spring.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education made an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for £44,500 to remove the John Luke mural from the old Millfield site and donate it to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum.

(AQW 39779/11-15)

Dr Farry: In July 2000 the, then, Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (the college) signed a contract with Northwin to provide a new Millfield campus under a PFI agreement, and at that date Northwin took control of the Millfield site, which had the John Luke Mural painted on one of its walls.

The terms of the PFI contract between Northwin and the college specified that the mural was "to be removed by others". When the new campus was delivered in 2002 a demolition contract was awarded, by Northwin, to Eastwoods without any reference to the terms of the PFI contract regarding how the mural was to be removed. A standard demolition contract was used which included salvage clauses that Eastwoods claimed gave them ownership of the mural. This was disputed by the college, but after protracted negotiations ownership was conceded to Eastwoods on consideration of legal advice.

The college has made a number of approaches to Eastwoods seeking to take the John Luke Mural back into college ownership. However, none of these approaches have been successful. An application was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2001 to remove the mural from the old Millfield site and donate it to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. However, this application was unsuccessful when the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum was unable to provide firm proposals with regard to displaying the mural.

The mural was moved from the Millfield campus to the Paint Shop at Titanic Quarter in February 2003. It was subsequently moved to Walter Graham's Haulage, Airport Road, Belfast and, as far as I understand, it remains at this site.

My Department has responsibility for further education colleges, and approved the college's request to sign the PFI contract. Departmental officials also had various discussions with the college as the negotiations around the relocation and ownership of the John Luke Mural progressed, and the Department remains willing to consider any proposals that the college brings forward in relation to the mural.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when the John Luke mural was removed from the Millfield complex of the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education.

(AQW 39780/11-15)

Dr Farry: In July 2000 the, then, Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (the college) signed a contract with Northwin to provide a new Millfield campus under a PFI agreement, and at that date Northwin took control of the Millfield site, which had the John Luke Mural painted on one of its walls.

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Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he will work with the Belfast Metropolitan College to ensure that the John Luke mural, that was formerly in the Millfield complex of the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, is recovered.

(AQW 39781/11-15)

Dr Farry: In July 2000 the, then, Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (the college) signed a contract with Northwin to provide a new Millfield campus under a PFI agreement, and at that date Northwin took control of the Millfield site, which had the John Luke Mural painted on one of its walls.

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Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning who was the accounting officer in the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education when the Private Finance Initiative contract was drawn up for the redevelopment of the Millfield complex.

(AQW 39782/11-15)

Dr Farry: In July 2000 the, then, Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (the college) signed a contract with Northwin to provide a new Millfield campus under a PFI agreement, and at that date Northwin took control of the Millfield site, which had the John Luke Mural painted on one of its walls.

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My Department has responsibility for further education colleges, and approved the college’s request to sign the PFI contract. Departmental officials also had various discussions with the college as the negotiations around the relocation and ownership of the John Luke Mural progressed, and the Department remains willing to consider any proposals that the college brings forward in relation to the mural.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what role his Department had in the Private Finance Initiative contract for the redevelopment of the Millfield complex; and whether there were any discussions around the relocation of the John Luke mural.

(AQW 39783/11-15)

Dr Farry: In July 2000 the, then, Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (the college) signed a contract with Northwin to provide a new Millfield campus under a PFI agreement, and at that date Northwin took control of the Millfield site, which had the John Luke Mural painted on one of its walls.

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Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what will replace the Employment Service Support programme from March 2015.

(AQW 39788/11-15)

Dr Farry: Funding of elements of the Employment Service Support Programme, such as First Start, Step Ahead 50+ and Yes, will come to a natural end at 31st March 2015. In addition, the design of the Department's main back to work programme, Steps 2 Success, will change the way in which the Employment Service supports its clients in preparing for and moving them towards and into work.

As a result, the Employment Service frontline staff will have an enhanced role in supporting their clients during the initial 9 to 12 months before they are mandated onto Steps 2 Success.

The Department is actively considering the way forward to deliver the remaining training support it requires as part of the Employment Service Client Offer and it is hoped to have a decision on the way forward by the New Year.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how the United Youth Pilot Programmes will be delivered in the Foyle region.

(AQW 39790/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning has led on the design of the United Youth Programme. A draft outcomes/principles framework has been developed using a co-design approach. This will be further explored during a pilot phase. The pilot phase will commence in early 2015, subject to central funding being available, to allow the work to be completed during the 2015/16 financial year. During this phase, the Department will consider how the United Youth Programme can be effectively delivered, including within the Foyle region.

The Department is committed to delivering the pilot activity across as many areas as possible within funding constraints.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning on how many quangos does each of his appointments to the Labour Relations Agency already serve.

(AQW 39795/11-15)

Dr Farry: The current Board of the Labour Relations Agency consists of; a Chair; three employer representatives; three employee representatives; and three independent members.

Of the 10 members, three hold other public body membership as follows:

- one is an independent member of the Board of DCAL;
- one is a member of the General Consumer Council; and
- one is an employer representative member of the Industrial Court and is also a member of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the budgetary constraints to his Department, how he will protect organisations who are funded by the European Social Fund, whose client groups include those with mental health needs, learning and physical disabilities, lone parents and disadvantaged young people.

(AQW 39818/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Strategic Aim of the NI ESF Programme 2014-2020 is to combat poverty and enhance social inclusion by reducing economic inactivity and to increase the skills base of those currently in work and future potential participants in the workforce.

The Programme will fund activity to enhance and extend employment opportunities, in particular, for those groups at a disadvantage in the labour market, such as lone parents, and other groups who are unemployed, including long term

unemployed, or economically inactive. Almost 20% of funding has been allocated for the priority supporting unemployed and inactive people.

A quarter of the programme is ring fenced for projects supporting people with a disability, reflecting the importance DEL attaches to supporting this sector. Almost 20% has been ring fenced to support young people not in employment, education or training.

The total value of the new ESF Programme will be €513.4m – over 20% more than the initial allocation to the previous programme. This amount is made up of €205.4m (40%) from the European Union, which requires 60% match funding of €308m.

ESF funding will be awarded on a competitive basis. Applications will be objectively assessed by expert panels and any application that meets the required threshold will be considered for funding. As part of the call for applications, comprehensive guidance notes are available for all potential applicants.

I would fully expect significant numbers of successful bids to come forward from the voluntary and community sector, as has been the case in previous ESF programmes. Statutory organisations will also be required to submit applications as part of the same process. The ESF funding can be released to any organisation which can raise the necessary match funding.

If the current draft budget stands without amendment, my Department will have difficulty in making available match funding for successful projects at the level it has been able to do in the past (typically 25% of the required 60% match funding for applicants, who have been required to find the remaining 35% from public sources).

I will also no longer have in my budget the £35m additional funding the Executive made available in 2012 to deliver the Pathways to Success strategy and other initiatives in response to the economic situation at that time.

With regard to areas of my Department's work that previously were mainstreamed, covered through block grant, that we could consider funding under the European Social Fund, areas such as the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS), the Learner Access and Engagement Programme, the Collaboration and Innovation Fund (CIF) and the Community Family Support Programme are in large part already delivered by voluntary and community sector organisations and we are seeking to rationalise the range of funding streams through which we support the sector.

In the current financial context, it is also important that we minimise duplication between programmes funded by my Department, and that is why we are seeking to focus the ESF programme on level 1 provision and other support required by learners with barriers to employability, in which voluntary and community providers have particular expertise. At the same time, FE colleges and other Departmental programmes will have to reduce their level 1 provision and concentrate on higher level courses.

To this end, the six further education colleges are currently working on a combined application for ESF funding for a project at Level 1 and below.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of budgetary constraints within his Department, which areas of his Department's work, previously funded through the block grant, will he consider making applications under the European Social Fund to resource.

(AQW 39821/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Strategic Aim of the NI ESF Programme 2014-2020 is to combat poverty and enhance social inclusion by reducing economic inactivity and to increase the skills base of those currently in work and future potential participants in the workforce.

The Programme will fund activity to enhance and extend employment opportunities, in particular, for those groups at a disadvantage in the labour market, such as lone parents, and other groups who are unemployed, including long term unemployed, or economically inactive. Almost 20% of funding has been allocated for the priority supporting unemployed and inactive people.

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The total value of the new ESF Programme will be €513.4m – over 20% more than the initial allocation to the previous programme. This amount is made up of €205.4m (40%) from the European Union, which requires 60% match funding of €308m.

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To this end, the six further education colleges are currently working on a combined application for ESF funding for a project at Level 1 and below.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the total spent on each of the (i) capital; and (ii) other projects which have not proceeded since May 2007, including the loss resulting from each project.

(AQW 39841/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has not identified projects, neither capital nor other projects, where spend was incurred but the project did not proceed since May 2007. There have therefore been no resulting losses identified.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how recent budget constraints could affect the new capital builds his Department are planning in the next three years.

(AQW 39856/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Departmental Draft Budget for 2015-16 was published on the Department's website on 4 December 2014 for consultation. The document can be accessed at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/consultation-zone/del-draft-budget-2015-16.htm>.

The Budget allocation for capital for 2014-15 was £55m. For 2015-16 the Department was planning to invest capital of £50m in the higher and further education sectors, in line with the allocation in 2014-15. The current Budget proposals for the Department only permit capital investment of £33m.

The Budget reductions will therefore curtail the Department's ability to invest in capital projects and the Department is examining the scope for using alternative capital funding mechanisms to support its capital investment programme.

The decisions regarding the 2015-16 capital allocations have not been taken and will not be taken until after the budget consultation process which ends on 29th December.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has any plans to introduce voluntary redundancy packages in the Further Education sector; and whether funding exists within his Department to cover the cost of voluntary redundancies within the sector.[R]

(AQW 39876/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not have the statutory authority to intervene in employment matters in the further education sector, including the introduction of voluntary redundancy schemes.

All staffing matters are the responsibility of each college as an employer.

In terms of the financing of any voluntary redundancies from the further education sector, I can say that there is currently no funding available from my Department.

I assume upfront redundancy costs will be centrally funded from the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the geographical range of Northern Regional College campuses.[R]

(AQW 39877/11-15)

Dr Farry: In July 2005, my Department commissioned an economic appraisal to look at the future size and structure of the management units of the further education sector to determine how the colleges could best deliver the Department's strategic aims. This appraisal can be found on the DEL website. As a result of its recommendations, Northern Regional College (NRC) was formed from the merger of Causeway Institute (campuses in Coleraine and Ballymoney), East Antrim Institute (campuses in Newtownabbey and Larne) and the North East Institute (campuses in Magherafelt, Antrim and Ballymena).

The new college structure was created to provide leading edge facilities to better meet the skills training required in a rapidly changing economy. To meet these needs NRC offers students an extensive range of higher education, further education, Training for Success, ApprenticeshipsNI and part-time courses, delivered across its campuses. These courses are available

to and studied by students from all over Northern Ireland and beyond, and are not restricted to students living within the locality of the college campuses. There is therefore no 'geographical range' as such, although most students who attend NRC will be within relatively straightforward travelling distance from one of its campuses.

You may also wish to note that NRC is currently preparing an outline business case which will consider not only the future size and structure of the college estate, but also the courses to be delivered at each campus.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of apprenticeships available in each constituency.

(AQW 39900/11-15)

Dr Farry: My department's ApprenticeshipsNI programme is employer-led training provision, with employers creating apprenticeship positions in line with their future business needs. It is therefore employers who determine the number of apprenticeships available in each constituency.

Statistics detailing ApprenticeshipsNI occupancy, by constituency, are included at Annex A.

A full copy of the most recently published ApprenticeshipsNI Statistical Bulletin can be viewed by following the link below.

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/publications/r-and-s-stats/apprenticeshipsni-statistical-bulletins/appsni-sept07-july14.htm>

Annex A

Occupancy (1) on ApprenticeshipsNI by Parliamentary Constituency and Level, July 2014

Parliamentary Constituency (2)	Level 2	Level 2/3	Level 3 Progression	Option not assigned (3)	Total
Belfast East	196	50	131	2	379
Belfast North	222	58	151	1	432
Belfast South	176	34	113	2	325
Belfast West	193	60	168	2	423
East Antrim	140	61	155	1	357
East Londonderry	99	18	106	-	223
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	113	45	187	1	346
Foyle	186	10	126	-	322
Lagan Valley	153	38	122	-	313
Mid-Ulster	185	59	131	1	376
Newry & Armagh	181	52	100	2	335
North Antrim	177	48	172	-	397
North Down	144	35	88	-	267
South Antrim	210	43	176	2	431
South Down	148	28	152	-	328
Strangford	142	39	120	-	301
Upper Bann	201	42	118	2	363
West Tyrone	125	19	173	1	318
Not Known (4)	26	2	32	-	60
Total	3,017	741	2,521	17	6,296

- (1) Refers to the number of participants on programme at a particular point in time.
- (2) Parliamentary Constituency is based on a participant's home postcode.
- (3) An apprentice for whom level is not known is most likely due to the fact that the participant has not been on programme long enough to complete their initial assessment period and establish which level they should be on.
- (4) "Not Known" includes participants for whom postcode is not known/incorrect or where postcode cannot be mapped to Parliamentary Constituency.

Source: Data extracted from the Department's Client Management System on 31st October 2014

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why the latest European Social Fund guidance places restrictions on salary levels and specifies that staff should not receive cost of living increases and only those on existing contracts can receive annual increments.

(AQW 39926/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department, while developing the new European Social Fund Programme, has worked to bring a uniform approach to reimbursement of salary costs across the Programme to ensure value for money. European Social Fund funding is public funding, and it would be unfair at the current time of financial constraint for it to be used to remunerate people more generously than public servants. As the guidance notes for organisations applying to the ESF Programme make clear, my Department will support organisations in meeting their contractual commitments to staff within the recommended payscales.

Voluntary and community organisations as employers are free to top up the salaries set out in these payscales from their own resources if they consider it appropriate.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to the latest European Social Fund guidance which places restrictions on salary levels and specifies that staff should not receive cost of living increases and only those on existing contracts can receive annual increments, whether it is within his remit to impose non-negotiated terms and conditions of employment to external organisations.

(AQW 39927/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department, while developing the new European Social Fund Programme, has worked to bring a uniform approach to reimbursement of salary costs across the Programme to ensure value for money. European Social Fund funding is public funding, and it would be unfair at the current time of financial constraint for it to be used to remunerate people more generously than public servants. As the guidance notes for organisations applying to the ESF Programme make clear, my Department will support organisations in meeting their contractual commitments to staff within the recommended payscales.

Voluntary and community organisations as employers are free to top up the salaries set out in these payscales from their own resources if they consider it appropriate.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what assurances he can give that projects within his Department, for which funding applications are submitted to the European Social Fund, will be judged fairly and on merit alone.

(AQW 39944/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department will establish Assessment Panels to examine all the applications that are submitted to the European Social Fund. The Assessment Panels will consist of members that are drawn from across the relevant business areas in the Department and also independent representation with relevant background in the specific Investment Priorities being assessed, such as disability or young people.

The Assessment Panels will follow a robust and transparent process to ensure all applications are judged on merit and against the specific criteria detailed in the application form.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how areas of his Department's work, previously funded through the Block Grant, which will now be applying to the European Social Fund (ESF), meet the conditionality requirements of the ESF.

(AQW 39945/11-15)

Dr Farry: All applicants to the ESF Programme will have to meet the criteria as outlined in the Guidance Notes and application form fully. These criteria include outlining how duplication with other local/geographical provision or other government programmes is avoided and/or additionality is demonstrated. It is very difficult to comment specifically on any application until it has been received and fully assessed by a process that is outlined below.

My Department is establishing Assessment Panels to examine all the applications that are submitted to the European Social Fund. It is anticipated the Assessment Panels will consist of members that are drawn from across the relevant business areas in the Department and also independent representation with relevant background in the specific Investment Priorities being assessed such as disability or young people.

The Assessment Panels will follow a robust and transparent process to ensure all applications are judged on merit and the specific criteria that are detailed in the application form.

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) why in the next round of European Social Funding voluntary and community providers will only be permitted to offer level one qualifications; (ii) why this restriction has been placed on an employability programme; and (iii) to outline his expectations for people enrolled on this programme, including those who wish to gain further qualifications.

(AQW 39961/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the current financial context, it is important that we minimise duplication between programmes funded by my Department, and that is why we are seeking to focus the European Social Fund (ESF) programme on level 1 provision and other support required by learners with barriers to employability, in which voluntary and community providers have particular expertise. Often, such additional support is given to individuals who are pursuing higher level qualifications at, for example, a Further Education college, or in order to prepare and signpost them to do so.

At the same time, FE colleges and other Departmental programmes will have to reduce their level 1 provision and concentrate on higher level courses.

I have, however, considered the representations made on this issue and am content that the guidance for applicants to the ESF Programme should be amended to allow a degree of additional flexibility on the level of qualifications to be supported under strand TO 9(i)a of the Programme, for participants with disabilities.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 39341/11-15, whether the calculation and formula used by the Higher Education Funding Council for England is applicable and directly transferable to Northern Ireland. **(AQW 39981/11-15)**

Dr Farry: Until 2012, Northern Ireland used the same funding methodology as England, which was developed and calculated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

As a result of changes to the fee regime in England, HEFCE has had to modify its funding model for English institutions which means that it is no longer appropriate to Northern Ireland in its new form. However, HEFCE continues to use the pre 2012 model to calculate the distribution of funds to Northern Ireland's universities on behalf of the Department and has agreed to do so up to and including AY 2016/17. As the Department will be responsible for calculating and administering the distribution of funding from then, the current Funding Review of Higher Education is considering whether the pre 2012 HEFCE model remains appropriate for the higher education sector here or if an alternative might be more applicable. My Department will be formally consulting with the sector to seek the views of stakeholders during the early part of 2015.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the work carried out by the groups funded under the Collaboration Innovation Fund Programme is not lost, given the constraints under the new European Social Fund Programme, especially the need for a cash asset of 10 per cent. **(AQW 40004/11-15)**

Dr Farry: From April 2015 my Department intends to increase the level of support to young people aged 16 to 24 who are not in employment, education and training (NEET). I propose to introduce a new investment priority under the European Social Fund (aimed at achieving sustainable integration of young people into the labour market (ESF) with particular emphasis on those young people who are at risk of social exclusion or from marginalised communities. Between April 2015 and March 2022, funding of over £124M (including match funding) will be available to support young people in this category.

I have secured funding of over £49 million from the European Social Fund to meet 40% funding costs of 'NEET' now that the Commission has adopted the Operational Plan. The remaining 60 %, amounting to £75 million, will be met through match funding which my department is currently taking steps to source. I am unable to confirm, at this moment, the level of match funding which my Department will provide but I am hopeful that this funding will be in place to enable European Social Fund projects to commence activity in April 2015. However, I will not be in a position to provide sufficient match funding if there is insufficient money for DEL in the final budget. The provision will draw upon the good practices tested under the Collaboration and Innovation Fund and reflected in the current evaluation of the Pathways to Success Strategy. I am confident that this approach will provide the training and support required to address the barriers experienced by this group.

There are no significant changes to the proposed financial capability assessment for the new ESF Programme, with the exception of a condition that all applicants must demonstrate the capability of 10% net cash assets in their most recent set of annual accounts.

One of the main reasons for introducing this specific condition is that the new ESF Programme for 2014-2020 has no facility for providing a 30% pre-payment advance, unlike the 2007-2013 ESF Programme. Any pre-payment advance is likely to be limited to 5% in each year of the new programme.

Given that actual ESF expenditure has to be paid out in full by an ESF project before submitting a claim to the ESF Managing Authority, a project must therefore have access to the relevant cash resources. It is therefore imperative that a project has net cash assets to fulfil this requirement. If a project has no or limited net cash assets, then potentially they would not be able to fully comply with the ESF financial claims process.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has considered implementing the proposals contained within the Committee for Finance and Personnel's Report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector that are applicable for his Department and its agencies. **(AQW 40007/11-15)**

Dr Farry: I have read the Committee's Report and can confirm that some proposals have been implemented by my Department, while other proposals may be introduced in due course. There are others which would be appropriate for consideration for wider implementation across the NICS.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people with a learning disability in (i) Derry; and (ii) Northern Ireland participate in projects funded by the European Social Fund. **(AQW 40028/11-15)**

Dr Farry: A record of home address is not held centrally for participants on the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme 2007-2013, and it is not possible to quantify the number of participants residing in any specific location.

A total of 12 projects that target primarily people with a learning disability are currently funded under the Programme, and since April 2011 the projects have assisted a total of 6,236 participants throughout Northern Ireland. None of the 12 projects have headquarter premises in Derry/Londonderry, but some of the projects operate on a regional basis and provide assistance to participants throughout Northern Ireland, including the North West area.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the amount of funding allocated under the current European Social Fund programme to projects which primarily support people with a (i) physical disability; and (ii) learning disability.

(AQW 40030/11-15)

Dr Farry: A total of 10 projects that target primarily people with a physical disability are currently funded under Priority 1 of the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (ESF) Programme 2007-13. Over the period 1 April 2011 – 31 March 2015 the projects have been offered funding amounting to £ 10.17 million, representing ESF support of 40% and a contribution of 35% of project costs by the Department for Employment and Learning.

A further 12 projects that target primarily people with a learning disability have been offered funding amounting to £18.88 million, including ESF support of 40% and a contribution of 35% by the Department for Employment and Learning.

The projects may be defined as targeting primarily participants with a physical or learning disability; however, some projects provide for both groups of participants and also for those with multiple disabilities.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when applicants for funding from the European Social Fund will be informed if their application has been successful; and what plans the Department has put in place to support organisations in the event of any funding gap.

(AQW 40032/11-15)

Dr Farry: (a)The Department anticipates advising those successful applicants to the European Social Fund in mid- end of February 2015. This is to allow for economic appraisals to be completed in March 2015 with an aim for funding being approved from 1 April 2015.

There are no plans in place for gap funding as this is the start of a new European Social Fund programming period and gap funding is not permitted.

(b)The Department will undertake a review the process for implementing the Open 'Call for Applications' to the European Social Fund once the process has been completed to ensure any relevant lessons learned are taken on board for future application calls.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the Chancellor's announcement in the Autumn statement that students taking postgraduate degrees can avail of student loans of up to £10,000, whether he intends to introduce a similar scheme.

(AQW 40118/11-15)

Dr Farry: The scheme announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement is expected to make student loans available to English domiciled postgraduate taught students studying in UK higher education institutions from the 2016/17 academic year onwards.

My Department will be considering the introduction of a similar scheme in Northern Ireland as part of its current review of higher education funding in the Spring.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the community and voluntary groups in East Londonderry that have received funding from his Department since 2011.

(AQW 40125/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning is the Managing Authority for the European Social Fund (ESF). The Strategic Aim of the ESF Programme for 2014-2020 in Northern Ireland is to combat poverty and enhance social inclusion by reducing economic inactivity, and to increase the skills base of those currently in work and future potential participants in the workforce.

The Programme will fund activity to enhance and extend employment opportunities, in particular for those groups at a disadvantage in the labour market; these include those who are unemployed, including long term unemployed, or economically inactive.

There will also be a focus on supporting Young people aged 16-24 who are not in employment, education or training and on people with a disability.

The total value of the new ESF Programme is €513.4m. This amount is made up of €205.4m (40%) from the European Union, which requires 60% match funding of €308m.

ESF funding is awarded on a competitive basis. Applications are objectively assessed by an independent assessment Panel and any application that meets the required threshold will be considered for funding. The call for applications opened on Friday 28th November with a closing date of 9th January 2015. Comprehensive guidance notes were provided for all potential applicants on the Department's website.

The Department has also administered the Collaboration and Innovation Fund, which has provided funding of over £9 million to organisations from the community, voluntary and educational sectors. This has provided support, between December 2012 and March 2015, to young people who are not in employment, education or training. Further support for this type of activity will be via the 2014-20 European Social Fund programme.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has met the Together: Building a United Community Strategy commitment to introduce an impact assessment that assesses the extent to which his departmental policies and interventions contribute to the objective of building a united, rather than divided, community.

(AQW 40188/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can confirm that within my Department all significant policy proposals and business cases are analysed to determine whether they contribute positively to a shared society. This Shared Future Policy Proofing screening, which has been operational within DEL since April 2012, reflects the objectives of the Together: Building a United Community strategy.

DEL has also agreed to be the lead Department for the development of the United Youth Programme which is an important element of the strategy with the overarching outcomes of assisting with the personal development of young people and the promotion of good relations.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the guidelines on cash flow, up front funding, match funding and the levels of projects that will be funded, provided to organisations interested in applying for the European Social Fund scheme; and how this will impact on the ability of grass roots community based organisation to apply.

(AQW 40218/11-15)

Dr Farry: All potential applicants to the European Social Fund (ESF) must meet a financial capability assessment for the new Programme including demonstrating the capability of 10% net cash assets in their organisations most recent set of annual accounts.

One of the main reasons for introducing this specific condition is that the new ESF Programme for 2014-2020 has no facility for providing a 30% pre-payment advance. Any pre-payment advance is likely to be limited to 5% in each year of the new programme.

Given that actual ESF expenditure has to be paid out in full by an ESF project before submitting a claim to the ESF Managing Authority, a project must therefore have access to the relevant cash resources.

It is therefore imperative that a project has net cash assets to fulfil this requirement. If a project has no net cash assets then they would not be able to fully comply with the ESF financial claims process specified by the European Commission.

It is intended that the amount of funding to be provided under the ESF Programme 2014-2020 will remain the same as the current ESF Programme which is 40% funding from the European Commission; 25% from my Department; and 35% from match funding. However, the Executive's draft budget has not allocated sufficient funds to my Department to allow me to commit to providing the 25% share at this stage.

It is very difficult to determine any impact the above conditions of funding will have on grass roots community organisations. However, similar conditions apply to other Government or European funding, and in the case of the ESF, they reflect requirements at European level.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what percentage of Departmental Expenditure Limits is spent on salaries; and (ii) how she intends to reduce this spend in order to make efficiency savings.

(AQW 38827/11-15)

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

- (i) It is forecast that 30% of the total Resource Departmental Expenditure Limits budget will be spent on DETI salaries in 2014-15.
- (ii) The Department has outlined how it proposes to manage administration reductions in the DETI Draft Budget 2015-16 Spending and Savings Proposals and this consultation document is on the DETI website: www.detini.gov.uk

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans are in place to access finance under the Joint European Resources for Micro and Medium Enterprises Programme under the new 2014-2020 programming period.

(AQW 39589/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Joint European Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises (JEREMIE) is an initiative to help countries use part of their existing allocation of European Union (EU) Structural Funds in financial engineering instruments. It is not a source of additional public funding.

A recent independent assessment looking at how access to finance for SMEs should be provided using European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) during the 2014 – 2020 period concluded that the JEREMIE structure was inappropriate for the needs of Northern Ireland. It recommended a continuation of the alternative bespoke Invest NI Fund of Funds model, which offers all the benefits of the JEREMIE structure but at a much lower cost. €91.1 million has been allocated in the draft 2014-2020 ERDF Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme to SME access to finance instruments and this is expected to result in more than €150 million being invested in SMEs.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why there has been a change of applicant in regard to the planning applications on the Tyrone to Cavan Interconnector Project.
(AQW 39594/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Pursuant to the unbundling requirements of the EU Third Package of legislation, the European Commission published a decision on 12th April 2013 requiring SONI to be certified as Transmission System Operator. The decision required the transfer of responsibility for transmission planning activities from Northern Ireland Electricity to SONI.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the additional generating capacity at Ballylumford and the full restoration of the Moyle interconnector will resolve the security of supply issue in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 39595/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The additional 250 Megawatt generation capacity at Ballylumford power station will be in addition to the 200 Megawatt capacity margin estimated for post 2015 by SONI in their most recent Generation Capacity Statement. Restoration of the Moyle interconnector to full transfer capacity by 2017 will further enhance our security of supply margin.

However, EU emissions legislation will have increased impact on the AES Kilroot coal fired plant from 2021, thus restricting its output. Work remains ongoing to deliver the new North-South electricity interconnector which, subject to planning and other consents, is expected to be in place by 2019.

The combination of these measures will continue to ensure an appropriate security of electricity supply margin in Northern Ireland.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she will ensure that InvestNI actively pursues the Enterprise Zone status announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in March 2014.
(AQW 39602/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The UK Government's Economic Pact, published on 14 June 2013, set out 3 commitments in relation to Enterprise Zones, focusing on Enhanced Capital Allowances (ECAs), which permit 100% first year allowances for qualifying plant and machinery expenditure. The pilot Enterprise Zone announced in the Chancellor's Budget statement in March 2014 will only offer ECAs as an incentive.

The decision to designate a particular area offering ECAs is ultimately for Treasury. Discussions are ongoing between the relevant stakeholders to put the necessary arrangements in place prior to formal designation of the zone by HMT once those discussions have concluded. DETI and Invest NI are continuing to liaise closely with stakeholders to ensure that Enterprise Zone designation progresses as quickly as possible.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether InvestNI's Access to Finance scheme can be supplemented by the Joint European Resources for Micro and Medium Enterprises Programme.
(AQW 39622/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Joint European Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises (JEREMIE) is an initiative to help countries manage some of their existing European Union (EU) Structural Funds allocation to improve access to finance for SMEs.

JEREMIE is essentially a complex fund management option in which European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Managing Authorities set up Holding Funds which then invest in several investment funds. It is not a supplementary source of public European funding. The Holding Funds are funded by ERDF and match funding. They are managed either by a regional or national financial institution or the European Investment Fund.

Member States do not have to adopt the JEREMIE approach and Invest NI's Access to Finance Scheme is a more effective and cost efficient way of delivering greater access to finance for SMEs within the Northern Ireland context.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the job creation projections used by the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to the potential reduction of Corporation Tax to 12.5 per cent are premised on any assumptions relating to increased skills levels.
(AQW 39623/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Following the work undertaken by the Economic Advisory Group in 2011, research was published by the Department for Employment and Learning in 2012 on the impact of a lower corporation tax rate in Northern Ireland on the demand for skills, labour and innovation capacity.

You will be aware that changes since 2011, notably further falls in the UK rate of Corporation Tax, have prompted us to update the work previously undertaken by EAG. That updated work, carried out by the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy, focuses on the incremental economic benefit of moving from the new 20% UK rate to a lower Northern Ireland rate of 12.5%. The provisional results of this work indicate that approximately 37,500 net new jobs could be created by 2033 if a 12.5% rate of Corporation Tax was implemented, and that the majority of sectors will gain as a result with the manufacturing; information and communication; and administration and support services expected to add the most jobs.

My officials are currently preparing, along with their counterparts in the Department for Employment and Learning, to update previous research which looked at the different composition of FDI that would be attracted if we reduced corporation tax, and alongside this update the earlier work on the skills impact on that different composition.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the current job creation projections in relation to the potential reduction of Corporation Tax to 12.5 per cent.

(AQW 39624/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Previous work carried out in 2011 by my Economic Advisory Group estimated that 58,000 net new jobs could be created as a result of moving from a Corporation Tax rate of 23% to 12.5%. The further UK reductions, which will see the rate of Corporation Tax reduce to 20% from April 2015, has already taken us part of the way to this goal.

Given that some of the rate cut has been achieved, my Department commissioned the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy to update this work on the economic benefit of moving from the new 20% UK rate to a lower Northern Ireland rate of 12.5%.

Provisional results from this new work has concluded that if a reduction from 20% to 12.5% was implemented from April 2017, approximately 37,500 net new jobs would be generated by 2033. In addition it is also expected to deliver an economy that is 11% larger by 2033.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the latest Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings produced by the Office of National Statistics, which suggests that the median wage of employees in Northern Ireland aged between 18-21 years has almost halved between April 2008 and April 2014.

(AQW 39634/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The prolonged downturn in economic conditions had major consequences across the local economy – and many of those impacts are still being felt today. Like many parts of the UK, the downturn undoubtedly put downward pressure on wages.

Some caution should be exercised in interpreting survey based results at a disaggregated level. Estimates become less reliable, with a greater margin of error, the further you dissect the data. This is the case with the 2014 results for those aged 18 to 21, with the estimate of median gross weekly earnings being less reliable than the equivalent estimate in 2008.

Nevertheless the biggest driver of the fall in median gross weekly earnings for this age group has been an apparent shift between full-time and part-time employment. Full-time earnings were actually marginally up over the period, but a marked shift away from full-time working combined with a 12% fall in part-time median gross weekly earnings (which also tend to be lower), prompted a decline in the overall median for this age group.

Overall, I fully recognise these have been challenging times with many pressures on earnings and incomes for many people within the labour market. Through Invest NI we have placed a high priority on not only attracting new jobs, but also targeting those jobs attracting salaries, above the NI Private Sector Median (currently £18,954 per year). Such an approach is designed to help drive up annual salaries in Northern Ireland for the benefit of the whole community, including those aged between 18 and 21 years old.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what actions her Department is taking to redress the decline in annual earnings experienced in Northern Ireland since 2008, especially amongst 18 to 21 year olds.

(AQW 39635/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The ultimate aim of the Northern Ireland Programme for Government (PfG) and Economic Strategy is to improve the economic competitiveness of our businesses, by building a larger and more productive private sector, in order to rebalance the Northern Ireland economy. Through rebalancing the economy, we aim to improve the wealth, employment and living standards of everyone in Northern Ireland.

An important element of this is not only to promote and attract new jobs, but also to target those jobs attracting high salaries, as a minimum, above the Northern Ireland Private Sector Median (NIPSM) (currently £18,954 per year), a level significantly higher than the recognised UK living wage. Such an approach is designed to help drive up annual salaries in Northern Ireland for the benefit of the whole community, including those aged between 18 and 21 years old.

Within the Economic Strategy, Invest NI was set a target to deliver 7,575 new jobs paying a salary above the NIPSM by 31st March 2015. As at 30th September 2014, Invest NI had exceeded this target, supporting over 13,300 new jobs which will

deliver salaries above the NIPSM. This includes support for companies such as Baker and McKenzie, First Derivatives and Citi which have exciting growth plans which will open up tremendous opportunities for our recent graduates.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether his Department is working under the assumption that 58,000 jobs will be created by 2030 if the power to vary Corporation Tax is devolved and reduced to 12.5 per cent.

(AQW 39647/11-15)

Mrs Foster: For clarity you should note that the Economic Advisory Group estimate of 58,000 net new jobs created was associated with a reduction in Corporation Tax rate from a rate of 23% to a rate of 12.5%. Since the 58,000 figure was an incremental one, both the start point for Corporation Tax and its end point are relevant to the net additional jobs estimation.

That work by EAG was conducted in 2011 when the Chancellor had announced an intention to reduce UK Corporation Tax to 23%. Since then further UK reductions have been announced, which will see the rate of Corporation Tax reduce to 20% from April 2015, and so this has already taken us part of the way to a lower Corporation Tax goal.

Given that some of the rate cut has been achieved at a national level, my Department commissioned the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy to update the work on lowering Corporation tax. This time the work focuses on the incremental economic benefit of moving from the new 20% UK rate to a lower Northern Ireland rate of 12.5%.

Provisional results from this new work has concluded that if a reduction from 20% to 12.5% was implemented from April 2017, approximately 37,500 net new jobs would be generated by 2033. In addition it is also expected to deliver an economy that is 11% larger by 2033.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the measures in place to ensure the effective transfer of tourism powers to the new district councils.

(AQW 39658/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Tourism (NI) Order 1992 provides Councils with the necessary powers to undertake local tourism functions.

DETI, through Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and Tourism Ireland, is working with local councils to develop and promote local tourism by focusing on our 9 key tourism areas.

Councils are now taking the lead in the development of Tourism Area Plans for the 9 key tourism areas and this work will be integrated into the new Councils' Community Planning responsibilities from next April. Significant work has already been undertaken by the NITB and local authorities on a cross-council basis in each of the nine areas and NITB has met recently with a number of the Chief Executives of the new Councils. This partnership approach is ongoing and NITB will seek to put in place effective formalised working relationships with the new Councils as Local Government reform progresses.

Giving Councils the lead in developing these tourism area plans clarified their lead role in many of the functions previously listed for transfer under the Review of Public Administration such as local marketing, local product development, visitor servicing and development of the sector at local level. The remaining list of tourism functions to be transferred to Councils is:

- Providing business support to tourism businesses including business start up advice along with training and delivery of customer care schemes. This includes small-scale tourism accommodation development. This is included in the arrangements with Invest NI for the transfer of business start programmes;
- Providing advice to developers on tourism policies and related issues. Councils will take the lead in this advice role from April 2015.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the process of transferring functions for local economic development from InvestNI to new district councils.

(AQW 39659/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A comprehensive programme of engagement has taken place between my Department, Invest NI, Councils and the Department of Environment to ensure the transfer of functions takes place smoothly and efficiently.

Invest NI will remain the primary economic development agency for Northern Ireland responsible for local business development after the reform of local government takes place. From April 2015 it will be the responsibility of local councils to determine the schemes they will establish to deliver those functions which are transferring.

DETI and Invest NI have prepared input to the DOE Performance Framework, a draft Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Councils on contracts for Regional Start Initiative and Social Enterprise Programme and an overarching Guidance document for Councils.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the collapse of the First Flight Wind Consortium project for off shore windfarms, what plans she has to encourage other developers to avail of this opportunity.

(AQW 39662/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Crown Estate is responsible for leasing the seabed and has no immediate plans to re-lease this site. However, it considers that the area remains a good wind resource and has stated that it will continue to work with my Department to understand what role offshore wind development can play in Northern Ireland over the long term.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why profit margins for generators in the Single Electricity Market are consistently higher than in the Great Britain market; and what can be done to reduce the price differential with Great Britain.

(AQW 39673/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am informed by the Regulator that profit margins for generators vary for a number of reasons. These include generator running patterns, generation mix and scale and structural differences between the two markets. The Regulator also advises that, over recent years, profit margins between the Single Electricity Market and the GB market have generally converged.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the programme to redesign the Single Electricity Market will provide confidence and transparency in the system and bring about a reduction in costs for customers.

(AQW 39677/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Arrangements for the delivery of the programme have been published by the SEM Committee. The programme has ten work-streams, each of which with associated market participant review groups, workshops and consultations.

Project governance arrangements, under which the Regulators are delivering the programme, have also been put in place by my Department and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in Dublin. The two Departments have oversight of the programme through working and joint steering group arrangements.

I am informed by the Regulator that the redesign is expected to help facilitate greater competition, more efficient trading with lower priced markets (such as our neighbouring GB market) and to ultimately place downward pressure on prices.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many of the 11,000 jobs promoted by InvestNI in 2013/14 have been delivered in this financial year to date.

(AQW 39684/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI only releases job creation figures at end of each financial year.

It can take a period of time for assisted companies to begin recruiting and filling posts. It would therefore be meaningless to provide this information in year. It is also important to note that job creation projections usually take 3-5 years to implement, and in some cases this can be longer. Therefore it may take until 2018/19 for companies to create all the jobs promoted in 2013/14.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many of the 34,400 new jobs promoted by InvestNI over the duration of the current Programme for Government 11/15 have been delivered.

(AQW 39685/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI only releases job creation figures at the end of each financial year; therefore, information for the period 2011-12 to 2013-14 has been provided for this answer. During that period, Invest NI promoted 23,629 new jobs. At 31st March 2014, 10,687 of these jobs had been created; however, it will not be until at least 2016-17 before the full extent of job creation for the majority of these projects will become clear.

It is important to note that job creation projections usually take 3-5 years to implement, and in some cases this can be longer. For example, for a job announcement made in May 2011, it is only now in 2014 that meaningful data on the number of jobs actually created is beginning to emerge, and even then this is dependent upon the individual conditions of each Letter of Offer.

It should also be noted that Invest NI does not release grant aid for these projects until companies satisfy the obligations under their letter of offer to fill promoted jobs. Invest NI releases the proportionate amount of funding as these jobs are filled.

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs have been created in the last ten years in the Banbridge area.

(AQW 39704/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is only able to report on jobs created since 2011-12. Over the past 3 years (2011-12 to 2013-14) Invest NI has created 153 new jobs as a direct result of its interventions in the Banbridge council area.

While Invest NI is not able to provide job creation figures by individual companies due to commercial sensitivity, since 2011/12 it has provided support towards over 200 projects in the Banbridge area promoting nearly 180 new jobs; such as support for Cottage Catering Ltd to promote 10 new jobs, MJM Marine Ltd to promote 9 new jobs and Environmental Fabrications Ltd to promote 5 new jobs.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the benefits in real terms to Derry of the completion of Project Kelvin.

(AQW 39711/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Project Kelvin provides businesses across Northern Ireland, for the first time, with a direct international telecommunications link to North America and improved services to mainland Europe. Under the terms of the Project Kelvin contract, the latency, resilience and cost of this international connectivity is guaranteed until 2018.

This means that businesses throughout Northern Ireland now have access to the same international telecoms services found in major cities like Amsterdam and New York. This enables them to compete in global export markets and provides increased opportunities to sell goods and services overseas.

Invest NI uses the benefits of the region's world class telecoms infrastructure, including the transatlantic link provided by Project Kelvin, to promote Northern Ireland as an attractive and viable location for new inward investment opportunities, and to secure additional projects from existing international investors.

While Invest NI does not hold information on which companies have chosen to take advantage of the transatlantic link, the agency conducted an informal survey in 2012 to assess the extent to which Project Kelvin was important to investment decisions.

The survey found that, between going fully operational in Spring 2010 until the end of Financial year 2011-12, approximately 25% of first time investors (14 companies) rated the transatlantic link as either crucial to their investment decision or a contributing factor. Two of the companies in question invested in the Foyle parliamentary constituency area.

Invest NI has not collected any data on Project Kelvin since that time but it would not be unreasonable to assume it has been a key factor in influencing a similar proportion of more recent investors, particularly those in the ICT and Financial Services sectors where high-speed internet connectivity is crucial.

It is important to note, however, that telecoms infrastructure is just one of the factors that influence an investment decision. An investor will make this decision based on a number of factors, including the availability of a skilled workforce, availability of suitable office accommodation and other infrastructure issues.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much more departmental funding is expected to be invested in Project Kelvin; and what benefits these overheads will provide for (i) Derry; and (ii) Northern Ireland.

(AQW 39712/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The final payment in respect of Project Kelvin was made by DETI on 9 August 2010 upon completion of the construction phase of the project. No further funding will be provided by my Department.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment on the new proposed Integrated Single Electricity Market; and its impact on (i) domestic; and (ii) business prices.

(AQW 39713/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Work to deliver the new market arrangements has just entered the detailed design phase. The work is being led by the Single Electricity Market Committee, which is responsible for assessment of costs and benefits. I met the SEM Committee on 27 November 2014 and challenged it to clarify benefits, including those relating to pricing, as soon as possible.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) for her assessment of the System Operator for Northern Ireland's (SONI) performance in managing the electricity network and market; (ii) how many people SONI employs; and (iii) what are the costs to the consumer.

(AQW 39714/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) SONI operates under license and its performance is a matter for the Regulator to consider and manage.
- (ii) The SONI website <http://www.soni.ltd.uk/AboutUs/ourcompany/>, indicates that it currently employs approximately 110 staff.
- (iii) SONI operates under a Price Control arrangement which is agreed with the Utility Regulator. Its current 5½-year Price Control, published by the Utility Regulator and covering the period 2010-2015, shows total allowed revenue of £72 million. My Department does not hold information on cost to the consumer of the allowed revenue.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the North South Interconnector; and what effect the interconnector will have on imperfection charges to the public.

(AQW 39715/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The planning application and revised environmental statement for the Northern Ireland part of the interconnector are currently with DOE pending referral back to the Planning Appeals Commission. I understand that EirGrid is working with the planning authority in the Republic of Ireland to agree a timetable for re-submission of its application. The constraint costs arising from the absence of the North-South electricity interconnector are estimated by the Transmission System Operators

to be €20 million per annum in 2020, rising to €40 million per annum in 2030. I am advised that delivery of the Interconnector would eliminate such charges.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what evidence there is to suggest that smart metering of electricity provides an appropriate level of return on investment.

(AQW 39717/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A cost/benefit analysis undertaken in 2011, as a result of an EU requirement, showed a marginally positive net benefit for the roll out of electricity smart meters. In light of changes since the original assessment, for example on technology and concerns about the potential benefits of smart meters to customers in GB, I have decided that the previous analysis should be updated to establish the most effective option for implementation. It is important that any smart metering solution is cost effective and offers customer's value for money given the significant costs involved. My officials, in conjunction with the Utility Regulator, are taking this forward.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people are currently employed by Seagate.

(AQW 39742/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As at November 2014 Seagate in Northern Ireland employs 1375 at its Springtown Plant.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department has held any discussions with Ulster Bank on its plans for additional branch closures.

(AQW 39778/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has not held specific discussions with Ulster Bank regarding its latest announcement of additional branch closures. However the DFP Minister and I meet with the main Northern Ireland banks on a regular basis and those discussions have included the issue of bank restructuring.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has any plans to remove electricity network costs from business, similar to the initiative in Germany; and what effect this would have on domestic and industrial bills.

(AQW 39786/11-15)

Mrs Foster: All customers who use the electricity network should pay for it. NIE and SONI charge customers Use of System tariffs for the distribution and transmission networks respectively. These tariffs are set in a cost reflective manner and are approved by the Utility Regulator.

If electricity network costs were removed from business customers, domestic customers would see a disproportionate increase in their electricity bills because network costs already make up a larger percentage of their bill than industrial and commercial customers.

Any initiative to favour one set of customers over others is likely to breach European Union state aid measures.

Nevertheless I continue to explore potential ways to reduce the burden of electricity costs to business in Northern Ireland.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what reasons were given by the utility regulator for the publication of erroneous figures in its energy cost report; and for her assessment of the impact of this error on public confidence in the office.

(AQW 39787/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Utility Regulator has been publishing its Retail Energy Market Monitoring reports, which provide a comprehensive range of information about the retail electricity and gas markets in Northern Ireland, on a quarterly basis since February 2011.

The report for the period to the end of September 2014 included an error in one bar chart. The chart erroneously included taxes for Northern Ireland small and medium industrial and commercial consumers which incorrectly inflated Northern Ireland costs compared to other countries.

Once the Regulator became aware of the error, it made the necessary correction and re-issued an amended version of the report on the same day.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of the Government's Military Covenant her Department has adopted as a policy; and what percentage has been implemented.

(AQW 39801/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Estimates of the numbers of economically inactive by Northern Ireland District Council Area (DCA) are sourced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), with the most recent data available for July to September 2014. These estimates are based on the residency of an individual.

The requested breakdown of economic inactivity by DCA is shown in the attached table.

Table: Number of Economically Inactive by District Council Area (age 16-64)

	July - September 2014	Margin of Error
Antrim	7,000	+/- 4,000
Ards	12,000	+/- 4,000
Armagh	9,000	+/- 3,000
Ballymena	11,000	+/- 4,000
Ballymoney	6,000	+/- 3,000
Banbridge	9,000	+/- 3,000
Belfast	46,000	+/- 9,000
Carrickfergus	*	*
Castlereagh	12,000	+/- 4,000
Coleraine	8,000	+/- 4,000
Cookstown	8,000	+/- 3,000
Craigavon	15,000	+/- 5,000
Derry	29,000	+/- 6,000
Down	8,000	+/- 3,000
Dungannon	8,000	+/- 3,000
Fermanagh	13,000	+/- 4,000
Larne	6,000	+/- 3,000
Limavady	6,000	+/- 3,000
Lisburn	28,000	+/- 6,000
Magherafelt	6,000	+/- 3,000
Moyle	*	*
Newry and Mourne	16,000	+/- 5,000
Newtownabbey	14,000	+/- 5,000
North Down	8,000	+/- 4,000
Omagh	9,000	+/- 3,000
Strabane	9,000	+/- 3,000
Northern Ireland	312,000	+/- 21,000

Source: Economic and Labour Market Statistics Branch, Labour Force Survey, July – September 2014

* Estimate is suppressed due to sample size.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs her Department and its arm's-length bodies have created over the last two financial years.

(AQW 39851/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During the last two financial years (2012-13 and 2013-14) Invest NI support has helped create 12,980 new jobs across Northern Ireland.

Invest NI continues to promote new jobs across Northern Ireland with recent support in North Down for Mango Direct Marketing to promote 55 new jobs and Positive Futures to promote 27 new jobs.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much foreign investment has been secured over the last two financial years.

(AQW 39853/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During the last two financial years (2012-13 and 2013-14) Invest NI has secured inward investment commitments of £715million. This includes support for companies such as Convergys, Ryobi, Baker & McKenzie and Alexander Mann.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what grants are available for business start ups.
(AQW 39854/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI provides an extensive portfolio of support to start-up businesses in Northern Ireland including grant support in a number of specific areas including

The Regional Start Initiative (RSI) is designed to support locally focussed entrepreneurs into self employment. Business Start Grants are available for those people resident in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRA - £1,000 grant) and for young people who are not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETS - £1,500 grant) who complete a business plan and then go on to start a business.

Jobs Fund provides **employment grant** support to investment projects which will create new sustainable jobs. Through this fund Invest NI supports businesses affected to provide employment opportunities, thus improving employment prospects for individuals. Grants are available between £3,000 and £7,000 per job.

'**Export Starts/Global Starts**' are programmes dedicated to entrepreneurs who are starting an export focused business or who have an established business who are seeking to enter export markets for the first time. These businesses are typically supported in areas of job creation, marketing, ICT, skills and strategy and R&D.

Innovation Vouchers - this scheme provides a voucher of up to £4,000 to enable small and medium sized enterprises to engage with one of the 39 universities, colleges and other publicly funded research organisations throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The voucher allows businesses to access specialist skills and expertise to provide an innovative solution to a business issue that cannot be easily solved by the private sector or other support mechanisms.

The **Technical Development Incentive (TDI)** can offer business start-ups up to 50% support of eligible technical supplier costs up to a maximum grant of £5,000. Areas that can be supported include Intellectual Property, investigating new technologies and processes, product and process problem resolution, product approval/global technical compliance, process and quality management schemes & improved product design and performance.

Invest NI also assists those High Potential Start Ups that have ambition to achieve £1million revenue in 3 to 4 years commercializing Intellectual Property that can compete in global markets. The Project Definition **R&D Grant** and the **Growth Acceleration Programme** assist the company to discover and validate their customers. The Grant for R&D programme assists with the development and commercialization of the product.

The **Propel Programme** helps put the structure around the company to commercialise the service or product and seek investment. Selective Financial Assistance can be used to help accelerate growth. Invest NI also provides a wide range of other assistance appropriate for the High Potential Start Up such as helping the companies with design, train their staff, protect their IP, develop their management team and strengthen their board.

Separate from grants Invest NI also provides support to startups through its **Access to Finance Programmes** via the NISPO Invest Growth Fund, Co-Fund NI and the Small Business Loan Fund. Loans and equity to grow the businesses can be provided by the Growth Loan Fund and Development Funds respectively.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the grants awarded by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board for events in North Down in each of the last five years; and what economic impact those events had on the area.
(AQW 39866/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015:

Scheme:	Event Name:	Award:
Sponsorship	Bangor Seashore Festival	£18,000
Sponsorship	F18 World Championship	£ 6,000
Sponsorship	Open House Bangor 2014	£12,500
International*	Circuit of Ireland Rally*	*£150,000
	Total:	*£36,500

* Stages of the Circuit of Ireland Rally were held in various constituencies, including 1 stage in Newtownards town centre. It is impossible to estimate the breakdown of grant by constituency. This has therefore not been included in the total grants awarded to North Down in this financial year.

1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014:

Scheme:	Event Name:	Award:
National	Festival of Light	£15,000
	Total:	£15,000

1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013:

No grants awarded.

1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012:

No grants awarded.

1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011:

Not Applicable. The Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL) was responsible for events funding prior to 1 April 2011.

Based on the information provided at application stage by the event organisers, the 2014/15 sponsored events are projected to generate £30.34 for every £1 of NITB's investment. The visitor numbers and bed nights generated by these events to the North Down area are 61,500 and 5,840 respectively.

NITB has not carried out any independent economic impact audits on the above events however unconfirmed economic impact estimates may be available from the event organisers directly.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the value of the grants used to secure the 4.5 per cent of all foreign direct investment projects into the UK in 2013, compared to the rest of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 39932/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The 4.5 per cent figure highlighted in the question originates from the EY European Investment Monitor, researched and powered by Oxford Intelligence. It is a source of information on cross-border investment projects and trends in Europe. The database focuses on investment announcements, the number of new jobs created and, where identifiable, the associated capital investment, thus providing data on FDI in Europe. Projects are identified through the daily monitoring and research of more than 10,000 news sources, which covers a much wider business base than the Invest NI customer portfolio; therefore Invest NI is unable to detail the value of the grants used to secure the 4.5 per cent.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much funding the Irish Government contributes to the local tourist industry on an annual basis; and to list the projects it has helped fund, and the funding awarded, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39957/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Irish Government does not fund individual tourism projects in Northern Ireland.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the Tourist Board will fund the promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way; and whether Tourism Ireland could play a role.

(AQW 39958/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Wild Atlantic Way is a coastal route in the Republic of Ireland, developed as a tourism route by Failte Ireland. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has no role in its development or promotion.

However, as I have indicated previously, I am keen to see it promoted simultaneously with the Causeway Coastal Route in Great Britain and international markets by Tourism Ireland.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether further consideration has been given to introducing the Warm Homes Discount Scheme; and if so, to detail (i) how many customers would benefit; and (ii) whether any customers would pay more than at present.

(AQW 40120/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Discussions between my officials and counterparts in the Department of Energy and Climate Change confirm that it would be impractical to implement the Warm Homes Discount Scheme in Northern Ireland. In GB one in thirteen customers receives a payment but this would not necessarily follow in Northern Ireland. The question of how many customers would benefit would depend on the Executive's policy decisions on the nature of a scheme to be adopted, if one were adopted. The Warm Homes Discount Scheme is customer-funded so, in GB, a majority pay more. Payment to eligible customers is funded by a tariff charge paid by all customers. Those eligible for payment are subsequently paid from the resulting pot. The extent of any additional tariff charge would be proportionate to the number of customers deemed eligible to receive payment and the level of payment.

Department of the Environment

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment what progress the Executive has made in relocating Civil Service jobs to Coleraine to replace those lost when Driver and Vehicle Agency offices were moved to Swansea.

(AQW 36871/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): I would like to first of all apologise for the delay in responding. My Department had to contact and await input from other Departments and this took longer than anticipated.

The Department for Transport (DfT) decision to centralise vehicle licensing services in Swansea created 272 surplus staff in DVA based in the Central Office in Coleraine or in 8 Local Vehicle Licensing Offices (LVLOs) located throughout the Province.

I announced in June 2014 that around 50 posts from my Department would transfer to Coleraine to create redeployment opportunities for surplus staff in that area. All other NICS Departments had been asked to examine the potential for the transfer of posts to Coleraine however no immediate opportunities were identified at that time, although DSD did create about 60 temporary posts in Coleraine to carry out work on behalf of the Child Maintenance Service.

Other Departments have filled vacancies in permanent posts in the Coleraine area as and when opportunities have arisen.

All NICS Departments recently reviewed the scope for the transfer of posts to Coleraine but none were able to identify any immediate opportunities.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the activities of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in North Belfast over the last three years.

(AQW 38789/11-15)

Mr Durkan: During the last three years, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) continued to carry out a great deal of work in all areas of Northern Ireland including North Belfast.

The NIEA is responsible for a wide range of remits including pollution investigation, monitoring of water quality, the control of waste disposal and promotion of the use of open spaces in areas of outstanding natural beauty and scientific interest. The Agency's strategic objective is to create prosperity and well-being through Environment and Heritage excellence.

During the last three financial years the NIEA, through its Natural Heritage Grant Programme, provided core funding of £132,000 to the Belfast Hills Project (BHP) to improve management of the Belfast Hills. Specific projects funded in North Belfast include habitat surveys of key community wildlife sites at Ligoneil Park, Glencairn woodland and Forth river Valley. A number of events and heathland surveys also took place on Cavehill.

Through the same programme the NIEA has also provided funding of £133,000 to the Partnership during the last two financial years towards the costs of a Landscape Partnership Scheme. Specific projects carried out in North Belfast under this scheme include, the provision of new paths linking Cave Hill and Ligoniel Park, a community archaeological dig at Ballyaghagan and invasive species mapping and removal at Cave Hill and Glencairn.

The NIEA Historic Environment Division (HED) supported the Belfast Hills Community Archaeology Dig in 2014, through the provision of one member of staff from the Centre of Archaeological Fieldwork for one week, and a further two members of staff from the Centre of Archaeological Fieldwork for two weeks. The excavations were part of a wider project undertaken by the Belfast Hills Partnership.

The NIEA HED also supported the Divis Archaeology Dig in 2013 through the provision of members of staff from the Centre of Archaeological Fieldwork. The excavations were part of a wider project undertaken by the Belfast Hills Partnership.

The NIEA continues to provide advice to DOE planning on planning applications in the area and undertook the Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

NIEA is also actively involved in providing scientific surveys to support statutory designation of Areas of Special Scientific Interest and a range of monitoring and surveillance activities to inform management action and reporting on specially protected areas and the wider countryside. In particular, officials are involved in regular – monthly in the winter months - surveillance of wetland birds along the shore of Belfast Lough, part of the Belfast Lough Special Protection Areas. In recent years there has also been grassland survey work carried out in the Carnmoney Hills area and earth science survey work at Bellevue, adjacent to Belfast Zoo. In addition, the NIEA manages Drumnadrough Rath, the only NIEA property in the North Belfast Constituency, which is located between the M2 motorway and Belfast Zoo.

The Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Challenge Fund is an environmental funding programme. It was established in 2011 to enable groups from the community and voluntary sector deliver a range of environmental projects. The programme was established to meet the community demand for funding and its success to date is a true demonstration of partnership between local community, NGOs and government to deliver shared environmental goals. The Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) administers the NGO Challenge Fund on behalf of the NIEA.

Through the NGO Challenge fund the NIEA has supported a variety of community environmental projects within North Belfast over the last three years. In the last three years the NGO Challenge Fund provided funding of just over £161,000 to 21 individual projects in North Belfast. Table A below details the organisation, the project title, the funding allocation and a brief description of the projects that received funding during this period.

Table A: Challenge Fund Projects in North Belfast in the last three years and this year.

Organisation	Project Title	Funding allocated	Project description
2011/12			
Conservation Volunteers	Ballysillan Community Allotments	£3,640.00	Working with local groups to develop the Allotments as a community resource, providing both growing food and a wildlife garden.
2012/13			
Nothing			
2013/14			
ArtsEkta	Access to Nature	£4,111.68	Our project has helped to encourage minority ethnic groups and communities to positively engage with the natural environment by taking part in fun, active and thought provoking activities. This has included willow weaving, dry stone walling and walking. This has been an important project to increase the participation in the natural environment by minority ethnic communities.
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health	Sustainability in the Belfast Food Business	£9,700.00	This pilot project provides evidence to demonstrate potential environmental improvements and economic savings to be made in the food service sector through a study of 15 participants around Northern Ireland. The lessons from this pilot could be applied across Northern Ireland.
Forum for Alternative Belfast cic	Forum Summer School 2013 Publication	£12,259.09	The 2013 FAB summer scheme devised a number of proposals for linking and 're-stitching' the green and growing landscape network of Belfast. This project took this information and produced a publication showing how the green spaces, existing and proposed, can form a set of 'stepping stones' for wildlife and public access and amenity.
Friends of Grove Park	Growing Together in Grove	£2,137.04	A successful community garden has worked with wildlife groups to improve the 'wildlife friendly' aspects of the site. Hedges, a living willow structure and a meadow were planted and bird and bat boxes and a bee 'hotel' installed. Intergenerational activities supported this practical work.
Groundwork Northern Ireland (GWNI)	Colin Glen Community and Wildlife Garden	£ 8,876.31	This wildlife garden at Colin Glen provides a shared space for the community with allotments, wildlife pond, bee-friendly planting and herbs. The garden used much recycled material and is used to promote heritage lessons to the local community.
Groundwork Northern Ireland (GWNI)	Railways to Greenways	£13,252.50	Northern Ireland has an extensive network of disused railways. This project mapped these and looked at the potential for developing some of these sites into Greenways, protecting the natural and built heritage, providing access and encouraging exercise while linking towns and cities.
Ligoniel Improvement Association	Ligoniel Environmental Rejuvenation	£20,252.00	The project transformed a neglected area of Ligoniel dams and parks into an attractive and educational area. The site includes 'edible landscape stations', paths, wildflower meadows, and an orchard. The work was supported by a leaflet promoting the features and encouraging use of the site.
Marine Conservation Northern Ireland	Elasmobranch Tagging Scheme	£18,922.32	The critically endangered Common Skate is just one of the elasmobranchs (animals with cartilaginous skeletons) in Northern Ireland waters for which little data is available on distribution or behaviour. This project tagged a number of skate to establish baseline data to form a basis for future conservation work. It also promoted the importance of these animals and raised awareness of the threats to them.

Organisation	Project Title	Funding allocated	Project description
Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG)	Interactive Raptor Education Programme	£6,900.00	Raptors often have a 'bad press'; this project attempts to counteract this through an education programme promoting the value and role of raptors, including allowing the children to meet a living raptor. Two primary schools were visited in each County.
Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG)	Printed Raptor Education Programme	£6,000.00	A suite of education materials was prepared and distributed highlighting the threats to raptors from poisoning, shooting and habitat destruction. The materials included worksheets, banners, leaflets and signage at quarries.
PLACE	Introducing Architecture for Key Stage 2	£ 6,278.59	A new book promoting children's relationship with architecture was produced by PLACE and Dr Jenny Russell and distributed to schools at KS2 level throughout Northern Ireland. A symposium was also held to discuss Built Environment Education and help to introduce innovative practice into local schools and organisations.
PLACE	PLACE Walking Tours	£6,835.00	A series of walking tours were developed, marketed and delivered to highlight the architectural merit of towns across Northern Ireland. The tours will increase understanding of the built environment among both residents and visitors.
PLACE	Place-Making Podcast	£ 3,945.00	The Place-Making Podcast was developed by PLACE to profile initiatives, organisations and individuals who are making 'better places' across NI. The project involved audio recording equipment purchase, a training workshop and a post-project report.
PLACE	Vacant to Vibrant: Exchange Network	£ 9,661.63	Town centre vacancy rates are an increasing problem throughout the UK and elsewhere in the world. This campaign starts with international exchange discussions and sharing best practice, and will ultimately be a catalyst for positive change in how we use our town centres.
The Boys' Brigade (Belfast)	B R C Enhancement	£6,780.00	The Boys Brigade Centre in Belfast's Belvoir Estate is well used by clubs and local people for sport and recreation, but over the years the grounds have not been maintained. This project rejuvenated the natural heritage and amenity aspects of the site through scrub removal, tree pruning, graffiti removal and tree planting.
2014/15 To be completed by March 15			
Belfast Royal Academy, The Duke of Edinburghs Award	Belfast Royal Academy, Mourne's Clean-up Project	£1,000.00	120 school pupils and 35 adult volunteers, will collect an anticipated 5 tonnes of rubbish from 13 locations across the Mourne Mountains. Rubbish will be collected from 13 locations.
Grow	Community woodland learning space	£5,372.00	Actively manage neglected woodland within our Waterworks Community Garden and reintegrate it into the site as a learning space for participants and visitors. The project will be carried out by volunteers using professional support where necessary.
Hazelwood Integrated College	The Hazelwood Community Garden	£4,800.00	To encourage students the community to improve the area around them. Transformation of an area of rough ground to an acceptable level for leisure, gardening & educational purposes, teaching gardening skills that will help people prepare for work. The project could also support the development of community engagement and diversity. The Hazelwood Community Garden would provide the ideal space to encourage cross community activity in the Castle ward of Belfast. By establishing partnerships with the local schools, the Hazelwood Community Garden could provide an outdoor learning experience for many of the children of the local area. It would also provide an opportunity for people in the local community to make use of the gardening facilities.

Organisation	Project Title	Funding allocated	Project description
Lower Shankill Community Association	LSCA Community Allotment	£8,550	A new community facility at Glentilt Street, Belfast which accommodating a range of community based programmes and initiatives. Improving of a garden area and the purchase of equipment for this purpose. In addition the project will include a cleanup of the exterior of the facility by volunteers and members of the local community to promote a sense of community pride in terms of keeping a cleaner living environment for everyone to live in.
Skegoneill & Glandore Common Purpose	Skegoneill & Glandore Community Garden	£6,000	Bringing together two communities across an interface area to plant flowers and vegetables and improve their local environment on the Skegoneill & Glandore Community Garden. This is the only green space in the community and local people are directly involved in the management, planting and transformation of the space. This includes building good relations and focusing civic pride.

The NIEA has advised DOE planning on Area Plans, especially on Local Landscape Policy Areas.

The NIEA has been working in co-operation with the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), the Department for Social Development, the Strategic Investment Board (SIB), Belfast City Council (BCC) to identify a sustainable end use for Crumlin Road Courthouse. The NIEA continues to be represented on this Steering group, and provides guidance on restoration/re-use strategies for this very significant listed building. (Since 2003 OFMDFM has invested over £15million to re-establish this iconic building as a highly significant public asset for Belfast.)

The NIEA has secured preservation of the Built Heritage record using the Planning Service consultation process at the sites including (but not restricted to) those listed below:

- a. Corner of Stanhope Street and Clifton Street, Belfast, BT13 1AB. Residential development consisting of four semi-detached houses and six apartments;
- b. 469-487 Crumlin Road, Belfast, BT14 7GA. Demolition of existing public house and betting office (bookmaking office); construction of food retail unit, betting office (bookmaking office), ATM and 21 apartments;
- c. Lands adjacent to Holy Cross Church, 432 Crumlin Road, Belfast, BT14 7GE. Proposed 76 bed care home with associated car parking and landscaping (to supersede care home approved under Z/2008/0684/F). Access to Crumlin Road as approved under Z/2010/0108/F;
- d. Setting to Holycross Monastery and Church, Crumlin Road Interface Boundary Wall, from lands adjacent to 1 Herbert Street to 405 Crumlin Road, Belfast, BT14 7FY. Demolition of existing boundary wall and erection of 300mm high wall with 1600mm vertical steel railings fixed on top. Landscaping of area immediately adjacent to wall to include planting of trees, and like for like replacement of 1200mm high bow top railing;
- e. Holy Cross Monastery, 432 Crumlin Road, BT14 7GE. Car park for Church including fence and gates, application for landscaping;
- f. 533 Antrim Road, Belfast, BT15 3BS. Change of use from offices to crèche;
- g. Seaview Primary School, Seaview Drive, Belfast, BT15 3NB. Alterations to doors and windows to accommodate fire safety remedial works;
- h. Currie Primary School, 111-113 Limestone Road, Belfast. Internal security works;
- i. 208-214 Limestone Road and 33-35 Newington Street, Belfast. Demolition of existing derelict dwellings and replacement with 12 apartments and two dwellings;
- j. Lands bounded by Parkside Gardens to the south west, 1 Parkside Gardens to the south east, Alexandra Park to the north west and retaining wall to north east of Parkside Gardens, BT15 3AW. Demolition of 3-33 Parkside Gardens and erection of 16 social housing units. (13 2.5 storey units in a terraced form, one detached single storey unit and two semi-detached two storey units);
- k. 605 Antrim Road, Belfast BT15 4DY. Proposed single storey rear extension to allow for additional living space;
- l. 517 Antrim Road, Belfast. Alterations to premises, including new ancillary extension to rear to allow for disabled access (amendments to previously approved app Z/2009/1704/f);
- m. Tieve Tara, 92 Somerton Road, Belfast, BT15 4DE. Erection of new detached garage, including bin store and utility laundry room and landscaping works; and
- n. 607 Antrim Road Belfast, LBC application, and 30 – 32 Ballysillan Road, Belfast, BT14 7QQ. Development of adjoining listed building.

A systematic survey of historic buildings has been carried out in North Belfast during the past three years and there are currently 319 buildings listed as being of 'special architectural or historic interest'. This number may change when the survey records are fully assessed. When processed, these records will be available for public inspection on the NIEA website.

In 2012 the NIEA offered £400,000 of grant-aid for urgent 'stabilisation works' to secure Carlisle Memorial Church., which involved the construction of raking shores and vertical cantilevers to address structural issues. These works reflected the minimum necessary to address the most serious aspects of the building's condition, in order to ameliorate any potential danger. To date £392,500 has been paid. The catalytic effect of regeneration will be important, including the provision of jobs and skills in the (specialist) construction and materials sector. £300,000 will also be expended through the NIEA Heritage Led Development fund for further repair works, before 31 March 2015.

In addition, the NIEA Listed Buildings Grant-aid for repairs to original fabric included assistance for the listed buildings in table B below.

Table B

Address	(Actual Spend)
Lisbreen, 73 Somerton Road	£249,710
Belfast Royal Academy, Cliftonville Road	£84,565
St. Malachy's College, Antrim Road	£126,170
Former Duncairn Presbyterian Church, Belfast	£500,000
Carlisle Memorial Church	£392,500
Holy Cross Boys School	£19,090
Total	£1,372,035

Twelve buildings in the North Belfast area participated in this year's major outreach event of the Built Heritage - European Heritage Open Days;

- a. Clifton Villas;
- b. Clifton Heritage Centre;
- c. Cliftonville Moravian Church;
- d. Conway Mill;
- e. Crumlin Road Gaol;
- f. Crumlin Road Masonic Hall;
- g. Belfast Orange Hall – Clifton Street;
- h. Belfast Castle;
- i. Belfast Royal Academy;
- j. Indian Community Centre – Clifton Street;
- k. St Malachy's College Chapel; and
- l. St Matthew's Parish Church.

The NIEA monitors water quality in rivers in the North Belfast area. The Three Mile Water, near Whiteabbey is monitored monthly under the under the EC Water Framework Directive (WFD) and is of Good general chemical quality. It is however showing signs of biological stress, the cause of which is unclear at present.

As part of WFD classification, 11 surveys were also undertaken in 2014 in North Belfast to assess the ease of passage for migratory fish through rivers. As an urban area, the surveys found extensive culverting and several barriers that would create significant problems for fish migration.

In the period 2011 to date, NIEA have investigated 67 water pollution reports in the North Belfast constituency area. NIEA substantiated (confirmed) that 30 of these incidents, 44.8 per cent of those reported, had an impact on the water quality of the receiving waterway. By 'pollutant category', in the period 2011 to date, Sewage (40 per cent) and Oil (23 per cent) accounted for the largest proportions of pollutant types (63 per cent) in respect of the substantiated incidents. Three Medium severity and 27 Low Severity water pollution incidents were confirmed during this period.

The NIEA maintain a good working relationship with the Belfast Waterworks Angling Club and respond to reports of pollution as required.

The NIEA also carries out a range of activities to implement the Lagan and Belfast Lough Local Management Area Action Plans in the area as part of its work to implement the North Eastern River Basin Management Plan. These are coordinated by the Catchment Management Officer (CMO) and for the period 2012 to 2014 included -

- a. In Autumn 2012 and Spring 2014 - 2 Catchment Stakeholder Group Meetings held in Mossley Mill;
- b. Seven River walks in Three Mile Water catchment;
- c. Supplied Three Mile Water Conservation and Angling Association with Pollution Hotline Signage;
- d. Erection of two Pollution Hotline Signs in 2013 (Manse Rd / Doagh Rd Junction and Three Mile Water Conservation Park);
- e. In May 2013 the NIEA attended Bioblitz Event at Belfast Castle – demonstrated kick sampling and helped out with species identification; and
- f. In August 2013 Newtownabbey Borough Council, in partnership with the Three Mile Water Conservation and Angling Association, were awarded £7,785 Water Quality Improvement Grant for Bank Enhancement at Nelly's Dam.

The NIEA is the Competent Control Authority for environmental parameters of the Common Agricultural Policy single payment and support schemes (popularly known as 'Cross Compliance'). The NIEA carried out one compliance inspection in the area on one farm in 2013.

The NIEA is a consultee on the Giants Park regeneration on part of the reclaimed Dargan Road Landfill; where all storm drainage will be intercepted and conveyed through sustainable drainage systems into newly constructed nature conservation ponds to add amenity value and biodiversity to the development area. The NIEA is also a consultee for the newly planned motorway interchange at York Street, with regard to sustainable drainage options for storm water as this area of Belfast is prone to flooding.

The Licensing & Authorisations Section within the NIEA processed a considerable number of Pollution Prevention and Control (PPC) permits, waste licences/exemptions during the past three years. This involved staff visiting the sites on a number of occasions. The NIEA also have a range of permitted and licensed facilities which staff regularly monitor, inspect and audit. A full list of all authorised facilities is available on the Public Register and may be viewed by the public during office hours and subject to making an appointment.

The Registration of Waste Carriers Unit processed a number of applications (new and renewal carriers) during the same period. The Hazardous Waste/TFS Unit also carried out producer visits/audits and site inspections to businesses throughout Northern Ireland. In addition staff reacted to complaints/incidents in relation to these sites and would visit the site as soon as possible subject to the availability of staff.

In January 2014, officers from the NIEA's Environmental Crime Unit oversaw a successful prosecution (a £400 fine) against a Larne man who, in June 2013, had disposed of waste tyres at a bonfire in Mount Vernon, Belfast. The offender was fined £200 on two counts under the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 for depositing and disposing of controlled waste.

The NIEA regulates a wide range of facilities which have been permitted or licensed under various pieces of environmental legislation and which are periodically inspected. The NIEA is currently determining a Pollution Prevention Control permit application for the ARC21 waste management facility at Hightown Quarry.

The ARC21 proposed waste management facility, will need to obtain a permit under the Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (NI) 2013 (PPC Regulations) prior to operating. The PPC permit application was received by the NIEA on 27 October 2014.

As part of the permit assessment process the application is subject to widespread consultation including Belfast City Council, the Public Health Agency, the Food Standards Agency, NIEA Conservation, Designation and Protection, the NIEA's Water Management Unit and the Health and Safety Executive. It is also available for the general public to examine at public registers at Antrim Borough Council offices and the NIEA offices in Belfast.

It is only when the application and replies from consultees and any public representations have been considered that the NIEA will decide if a permit can issue, and if so, what conditions would be necessary to ensure protection of the environment. These conditions would include stringent requirements specified in the IED.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment for an update, including the timescale, on any guarantee of assurance that he has received from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea that it will contribute to an early-exit scheme for employers which may provide previous Driver and Vehicle Agency workers from Coleraine with civil service employment in the North West.

(AQW 39023/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) has agreed to contribute financially to the NICS Administrative Assistant (AA) and Administrative Officer (AO) (Restricted Locations) Voluntary Exit Scheme which was launched on Wednesday 19 November 2014.

The purpose of the Scheme is to clear the DVA surplus at AA and AO grades within the designated area defined in the Scheme Notice, either directly by releasing eligible surplus DVA staff or indirectly by releasing eligible non-DVA surplus staff where this creates a suitable vacancy into which a DVA surplus can be permanently redeployed.

The Scheme will therefore provide opportunities for any remaining surplus DVA staff who do not leave the Service under the terms of the scheme to be permanently redeployed into NICS posts within the designated area which includes the North West.

The closing date for eligible staff to submit a formal application to exit under the Scheme is Wednesday 7 January 2015.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 38207/11-15, whether the failure to enforce against unauthorised Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) development is a breach of the EIA Directive.

(AQW 39217/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My officials have written to the Lough Neagh Sand Traders seeking their voluntary agreement to cease dredging until this matter is resolved. The Department is currently monitoring compliance with this request and should dredging continue I will consider whether it requires more formal action.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of the Environment how many referrals the Planning Service in Belfast has received from the Housing Executive, with regard to the failure to comply with the Houses in Multiple Occupation registration scheme in each of the last five years; and what action his Department has taken to address these failings.

(AQW 39521/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department has not received any correspondence in the last five years from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) with regard to the failure to comply with the HMO registration scheme.

DOE Planning in Belfast has access to the HMO database and NIHE do notify the Department, for information purposes, of Article 80 Notices which are used by NIHE to bring properties up to HMO Standards. This notification is not in respect of the registration scheme itself and does not refer to registration or failure to comply with the NIHE registration scheme.

The NIHE registration scheme and the Planning regulations requirements in respect of HMO use are two entirely separate legislative regimes and are not currently dependant on each other.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment whether there is a protocol between the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and the Planning Service whereby NIHE can report operating Houses in Multiple Occupation which do not have planning permission for enforcement or investigation.

(AQW 39528/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There is no official protocol between Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and my Department whereby NIHE would report Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) which may not have planning permission.

The Planning (Use Classes) Order 2004 includes HMOs as a sui generis use, and therefore a change of use to a HMO requires planning permission in all instances.

NIHE requires landlords to register properties which are being rented out to multiple occupants. [Registration certificates are issued if, at the time of registration, the property complied with the Fitness for Human Habitation Standard, and the HMO Amenity and Fire Standards.] Proof of planning permission is not a requirement for the NIHE certification process.

However, my Department investigates all alleged breaches of planning control brought to its attention, including unauthorised use of dwellings as HMOs.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has any plans to work with the Department for Social Development to standardise the definition of Houses in Multiple Occupation, so that the Planning Service and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive work to the same definition.

(AQW 39529/11-15)

Mr Durkan: From a planning perspective any proposed change in the definition of a HMO will need to be considered with regard to the Planning (Use Classes) Order (Northern Ireland) 2004 ("UCO").

The current UCO separates a number of the most common land uses into 11 groups (classes) and stipulates that a change in use between activities within the same group is not 'development' and therefore planning permission is not required. A house in multiple occupation does not belong to a specific class in the UCO and therefore express planning permission for such a change is required.

Article 2 of the UCO attracts the definition of Article 75 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (as amended) for the purposes of the term "house in multiple occupation".

My officials have recently been engaged in discussions with officials from the Department for Social Development (DSD) on related cross cutting issues including the definition of houses in multiple occupation. I am advised that DSD officials are working on proposals for a new HMO Bill which will introduce a licensing scheme. Subject to Assembly process, it is their aim that the new Bill will be passed in the current mandate. These discussions will continue with a view to achieving a common legislative definition of a house in multiple occupation in both housing and planning law.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what leisure, sports and well being premises or facilities were sold, or gifted, by Moyle District Council to private, voluntary or community organisations in the last ten years; (ii) to whom any such transfers took place; (iii) what facilities were involved; and (iv) what financial arrangements applied.

(AQW 39592/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Officers from Moyle District Council have advised my officials that they are not aware of any such arrangements having taken place within the last ten years.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37539/11-15 to detail the locations of each of the offences; and how his Department utilised the funds accrued from the penalties.

(AQW 39610/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The six offences relate to the following Northern Ireland Water assets:

- Burren sewage pumping station, Newcastle (offences in 2011 and 2013);
- Harbour sewage pumping station, Ardglass;
- Fofanny water treatment works, Bryansford, Newcastle;
- Drumaness waste water treatment works, Ballynahinch; and
- Magheratimpany waste water treatment works, Ballynahinch.

In addition to fines imposed (which go to the Treasury), costs totalling £2,861.97 were recovered by the Department. These offset basic investigation costs, including sample analysis, staff time, and any consumables that may have been used.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment what is the total area covered by brownfield sites in each local council area.

(AQW 39617/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My officials have advised that it is not possible to provide specific answers to the questions asked as records of 'brownfield sites' are not kept.

However the Housing Monitor can provide you with information in relation to development within urban footprints. It records all land within the urban footprint which forms part of the housing land supply, which is either zoned for housing or subject to a housing permission. It also records housing completions on this basis.

The Monitor covers all settlements as defined in prevailing development plans but excludes dwellings in the open countryside. It identifies the number of dwelling units completed, the area of land developed and assesses the available potential of land and dwellings that remains undeveloped on monitored sites within settlements in all Council Areas.

Information is contained within the Northern Ireland Housing Land Availability Summary Report 2013 (NIHLASR) (Revised) which was published in July 2014. A copy of this report will be submitted to the Assembly library in Stormont for information.

The summary table attached provides information for the amount of potential land and units completed by Council area.

District	Units Complete 31-12-98 to 31-07-13	Units Complete 01-08-12 to 31-07-13	Area Developed (Hectares) 31-12-98 to 31-07-13	Area Developed (Hectares) 01-08-12 to 31-07-13	Units Dev. Within the Urban Footprint (%) 01- 08-12 to 31-07-13	Available Potential (Hectares)	Available Potential (Dwelling Units)
Belfast	20188	541	359.6	10.7	98.3	321.4	19131
Carrickfergus	2526	43	106.4	1.6	79.1	144.9	3992
Castlereagh	2413	157	103.3	9.6	22.3	220.4	4934
Lisburn	9127	555	402.5	22.5	54.5	343.3	9132
Newtownabbey	6419	111	267.2	4.7	56.1	314.4	7677
North Down	4725	132	172.5	4.1	73.3	154.3	4546
Antrim	3350	119	138.8	4.3	52.1	205.5	5430
Ballymena	3159	92	146.5	3.0	86.2	192.4	5225
Larne	2375	22	103.6	1.1	42.9	148.9	4234
Magherafelt	1828	76	103.1	3.9	75.0	199.4	4399
Ards	5025	135	239.3	9.2	74.7	425.4	8801
Down	4925	165	234.6	5.7	26.0	321.4	6464

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Armagh	3368	58	188.5	2.4	8.6	274	6449
Banbridge	3530	54	164.1	2.9	58.8	154.3	3472
Craigavon	9146	167	424.9	7.7	70.8	510.2	12786
Newry & Mourne	5439	84	262.2	4.0	40.0	328.2	7298
Derry	7843	187	315.9	6.9	64.2	523.7	11059
Ballymoney	2137	31	99.9	1.2	0	111.1	2787
Coleraine	5417	117	205.9	4.2	65.9	231.3	6936
Limavady	1917	54	98.2	2.6	94.4	123.1	2741
Moyle	1381	17	59.9	0.5	50.0	52.2	1394
Cookstown	1747	28	88.0	1.9	27.3	195.3	3641
Dungannon & South Tyrone	3650	67	200.2	4.4	11.5	419.6	7254
Fermanagh	3238	20	202.5	1.1	20.0	523.7	9077
Omagh	2640	4	157.3	0.2	50.0	394.4	6546
Strabane	2681	7	133.7	0.8	0	234.9	3845
Ni Totals	120194	3043	4978.6	121.2	63.8	7067.6	169250

Source: NIHLASR July 2014

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the brownfield sites in each local council area identified for redevelopment.

(AQW 39618/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My officials have advised that it is not possible to provide specific answers to the questions asked as records of 'brownfield sites' are not kept.

However the Housing Monitor can provide you with information in relation to development within urban footprints. It records all land within the urban footprint which forms part of the housing land supply, which is either zoned for housing or subject to a housing permission. It also records housing completions on this basis.

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Lisburn	9127	555	402.5	22.5	54.5	343.3	9132

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Newtownabbey	6419	111	267.2	4.7	56.1	314.4	7677
North Down	4725	132	172.5	4.1	73.3	154.3	4546
Antrim	3350	119	138.8	4.3	52.1	205.5	5430
Ballymena	3159	92	146.5	3.0	86.2	192.4	5225
Larne	2375	22	103.6	1.1	42.9	148.9	4234
Magherafelt	1828	76	103.1	3.9	75.0	199.4	4399
Ards	5025	135	239.3	9.2	74.7	425.4	8801
Down	4925	165	234.6	5.7	26.0	321.4	6464
Armagh	3368	58	188.5	2.4	8.6	274	6449
Banbridge	3530	54	164.1	2.9	58.8	154.3	3472
Craigavon	9146	167	424.9	7.7	70.8	510.2	12786
Newry & Mourne	5439	84	262.2	4.0	40.0	328.2	7298
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Ballymoney	2137	31	99.9	1.2	0	111.1	2787
Coleraine	5417	117	205.9	4.2	65.9	231.3	6936
Limavady	1917	54	98.2	2.6	94.4	123.1	2741
Moyle	1381	17	59.9	0.5	50.0	52.2	1394
Cookstown	1747	28	88.0	1.9	27.3	195.3	3641
Dungannon & South Tyrone	3650	67	200.2	4.4	11.5	419.6	7254
Fermanagh	3238	20	202.5	1.1	20.0	523.7	9077
Omagh	2640	4	157.3	0.2	50.0	394.4	6546
Strabane	2681	7	133.7	0.8	0	234.9	3845
NI Totals	120194	3043	4978.6	121.2	63.8	7067.6	169250

Source: NIHLASR July 2014

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has identified any brownfield sites that could be used as housing zones, similar to the initiative introduced by the UK Government; and if so, to list the locations in each council area. (AQW 39619/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My officials have advised that it is not possible to provide specific answers to the questions asked as records of 'brownfield sites' are not kept.

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Source: NIHLASR July 2014

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37097/11-15, to detail (i) where the booking took place; and (ii) the observations communicated and to whom within the taxi operator/licensing/passenger transport division.

(AQW 39620/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The taxi booking took place inside Kingspan Stadium grounds at the entrance of a ticket office building. It was communicated to an official in the Passenger Transport Licensing Division that the taxi was pre-booked, in that the booking was recorded before a taxi was allocated and that the officer observed a taxi representative exiting the building in order to deal with the request.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, since his Department started issuing Fixed Penalties, how many have been issued to bus operators; and of these, to detail the (i) infringements; and (ii) penalty levels.

(AQW 39621/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Since the Department started issuing Fixed Penalty Notices there have been 194 notices issued to bus operators and drivers, a breakdown of the infringements detected along with the associated penalty is shown in the attached table.

Area	Infringement	Penalty	No of FPNs Issued
Driver Licensing	Driving vehicle otherwise than in accordance with the required licence	£60.00 3 points	1
Insurance	Using motor vehicle while uninsured or unsecured against third party risks	£200.00 6 points	3
Vehicle Tax & Registration	No Vehicle Test Certificate	£60.00	4
Drivers Hours & Records	Failing to comply with requirements relating to inspection of records or obstructing an officer	£200.00	1
	Failing to use a Tachograph	£30.00	1
Passenger Vehicle Operator Licensing	Using a Public Service Vehicle without an Road Service Licence	£200.00	23
	Using a Public Service Vehicle without a Community Licence	£60.00	21
	Using vehicle without a passenger waybill	£30.00	35
	Using vehicle for UK Cabotage operations without a Community Licence	£30.00	3
	Using vehicle for UK Cabotage operations without Control Document	£30.00	2
	Fail to produce Community Licence when requested	£30.00	7
	Failing to produce control document when requested	£30.00	7
Vehicle Prohibitions	Failing to comply with a prohibition or direction in relation to driving a vehicle	£200.00	2
	Failure to comply with conditions of a prohibition for unfit or overloaded vehicles	£200.00	1
EU Drivers Hours	Less than 9hrs but more than 8hrs rest	£60.00	1
	8hrs or less but more than 7hrs rest	£120.00	2
	Failure to take daily rest	£30.00	1
Drivers Records	Failure to ensure recording equipment installed	£200.00	2
	Failure to ensure the correct functioning of recording equipment or driver card	£60.00	3
	Failure to ensure proper use of the recording equipment	£120.00	1
	Failure to ensure that printing can be carried out correctly in the event of an inspection by a failure to provide sufficient printing material	£60.00	2
	Failure to use record sheets or driver card	£200.00	20
	Failing to operate switch mechanisms to tachograph	£30.00	3
	Using record sheet for longer than stipulated	£30.00	3
	Failing to keep tachograph record sheets in clean Condition	£30.00	2
Driver CPC	Failing to produce evidence of a certificate of professional competence (or of training exemption)	£30.00	16

Area	Infringement	Penalty	No of FPNs Issued
Other Construction and Use Offences	Failure to have a tread pattern of at least 1mm	£120.00 3 points	1
	Defective tyre – general	£60.00 3 points	1
	Defective light	£30.00	1
	Defective braking system	£60.00 3 points	1
Taxi/Bus Offences	No PSV Licence (Vehicle)	£30.00	12
	Overcrowding on PSV	£30.00	9
	Failure to have a fire extinguishing apparatus in a public service vehicle.	£30.00	2

The figures above are from June 2011 to June 2014 in line with official statistical publications.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) if; and (ii) when the “clarification booklet” referred to in the published Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan in relation to community greenways will be made available on his Department’s website.

(AQW 39636/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I can confirm that this booklet is now available on the website.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the programmes and grants that are under threat due to the recent proposed budget cuts; and the cost of each.

(AQW 39669/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department published its assessment of the 2015-16 draft Budget as approved by the Executive on 27 November 2014. This assessment highlighted that the allocations proposed for the Department in the Executive’s draft Budget would have significant adverse implications for the services provided by my department and for its clients, stakeholders and staff.

Under the draft budget proposals, my Department’s non ring-fenced Resource DEL budget was reduced by 15.1% (£17.6 million). Allocations were also made to my department of £2 million for local government and £2.7 million for other purposes. Therefore the net reduction to the opening budget under these proposals would be £12.9 million (11.1%).

My Department’s assessment of the draft Budget proposals indicates that in order to meet these reductions a wide range of grants, contracted services, road safety advertising and educational materials and professional fees paid would have to be significantly reduced or ceased completely.

Based on the current assessment of the draft Budget, proposals for addressing the £12.9 million of reductions include reducing the two main Local Government grants the Department administers (De-Rating Grant and Rates Support Grant) by £6.7 million.

In seeking to address the proposed budget reductions of £12.9 million my department has also had to bear in mind some inescapable elements of cost including those contracted and pay bill services as well as any new inescapable costs for 2015-16. In effect this has meant some of the more discretionary budgets such as those for grants programmes; road safety advertising and educational materials; contracted out services; and professional fees would need to be reduced significantly.

I am continuing to press the Finance Minister to bring forward alternative proposals in his final Budget to address my most serious concerns about the DOE’s draft Budget position. In particular I am seeking ring fenced protection for key grants paid to local government and for some easement in the excessive reductions proposed for our other services in the draft Budget.

The table below provides the current year allocations (2014-15) for the programmes and grants which are under threat due to the proposed budget cuts.

Programmes and Grants	Current Allocations for 2014-15 £million
Road Safety Advertising Programme	1.8
Constructions Product Grant	0.2
Emergency Planning Grant	0.5
JNCC Grants	0.3

Programmes and Grants	Current Allocations for 2014-15 £million
Listed Building Grants	2.2
Litter Grant	0.1
Civic Pride Funding	0.1
Eco Schools Grant	0.1
Challenge Fund	1.3
Community Waste Fund	0.2
NILGA Support Grants	0.1
National Trust Grant	0.1
Natural Heritage Grants Programme/ Fund	2.2
UAHS and AHF Grant	0.05
Townscape Heritage Initiative Grant	0.07
PDSU – Waste Resources Grant	0.01
Community Places Grant	0.07
WRAP Grant	0.6
Local Air Quality Grant	0.4
PLACE Grant	0.01
Community Transport Association Grants (Road Safety Grants & admin fee)	0.2
Sustainability Innovation Fund	0.4
Disability Action Grant	0.03
Contracted services for environmental related activities	4.9
Road Safety Educational Materials	0.4
Professional fees paid for environmental related activities	0.4

In addition to the reductions in the programmes and grants outlined above, other grants that are under threat due to the recent proposed budget cuts are the De-Rating Grant and the Rates Support Grant. The current 2014-15 budget for the De-Rating Grant is £25.8 million and under the draft budget proposals a reduction of 15.1% (£3.9 million) would be made. The current 2014-15 budget for the Rates Support Grant is £18.3 million and a 15.1% reduction to this grant would mean a reduction of £2.8 million.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant AQW 38413/11-15, if the application was granted correctly in line with all procedures, why it was removed on 1 October 2013.

(AQW 39695/11-15)

Mr Durkan: A number of complaints were received alleging that a physical operating centre had not been established at Ravenhill Rugby ground. This was investigated by officials, resulting in the removal of the centre from the licence.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment whether the new management structures for Local Government from April 2015 will be conducted internally or externally.

(AQW 39749/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Decisions concerning the management structures for Local Government are the responsibility of the elected members and officers of the new councils.

In making decisions and recruiting to those management structures, the new councils must comply with the Local Government Reform Joint Forum circular LGRJF/08 which gives effect to the provisions of the Guiding Principles and Associated Recommendations as recommended by the Public Service Commission and accepted by the NI Executive in relation to the procedure for filling posts in the new council structures.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will collate evidence from businesses which have been negatively affected by the road user levy for heavy goods vehicles; and if so, how his Department will collate.

(AQW 39754/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The HGV Road User Levy is a UK Government tax which has applied to all vehicles over 12 tonnes using the UK's roads since 1 April 2014. I remain concerned about the impact of the Levy on hauliers on this island. That is why I made a commitment to the Assembly on 4 November that my Department would monitor the position to identify any negative economic impacts resulting from the Levy.

Given that the impacts are likely to be reflected in factors such as increases in the costs of goods or services or decreases in profit margins, my officials will work with their counterparts in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) to review adverse impacts. I understand that DETI and the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy are already conducting research on the costs of doing business. That research will examine a range of cost areas, including transport costs, and seek to benchmark costs for Northern Ireland firms against Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. I have asked my officials to liaise with those undertaking the research to determine how the data could be used to identify any material impacts which result from the introduction of the levy.

As a direct result of my engagement, officials in the Department for Transport (DfT) have made a commitment that they will take mitigating action should firm evidence of economic impact on this island because of the HGV Road User Levy become available. Previous responses to me from DfT Ministers have made it clear that they require robust evidence of adverse economic impact before they are willing to consider action, rather than data that they can represent as anecdote or example. That is why I propose to proceed in the way I have set out in this answer.

I fully intend to revert to DfT with evidence of adverse impact as and when it becomes available, but recognise that it is likely to take time before impacts can crystallise and be analysed.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment what plan he has to ensure minority parties have equality on council committees and outside bodies, whether by nomination or election.
(AQW 39755/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am committed to ensuring that all the political parties and independents represented on a council have the opportunity to have a role in the governance structures of the council.

The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act) makes provision to ensure equality of opportunity in the allocation of positions of responsibility on a council, and the membership of committees of a council, across the political parties and independents represented on a council. Provision is also made to ensure a consistent approach across all the councils.

Section 6 of the Act lists those positions that are deemed to be positions of responsibility. This includes those positions on an external body, established under a statutory provision, that require the nomination by the council of an individual to represent the council on that body. Schedule 1 to the Act makes detailed provision on the methods available to a council for the filling of these positions. The methods specified are the d'Hondt or Sainte-Laguë formula approaches or the Single Transferable Vote, with the d'Hondt method being specified as the default approach.

The Act also makes provision to ensure that the membership of a committee of a council reflects, so far as is practicable, the political make up of the council. Schedule 2 to the Act makes detailed provision in relation to the application of either the Quota Greatest Remainder or Droop Quota allocation method for this purpose.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37097/11-15, to detail the occasions when the Chief Enforcement Officer of the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) communicated observations to DVA or licensing colleagues while acting in a personal capacity in the last two years.
(AQW 39764/11-15)

Mr Durkan: While attending Ravenhill Stadium in a personal capacity, a DVA enforcement officer has communicated observations to licensing colleagues on one occasion in the last two years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the grants available from his Department for community groups.
(AQW 39774/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table below details the grants currently available in 2014-15 from my Department for Community Groups. However, as outlined in my Department's assessment of the 2015-16 draft Budget, if the 2015-16 draft Budget proposals for my Department were to be confirmed in the final Budget then there would be a termination of a wide range of grant programmes.

Grant Programme	Description
Road Safety	The key objective of this programme is to contribute to the reduction of the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads and support the achievement of the road safety targets outlined in the Road Safety Strategy to 2020.
Natural Heritage	This grant programme supports projects to encourage the conservation and enhancement of the environment and its wildlife.

Grant Programme	Description
Listed Building	This grant programme is available to assist with the costs of eligible repair and maintenance works to most listed buildings
Challenge Fund	This grant programme enables groups from the community and voluntary sector to deliver a range of environmental programmes.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 39173/11-15, to detail the number of expressions of interest in the 'restricted' Northern Ireland Civil Service Voluntary Exit Scheme to generate vacancies for surplus Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency staff in Coleraine, which had been received by the December 3 2014 deadline.

(AQW 39802/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The NICS Administrative Assistant (AA) and Administrative Officer (AO) Voluntary Exit Scheme was launched on 19 November 2014 with the aim of clearing up to 130 surplus staff at AA & AO level.

The closing date for registering an expression of interest in receiving an illustration of entitlements under the Scheme was Wednesday 3 December 2014. A total of 783 eligible staff have registered their interest in receiving an illustration which includes a small number of late applications received after the closing date but which were accepted with the approval of the Scheme Selection Panel.

Those staff who requested an illustration of entitlements have until 5.00pm on Wednesday 7 January 2015 to submit a formal application to leave under the terms of the Scheme.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37881/11-15 and AQW 36783/11-15, why regulation 13 (I) of the PSV Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1985 feature in the legal position regarding taxi provision at Ravenhill Stadium if it has never been endorsed or enforced.

(AQW 39849/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I refer the member to my answer to AQW 37881/11-15.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department is taking to encourage councils to use e-sourcing for procurement.

(AQW 39857/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My officials have been working closely with the Local Government Procurement Group for a number of years. One of the key successes of this working relationship has been local government's use of Central Procurement Directorate's (CPDs) e-sourcing solution, which is known as 'Bravo'. At present, 16 councils regularly use the system.

The 'Bravo' system is currently being replaced, and a local government representative has been part of the project board which has selected the replacement system. The switch to this new e-sourcing system will take place over the next 12 to 18 months, and it is anticipated that all of the new 11 councils will use the new system.

Crucially, use of the new public sector e-sourcing system will be free of charge to local government.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant AQW 37736/11-15, on how many other occasions in the last eighteen months the Director of Road Safety and Vehicle Regulation Division has been accompanied by the Driver and Vehicle Agency Chief Enforcement Officer to a meeting with private hire taxi companies; and to detail the (i) dates; (ii) times; (iii) attendees; and (iv) minutes of each meeting.

(AQW 39882/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Aside from the meeting outlined in my response to AQW 37736/11-15, the Director of Road Safety and Vehicle Regulation Division has not attended any such meetings accompanied by the Driver and Vehicle Agency Chief Enforcement Officer during the last 18 months.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will review the current fee of £842 to register a Paragraph 16 exemption for the beneficial use of tyres for the farming community.

(AQW 39950/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Under Article 4(1)(b) of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (as amended), a person shall not treat, keep or dispose of controlled waste or knowingly cause or knowingly permit controlled waste to be treated, kept or disposed of (i) in or on any land ... except under and in accordance with a waste management licence.

There are however criteria and thresholds in the legislation which permit certain small scale, low risk waste activities to be exempt from the waste licensing regime. A farmer may apply to NIEA to register a Paragraph 16 waste exemption for the beneficial use of tyres and the fee is £842 for three years.

Tyres which were present on a farm prior to the introduction of the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (NI) 2003 would not require a waste authorisation.

Currently there are no farmers holding Paragraph 16 registrations for the beneficial use of tyres on farms.

My Department is undertaking a full review of all waste exemptions, including Paragraph 16 and I can confirm that the criteria, thresholds and costs will be considered as part of that review.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the operating cost of each MOT test centre, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 40132/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) does not hold the information in the format requested, as not all operating costs are held at test centre level. Some direct costs such as salaries, travel and cleaning are held at test centre level however, costs which relate to test centres operations such as the maintenance of the MOT equipment, the test booking system and building maintenance are held centrally.

The analysis of total operating cost for 2013/14 of £34.4m (2012/13: £34.4m, 2011/12: £32.9m) for Driver and Vehicle Testing as a whole can be found in the DVA Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for each year.

The following link provide access to the DVA Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for each year.

<http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/foi/recent-releases/publications-class-results.htm?category=Cat+3+-+What+are+our+priorities+and+how+we+are+doing&class=Annual+reports&sortorder=title>

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the reduction in the number of plastic bags used since the introduction of the Carrier Bag Levy.

(AQW 40134/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The 5 pence single use carrier bag levy was introduced on 8 April 2013 and has been well received by both retailers and shoppers. The levy applies to all single use carrier bags made from plastic, paper or other natural materials. As such retailers are not required to stipulate the material type when making their quarterly returns to the Department and for this reason it is not possible to provide data specifically in relation to plastic bags.

Official validated carrier bag usage figures for the first year of operation of the levy indicate that 84.5 million single use carrier bags were dispensed by retailers across Northern Ireland as opposed to around 300 million bags in the year prior to the levy. The 5p levy has delivered a reduction in bag numbers of 71.8% in its first year.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total payments made by Health and Care Trusts to private medical practices in each of the last eighteen months.

(AQW 39134/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The total payments made by each Health and Social Care Trust to Independent Sector providers in each of the last eighteen months (from April 2013 to September 2014), are set out in the table below. Information by month is not available.

	£m
Belfast Health & Social Care Trust	54.5
Northern Health & Social Care Trust	6.0
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust	16.9
Southern Health & Social Care Trust	5.9
Western Health & Social Care Trust	16.0
Total	99.3

*Source: Health & Social Care Trusts

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the review into bringing Health and Social Care Trust staff working arrangements into line with European Working Time Directives, namely the Williams Street Case, will be extended to include the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 39244/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that it is considering the outcome of the William Street Industrial Tribunal case and its implications for the Trust.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the estimated cost to the Western Health and Social Care Trust of outstanding back-dated pay.

(AQW 39246/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i) I am advised by the Western Health and Social Care Trust that it could only provide the estimated cost of outstanding back-dated pay at disproportionate cost. The Trust is, however, working to have these payments processed as quickly as possible and has a dedicated resource in place for this. The Trust will have all payments made within the current financial year.
- (ii) The number of Western Health and Social Trust staff affected by the entitlement to back dated pay is 6,656 staff. The Trust has already made payment to 5,078 staff. A further 1,042 calculations are completed and are awaiting verification so that payment can take place. A further 536 calculations remain to be performed.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact of the closure of Stewart Memorial House in Bangor.

(AQW 39451/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled (NIID), who runs Stewart Memorial House, confirmed to the Trust on 4 December 2014 that NIID's decision to close the facility had been put on hold to facilitate further discussion with residents, families, staff and MLAs regarding the future of Stewart Memorial House.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on how many occasions in each of the last five years assistance has been provided by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to calls in the Republic of Ireland; and what are the corresponding figures in respect of assistance provided from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland.

(AQW 39453/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table below provides details of the number of occasions, in each of the last five years, when the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) provided assistance at emergency incidents in the Republic of Ireland (ROI), and when ROI (Co Donegal) provided assistance to NIFRS at incidents in Northern Ireland.

	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	Total
No of incidents NIFRS provided assistance to ROI at Emergency Incidents	112	120	88	84	76	480
No of incidents ROI (Co. Donegal appliances) provided assistance to NIFRS at Emergency Incidents	4	7	4	2	6	23

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are the financial arrangements in place to recompense the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service for services provided in the Republic of Ireland; and how much has been recovered for same in each of the last five years.

(AQW 39454/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) has a Service Level Agreement with Donegal County Council which outlines the financial arrangements in place to recompense NIFRS for services provided in Donegal. Charges have two elements:

Donegal County Council pays NIFRS an annual retaining fee at the commencement of the financial year.

Donegal County Council is also charged for appliance and crew mobilisation, on a time basis, in respect of each incident. If an Officer is in attendance appropriate mileage is also charged. NIFRS also apply a 15% administration fee on the total value of each invoice. These charges are billed monthly.

Charges are uplifted annually in line with the Retail Prices Index.

Income received from Donegal County Council in the past 5 years is provided in the table below.

Year	Retention Fee	Income Based on Mobilisations	Total Income Received
2009/10	4,710	79,840	84,550
2010/11	4,911	134,944	139,854
2011/12	5,173	77,806	82,980
2012/13	5,358	80,983	86,341

Year	Retention Fee	Income Based on Mobilisations	Total Income Received
2013/14	5,534	62,294	67,827
Total	25,686	435,866	461,552

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to clarify the rationale behind the new 'check-in' service for appointments which is currently operating in Causeway Hospital, replacing the initial 'patient to staff' contact.

(AQW 39464/11-15)

Mr Wells: The new patient check-in service has been introduced to improve patient experience. It does not replace the check-in service which will continue to be provided by reception staff but complements existing services.

Whilst the system has been designed to be simple to use and provides step-by-step instructions to take patients through the check-in process, staff will be on hand to support them with any issues they may be facing in accessing services.

Dalriada Community Hospital

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what contact he has had with staff and families of patients who are receiving care in Dalriada Community Hospital, for needs other than Multiple Sclerosis Respite care, in respect of (i) the nature and timescale of their treatment; and (ii) plans to provide an alternative to care in Dalriada Hospital.

(AQW 39465/11-15)

Mr Wells: Northern Health and Social Care Trust senior management attended Dalriada Hospital on Thursday 30 October and took time to speak with patients and staff. The Trust further met with Moyle Council representatives on Monday 3 November and attended a public meeting on the same evening.

The Trust will continue to do all it can to communicate with stakeholders to ensure everyone understands the decisions being taken. The primary obligation is for the Trust to comply with the Court's order of 4 December concerning the granting of interim relief on the services that were temporarily closed at Dalriada Hospital.

I have also spoken directly with staff, patients and family members.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38454/11-15, to explain the change in the numbers of staff in the (i) Health and Social Care Board; (ii) Business Services Organisation; and (iii) Public Health Agency in each of the five years.

(AQW 39473/11-15)

Mr Wells: Pursuant to AQW 38454/11-15, the change in the numbers of staff in the (i) Health and Social Care Board (HSCB); (ii) Business Services Organisation (BSO); and (iii) Public Health Agency (PHA) in each of the five years is a result of a combination of factors including those cited for each organisation below; these lists are not exhaustive.

(i) **Health and Social Care Board**

- Transfer of staff from Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Department of Education and the Business Services Organisation to deliver additional functions eg. Management of Family Health Service Budgets, Clinical support for NI drug tariff, Clinical support for negotiation of local elements of the General Medical Services (GMS) contract etc.;
- Creation of a Transforming Your Care (TYC) project management core project team;
- Additional work to support:
 - Integrated Care Partnerships;
 - Primary Care Infrastructure;
 - Prescribing projects (formulary, Hospital e-prescribing, Medicine management initiatives);
 - Delivering Social Change (DSC) projects;
 - Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Inquiry; and
 - Social Care Strategy Implementation.

(ii) **Business Services Organisation**

- Implementation of the Business Services Transformation Programme;
- Introduction of Shared Services (resulting in a number of TUPE transfers from other HSC bodies); and
- Recruitment of additional staff to deliver a regional payroll, income payments and recruitment service to the HSC.

(iii) **Public Health Agency**

- Recruitment into vacant posts;
- Additional functions under remit to include servicing HSC Safety Forum, European Centre for Connected Health & Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland;
- Remit in relation to Allied Health Professions; and

- Development of Health and Social Wellbeing Improvement programmes.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the level of savings achieved following the establishment of the Business Services Organisation in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 39474/11-15)

Mr Wells: The level of savings (cash and productivity) achieved by the BSO for HSC organisations over the period 2009/10 to 2013/14 was as follows:

	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m	2011/12 £m	2012/13 £sm	2013/14 £m	Total £m
Savings Delivered to HSC Organisations	5.8	14.7	7.4	11.7	16.5	56.1

Savings generated by BSO for each individual HSC Trust can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of personnel who transferred from each Health and Social Care Trust to the Business Services Organisation, broken down by grade.

(AQW 39475/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of personnel who transferred from each HSC Trust to the Business Services Organisation (BSO), broken down by grade during the period 1 April 2009 (when BSO was established) – 30 November 2014 is detailed in the table below:-

Health & Social Care Trust	Agenda for Change Staff Band	Number (Headcount)
Belfast HSC Trust	2	3
	3	60
	5	14
	7	1
	Total	78
Northern HSC Trust	3	26
	4	3
	5	1
	6	1
	Total	31
South Eastern HSC Trust	2	1
	3	15
	4	5
	5	8
	6	2
	7	29
	8A	12
	8B	5
	8C	2
	Total	79
Southern HSC Trust	3	13
	4	3
	5	1
	Total	17

Health & Social Care Trust	Agenda for Change Staff Band	Number (Headcount)
Western HSC Trust	2	1
	3	20
	4	4
	5	4
	Total	29
Grand Total		234

Source: HSC Trusts

Note: 'Nil Return' from Northern Ireland Ambulance Service

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average ambulance turnaround times for category A calls, broken down by hospital, in each of the last four years.

(AQW 39502/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is not possible to present average ambulance turnaround times specifically for category A calls as the turnaround time is based on the priority of the patient when they arrive at an emergency care department, and not the category of the call, which is based on the call handlers assessment at the time of the emergency call (999). With this in mind, the turnaround time may be longer for a number of Category A calls as the patient may not be as serious as originally identified and reassessed as not potentially life threatening on arrival at the emergency care department.

However, information is available on the average ambulance turnaround time at each emergency care department for all types of emergency calls. This information is presented in the table overleaf for each of the last three years only, as information is not available prior to 1st April 2011.

It should be noted that the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) do not capture information on the date/time of admission of patients to emergency care departments. As a consequence, information on turnaround times detailed in the response refers to the time between the ambulance arriving at the emergency care department and it 'clearing' the location. The crew will remain with the patient until they have been handed over to the relevant clinical personnel within the HSC Hospital environment. The ambulance turnaround time will include patient handover and other aspects such as the time to clean and replenish the ambulance for the next call.

Ambulance Turnaround Times, by Emergency Care Department (2011/12 – 2013/14)

HSC Trust	Hospital	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Belfast	Belfast City	00:26:11	00:30:47	00:32:04
	Mater	00:25:04	00:28:48	00:30:05
	RBHSC	00:19:20	00:22:49	00:23:07
	Royal Victoria	00:34:48	00:38:55	00:37:29
Northern	Antrim Area	00:26:45	00:29:11	00:26:13
	Causeway	00:19:08	00:22:05	00:23:12
	Mid Ulster	00:24:05	00:22:45	00:26:23
	Whiteabbey	00:07:43	00:26:53	00:33:35
South Eastern	Ards	00:20:50	01:09:36	00:36:44
	Bangor	00:18:51	00:43:10	00:20:26
	Downe	00:18:41	00:21:27	00:23:32
	Lagan Valley	00:22:15	00:26:57	00:27:17
	Ulster	00:34:10	00:34:46	00:36:12
Southern	Craigavon Area	00:25:16	00:28:24	00:31:35
	Daisyhill	00:20:48	00:26:20	00:30:55
	Mullinure / Armagh1	00:09:03		00:09:40
	South Tyrone	00:13:52	00:18:34	00:27:37

HSC Trust	Hospital	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Western	Altnagelvin Area	00:20:35	00:22:15	00:23:57
	Erne2	00:18:16	00:19:37	
	South West Acute		00:23:29	00:24:00
	Tyrone County	00:16:03	00:15:44	00:18:36

Source: Northern Ireland Ambulance Service

- 1 Mullinure MIU closed on the 3rd September 2012
- 2 Erne was closed and replaced by the South West Acute hospital on the 21st June 2012

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38327/11-15, why the "commissioned levels of activity have been reducing over the past 10 years".

(AQW 39524/11-15)

Mr Wells: Over the past 10 years Health and Social Care Trusts have facilitated personal choice for people with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) who require respite care through the provision of more local arrangements in their respective HSC Trust areas. Consequently, the number of respite bed days commissioned from the MS Respite Centre in Dalriada by the other HSC Trusts has reduced over this period of time.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much core funding his Department has allocated to each voluntary and community organisation in each year since 2007; and when he will communicate to these organisations a final decision of core grant funding for the remainder of 2014/15 and for 2015/16.

(AQW 39553/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table details core funding support provided to voluntary and community organisations from my Department since 2007.

Organisations are now aware of the level of funding available to them in 2014/15, should they meet the terms and conditions of their grant. Final decisions about the core grant fund in 2015/16 have not been made at this stage.

	Planned 2014/15	Allocated 2013/14	Allocated 2012/13	Allocated 2011/12	Allocated 2010/11	Allocated 2009/10	Allocated 2008/09	Allocated 2007/08
Accord	87,150	87,150	87,150	87,150	87,150	87,150	85,024	82,950
Aids, Care, Education, Training (ACET)	55,059	55,059	55,059	55,059	55,059	55,059	53,716	52,406
Action Mental Health	85,237	85,237	85,237	85,237	85,237	85,237	83,158	81,130
Action on Hearing Loss (RNID)	29,444	29,444	29,444	29,444	29,444	29,444	28,878	28,037
Adopt	18,719	18,719	18,719	18,719	18,719	18,719	18,262	17,817
Adoption UK	21,197	17,402	21,197	21,197	21,197	24,094	13,668	15,102
Age Concern	0	0	0	0	0	0	184,287	179,792
AGENI	220,952	220,952	220,952	220,952	220,952	220,952	0	0
Alzheimers Society	42,794	42,794	42,794	42,794	42,794	42,794	41,750	40,732
Autism NI	51,187	51,187	51,187	51,187	51,187	51,187	51,187	0
Aware Defeat Depression	38,392	38,392	38,392	38,392	38,392	38,392	37,455	37,455
British Association for Adoption & Fostering	92,093	92,093	92,093	92,093	92,093	92,093	90,422	85,678
British Red Cross	6,698		6,698	6,698	6,698	6,698	6,533	4,145
Cara Friend	31,705	31,705	31,705	31,705	31,705	31,705	30,932	30,178
Carers N.I	42,143	42,143	42,143	42,143	42,143	42,143	41,115	40,112
CAUSE	33,000	33,000	33,000	33,000	0	0	0	0

	Planned 2014/15	Allocated 2013/14	Allocated 2012/13	Allocated 2011/12	Allocated 2010/11	Allocated 2009/10	Allocated 2008/09	Allocated 2007/08
ChildLine	62,392	62,392	62,392	62,392	62,392	62,392	60,871	59,386
Children in Northern Ireland	102,834	102,834	102,834	102,834	102,834	102,834	100,085	97,879
Children's Law Centre	71,969	71,969	71,969	71,969	71,969	71,969	70,214	68,501
Church of Ireland Board of Social Responsibility	75,232	75,232	75,232	77,394	75,232	75,232	73,397	71,607
Community Development in Health Network	46,858	46,858	46,858	46,858	46,858	46,858	45,715	44,600
Contact a Family	31,103	31,103	31,103	31,103	31,103	31,102	30,344	29,604
Crossroads	57,576	57,576	57,576	57,576	57,576	57,576	56,172	54,802
CRUSE - Bereavement Care	52,467	52,467	52,467	52,467	52,467	52,467	51,188	49,939
Disability Action	165,152	165,152	165,152	165,152	165,152	165,152	161,124	148,893
Down's Syndrome Association	35,046	35,046	35,046	35,046	35,046	35,046	34,191	33,336
Eating Disorders Association	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	0	0	0	0
Epilepsy Action	12,134	12,134	12,134	12,134	12,134	12,134	11,838	11,549
Family Care Society	178,608	178,608	178,608	178,608	178,608	178,419	177,741	173,406
Family Planning Association	96,045	89,632	96,045	92,754	96,045	96,045	93,703	91,418
Fostering Network	57,986	57,986	57,986	57,986	57,986	57,986	56,571	55,191
Gingerbread	136,274	136,274	136,274	136,274	136,274	140,274	132,950	129,700
Harmony Community Trust	32,257	32,243	32,243	32,243	32,257	32,257	30,845	25,972
Help the Aged	0	0	0	0	0	0	51,131	49,884
Homestart	50,420	50,420	50,420	50,420	50,420	50,420	49,190	47,990
Include Youth	45,983	45,983	45,983	45,983	45,983	45,956	44,861	43,767
LIFE (NI)	27,615	27,615	27,615	27,615	27,615	27,615	26,942	26,285
Lighthouse Limited	32,800	32,800	32,800	32,800	32,800	32,800	0	0
MENCAP	110,148	110,148	110,148	110,147	110,147	110,147	107,461	104,840
Meningitis Research	19,184	19,184	19,184	19,184	19,184	19,184	18,716	18,259
Men's Advisory Project (MAP)	0	0	0	10,202	71,750	71,750	70,000	46,493
Mindwise	85,187	85,187	85,187	85,187	85,187	85,187	83,110	79,105
Mucopolysaccharide	3,953	3,953	3,953	3,953	3,950	3,953	3,857	3,763
Nexus Institute	75,046	75,046	75,046	75,046	75,046	75,046	73,216	71,430
NI Music Therapy Trust	17,072	17,072	17,072	17,072	17,072	17,072	17,072	0
NI-ADD	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	0	0	0	0
Addiction NI (formally NICAS)	132,497	132,497	132,497	132,497	132,497	132,497	129,266	126,113

	Planned 2014/15	Allocated 2013/14	Allocated 2012/13	Allocated 2011/12	Allocated 2010/11	Allocated 2009/10	Allocated 2008/09	Allocated 2007/08
Northern Ireland Childminding Association	73,114	73,114	73,114	64,212	00,000	00,000	00,000	00,000
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation	197,261	197,261	197,261	197,261	197,261	197,261	192,450	187,756
Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health	194,365	194,365	194,365	194,365	194,365	194,365	189,625	185,000
Northern Ireland Hospice	133,829	133,829	133,829	133,829	133,829	133,829	130,565	127,380
Northern Ireland Myalgic Encephalopathy	0	0	0	18,434	18,434	18,434	17,984	13,160
Northlands	168,573	168,573	168,573	168,573	168,573	168,573	164,413	160,403
National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children	0	0	0	0	205,000	205,000	200,000	0
Parenting NI	97,751	97,751	97,751	97,751	97,751	97,751	95,367	93,041
Positive Life	103,646	101,976	103,646	87,856	72,899	111,962	109,231	106,567
Presbyterian Board of Social Witness	49,497	49,497	49,497	49,497	49,497	49,497	48,290	47,112
Rainbow Project	32,443	32,443	32,443	32,443	32,443	32,443	31,652	30,880
Relate NI	218,622	218,622	218,622	218,622	218,622	218,622	213,289	208,087
Relatives Association	0	0	0	0	0	0	19,422	18,949
Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB)	78,693	78,693	78,693	78,693	78,693	78,693	76,774	74,901
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	94,327	94,327	94,327	94,327	94,327	94,327	90,024	n/a
Samaritans	16,538	16,538	16,538	16,538	16,538	16,538	16,135	15,741
SENSE	25,038	25,038	25,038	25,038	25,038	25,038	24,427	23,831
Signature	0	20,619	20,619	0	20,618	20,169	0	0
St Vincent de Paul Society	83,886	83,886	83,886	83,886	83,886	83,886	81,840	79,844
Stroke Association for Northern Ireland	14,445	14,445	14,445	14,445	14,445	14,445	14,445	0
The Cedar Foundation	45,174	45,474	45,474	45,174	45,174	45,174	45,173	0
Threshold	88,046	88,046	88,046	88,046	88,046	88,046	85,899	84,132
Twins & Multiple Births Association	14,000	14,000	14,000	14,000	14,000	14,000	13,658	13,325
Volunteer Now	140,137	140,137	140,137	140,137	124,844	140,119	136,719	133,385
Voice Of Young People In Care (VOYPIC)	54,905	54,905	54,904	54,905	54,905	54,905	53,522	52,260

	Planned 2014/15	Allocated 2013/14	Allocated 2012/13	Allocated 2011/12	Allocated 2010/11	Allocated 2009/10	Allocated 2008/09	Allocated 2007/08
Federation of Women's Institute of Northern Ireland (WINI)	18,418	18,073	18,418	18,418	18,418	18,418	17,969	17,531
Women's Resource & Development Agency	45,871	45,871	45,871	45,871	45,871	45,871	44,752	43,661

n/a – information not available

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many residents currently reside at Stewart Memorial House in Bangor; and what was the average occupancy in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39566/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information is not collected centrally and was requested from the South Eastern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust.

The South Eastern HSC Trust stated that information provided by the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled (NIID) indicates that, at 4 December 2014, 16 people were residing in Stewart Memorial House in Bangor.

At 11 December 2014, the NIID also provided the average number of residents of Stewart Memorial House in each of the last three years, as detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Average Number of Residents in Stewart Memorial House 1, 2

Year	Average Number of Residents
20143	17
2013	19
2012	26

Source: Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled (NIID).

- 1 Figures take into account deaths and transfers.
- 2 The SEHSCT understands that Stewart Memorial House has been registered by the RQIA as a Nursing Home with 30 beds available.
- 3 Up to 11 December 2014.

The South Eastern HSC Trust stated that they cannot verify the information provided by NIID. It also has not been validated by the DHSSPS.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much annual funding his Department provides to the Stewart Memorial Nursing Home in Bangor.

(AQW 39571/11-15)

Mr Wells: This Department does not provide any annual funding to the Stewart Memorial Nursing Home in Bangor.

Although not providing direct support to the Stewart Memorial Nursing Home, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) provides support to each individual service user, their families and staff at Stewart Memorial to ensure that assessed needs are met on an ongoing basis. SEHSCT staff work in partnership with Stewart Memorial staff to ensure that service user needs are responded to in a timely and appropriate manner.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the exact process, step by step, of how the cost savings recommendations from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust were processed; and to outline his involvement.

(AQW 39576/11-15)

Mr Wells: All Trusts were advised during the summer that it would be necessary to implement a range of contingency proposals given the outcome of June Monitoring. Northern Health and Social Care Trust produced the first draft of their proposals in August.

Since then the HSCB (in liaison with the PHA) has liaised very closely with the Northern Trust, and has critically reviewed, analysed and revised the proposals as appropriate to safeguard the safety and integrity of services and to reflect the subsequent outcome of October Monitoring.

The Northern Trust proposals reflect what is achievable in maintaining safety and minimising costs between now and the end of the financial year.

I have been aware about the financial challenges within all Trusts since I took up office and I was advised of the final contingency plans for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust on 27 October.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the location of the respite care facilities in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust; and the number of respite beds at each facility.

(AQW 39579/11-15)

Mr Wells: As both these questions relate to the provision of respite care in the South Eastern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust, a joint response has been provided. This can be found in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1. Location, Number and Average Bed Usage of Respite Care Facilities in the South Eastern HSC Trust

Facility	Location	Number of respite beds	Average Bed Usage ¹			
			2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 ²
Ardcora	Downpatrick	3	-	100%	100%	100%
Ardview House	Ardglass	5	57%	100%	97%	-
Ballymacconnell Private Nursing Home	Bangor	1	79%	72%	63%	-
Bangor Care Home	Bangor	1	-	79%	26%	22%
Beeches	Lisburn	1	-	100%	100%	100%
Carmen House Residential Home	Bangor	1	Not available	Not available	48%	-
Carnalea Care Home	Bangor	1	87%	83%	74%	-
Clandeboyne Care Home	Bangor	1	60%	74%	51%	-
Croaghpatrick Care Home	Donaghadee	1	100%	80%	60%	-
Croft	Bangor	7	-	86%	84%	88%
Drumlough House	Lisburn	5	40%	47%	46%	-
Hillhall	Lisburn	7	-	63%	65%	65%
Iniscora	Downpatrick	3	-	Not available	95%	95%
Laurelhill House	Lisburn	2	82%	69%	100%	-
Lindsay House ³	Dunmurry	8	-	93%	93%	93%
Mount Alexander House	Comber	2	100%	71%	71%	-
Newcroft Lodge	Holywood	2	100%	57%	53%	-
Oakridge Care Home	Ballynahinch	1	57%	64%	63%	-
Orchard Grove	Downpatrick	1	-	Not available	89%	89%
Ravara House ⁴	Bangor	12	100%	77%	CLOSED	
Stewart Memorial	Bangor	1	-	Not available	39%	39%
Strangford Court	Downpatrick	2	-	Not available	87%	87%
Twisel Lodge	Bangor	1	-	100%	100%	100%

1 The South Eastern HSC Trust provided average bed usage relating to 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14 for facilities relevant to Older Peoples Services and average bed usage relating to 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 for facilities relevant to Adult Services and Children's Services.

2 Figures for 2014/15 are provided as at 8th December 2014.

3 Lindsay House is located in Dunmurry but is managed by the South Eastern HSC Trust.

4 Ravara House closed in March 2013.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average bed usage at each respite care facility in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39580/11-15)

Mr Wells: As both these questions relate to the provision of respite care in the South Eastern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust, a joint response has been provided. This can be found in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1. Location, Number and Average Bed Usage of Respite Care Facilities in the South Eastern HSC Trust

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			2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 ²
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Ardview House	Ardglass	5	57%	100%	97%	-
Ballymacconnell Private Nursing Home	Bangor	1	79%	72%	63%	-
Bangor Care Home	Bangor	1	-	79%	26%	22%
Beeches	Lisburn	1	-	100%	100%	100%
Carmen House Residential Home	Bangor	1	Not available	Not available	48%	-
Carnalea Care Home	Bangor	1	87%	83%	74%	-
Clandeboyne Care Home	Bangor	1	60%	74%	51%	-
Croaghpatrick Care Home	Donaghadee	1	100%	80%	60%	-
Croft	Bangor	7	-	86%	84%	88%
Drumlough House	Lisburn	5	40%	47%	46%	-
Hillhall	Lisburn	7	-	63%	65%	65%
Iniscora	Downpatrick	3	-	Not available	95%	95%
Laurelhill House	Lisburn	2	82%	69%	100%	-
Lindsay House ³	Dunmurry	8	-	93%	93%	93%
Mount Alexander House	Comber	2	100%	71%	71%	-
Newcroft Lodge	Holywood	2	100%	57%	53%	-
Oakridge Care Home	Ballynahinch	1	57%	64%	63%	-
Orchard Grove	Downpatrick	1	-	Not available	89%	89%
Ravara House ⁴	Bangor	12	100%	77%	CLOSED	
Stewart Memorial	Bangor	1	-	Not available	39%	39%
Strangford Court	Downpatrick	2	-	Not available	87%	87%
Twisel Lodge	Bangor	1	-	100%	100%	100%

1 The South Eastern HSC Trust provided average bed usage relating to 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14 for facilities relevant to Older Peoples Services and average bed usage relating to 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 for facilities relevant to Adult Services and Children's Services.

2 Figures for 2014/15 are provided as at 8th December 2014.

3 Lindsay House is located in Dunmurry but is managed by the South Eastern HSC Trust.

4 Ravara House closed in March 2013.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to alter the number of beds available for respite care in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in 2015/16.

(AQW 39582/11-15)

Mr Wells: For Older People's and Children's Services, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has no plans to alter the number of beds available for respite care in 2015/16. For Adult Services, the Trust intends to continue with its focus on developing a range of respite options for disabled people in 2015/16. The Trust is seeking to develop and provide flexible, responsive options that would maximise the carer's choice to sustain them in their caring role. These options would include a range of services, some of which will be bed based, others would be provided in the service users own home or would facilitate a social inclusion opportunity for the service user.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will consider condensing the six Health and Social Care Trusts into a single Trust as part of the ongoing review of health spending.

(AQW 39586/11-15)

Mr Wells: The review which I announced on Friday 28 November relates specifically to the administrative structures in place within the Health and Social Care system. As such, I have no plans to reduce the number of Trusts currently in operation.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what percentage of Health Service spending in Northern Ireland is allocated to GP practices.

(AQW 39626/11-15)

Mr Wells: £237m was allocated to General Medical Services in 2012/13, which information from the Technical Steering Committee indicates equates to 8% of the total Health budget.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what specific funding is available for the regional Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary surgical service.

(AQW 39652/11-15)

Mr Wells: An estimate of HPB (hepato-pancreato-biliary) sub specialty costs would require a lengthy analysis by classification code for all general surgery activity for Northern Ireland, and this is not readily available.

The Health and Social Care Board does commission regional (more complex) hepatobiliary and pancreatic system surgery from the Mater Hospital, within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. The cost associated with this service in 2012/13 were some £3.4m

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the budgetary allocation provided to (i) children; and (ii) adult respite services, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 39679/11-15)

Mr Wells: As respite care is provided across a number of Programmes of Care, information on Health and Social Care Trust's budgetary allocations to (i) children and (ii) adult respite services is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the breakdown of the Western Health and Social Care Trust's expenditure on respite services.

(AQW 39680/11-15)

Mr Wells: As respite care is provided across a number of Programmes of Care, information on the Western Health and Social Services Trust's expenditure on respite services is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the expenditure for respite care spend per person in the Western Health and Social Care Trust; and how this compares to other Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 39705/11-15)

Mr Wells: As respite care is provided across a number of Programmes of Care, information on the Western Health and Social Services Trust's expenditure on respite services is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) location; and (ii) number of in patient step down beds in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 39708/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information is not collected centrally and was requested from the South Eastern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust.

The South Eastern HSC Trust indicated that at 8th December 2014 there were 113 step down beds within their Trust, all of which were for Older Peoples services. Their locations are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Sector	Facility	Location	No. of Beds
Independent	Domnall Intermediate Care Centre	Dundonald	29
	Hollywood Nursing Home	Hollywood	6
	Comber Nursing Home	Comber	2
	Edgewater Nursing Home	Donaghadee	1
	Scrabo Isles Nursing Home	Newtownards	1
	Lisburn Intermediate Care Centre	Lisburn	10
	Floating Nursing Home Beds	North Down Ards Area	12
	Floating Nursing Home Beds	Down Lisburn Area	15
Statutory	Newcroft Lodge EMI Residential Home	Hollywood	2
	Mount Alexander EMI Residential Home	Comber	1
	Northfield House Residential Home	Donaghadee	14
	Drumlough House Residential Home	Lisburn	10
	Ardview House Residential Home	Ardglass	10

In addition, one designated step down bed for Mental Health services in Slieve Patrick is due to officially open on 11th December 2014.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions have taken place involving his Department or the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust with the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled (NIID) on the placement of residents following closure.

(AQW 39718/11-15)

Mr Wells: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the Northern Ireland Institute for the Disabled (NIID), who runs Stewart Memorial House, confirmed to the Trust on 4 December 2014 that NIID's decision to close the facility had been put on hold to facilitate further discussion with residents, families, staff and MLAs regarding the future of Stewart Memorial House.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children have received a diagnosis of autism, Autism Spectrum Disorder or Asperger's Syndrome in each Health and Social Care Trust in the last five years; and whether funding allocations to meet this assessment process, post-diagnosis support and intervention have been proportionate to the trend identified from these figures.

(AQW 39720/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board is unable to provide diagnostic data for the last five years as data collating from each Trust area only commenced in October 2012. The following table outlines the number of children diagnosed with autism over the last 2 years.

The number of children diagnosed with autism in each Health and Social Care Trust from October 2012 – October 2014

Trust	Children Diagnosed with Autism	
	Oct 12 - Sept 13	Oct 13 - Sept 14
Belfast HSC	170	212
Northern HSC	356	449
South Eastern HSC	154	228
Southern HSC	59	70
Western HSC	109	125
Total	848	1084

Prevalence data on school-age children is contained in the report <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/asd-children-ni-2014.pdf> and shows a 67% increase in children aged 4-15 with ASD (including Aspergers) over the period 2008/09 to 2013/14. The number of referrals to the children's Autism service has increased significantly over the last 5 years across all Trusts. Regional referral figures represent an estimated 100% increase in demand since 2008/2009. There has been no new recurrent investment in

children's autism specific services since 2012, however there is an on-going review within current services in each Trust to ensure efficient use of the current resources.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many adults have received a diagnosis of autism, Autism Spectrum Disorder or Asperger's Syndrome in each Health and Social Care Trust in the last five years; and whether funding allocations to meet this assessment process, post-diagnosis support and intervention have been proportionate to the trend identified from these figures.

(AQW 39721/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board commenced collating information provided from Trusts in February 2014 with adults diagnosed with autism. There is an on-going review of the information to ensure consistency of collation as the Adult Service and care pathway is developed and embedded within each Trust.

The information currently available shows that:

- (i) between June 2012 to September 2014, 42 adults were confirmed with a diagnosis of ASD in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust;
- (ii) between 1 April 2013 to October 2014, 22 adults were confirmed with a diagnosis of ASD in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
- (iii) since the establishment of the Adult Diagnostic Service in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust in 2013, two adults have received a diagnosis;
- (iv) from February 2014, 20 patients have received a diagnosis of ASD in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust; and
- (v) since the third quarter of 2013 Trust and 12 people were given a diagnosis of autism in the Western Health and Social Care. Prior to this six people were confirmed as having a diagnosis of autism.

An estimate of 15,000 adults in Northern Ireland, currently affected by Autism, was included in the Autism Strategy published in January of this year. This was based upon the latest prevalence data for the UK population which concluded that approximately 1.1% of the adult population have some form of autism.

In 2013/2014 additional recurrent investment of £250,000 was provided to help Trusts expand diagnostics and care support services for Adults with ASD.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how each Health and Social Care Trust spent its allocation of £250,000 provided recurrently for adult Autism Spectrum Disorder service development since 2013.

(AQW 39722/11-15)

Mr Wells: The £250k allocation was across all Trusts. The detail of spend is set out in the table below.

£250k allocation to adult ASD services 2013/14

Trust	allocation	development
BHSCT	£52k	The Trust has established an adult diagnostic team and will develop support for adults who have received a diagnosis via the "one stop shop" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 0.5 Band 3 Admin ■ 1.0 Band 5 Hub coordinator The Services also includes support from Psychology Services.
NHSCT	£61k	The Trust has developed the adult diagnostic service and is in the process of building service capacity through the development of mentoring, life skills coaching approaches and includes support from employment, training, housing and higher and further education services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 0.3wte Band 8a Psychologist ■ 0.5 Band 6 OT ■ £10k invested in independent sector
SEHSCT	£45K	The Trust is enhancing its Adult Autism Services through the development of a Trans-generational/trans-programme model. The Resources have been used to increase treatment capacity within the multi-disciplinary team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 0.4 x Band 4 support worker ■ 0.7 x Band 7 speech and language therapist

Trust	allocation	development
SHSCT	£49k	<p>The Trust is in the process of extending their current Trans- generational services provision from age 25 to age 30 years. The funding will be used to target and prioritise those individuals whose needs cannot be met through traditional pathways via AMHS and Learning Disability Services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 0.5 band 6 occupational therapist ■ 0.5 band 5 associate psychologist ■ 0.46 band 3 support worker
WHST	£43k	<p>The Trust is extending existing Adult disability Services, including £15,000 aimed at enhancing specialist voluntary sector provision which will enable people with autism to participate and be more fully involved in the life of their local communities. £3000 has been used to support the training and development needs of the specialist adult ASD team, Learning Disability Services and Mental Health Services. In addition 0.5 wte band 7 OT (£25,000) is also being recruited.</p>

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide details of the appointment in 2013 of a Clinical Lead for adult Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Western Health and Social Care Trust, including the rationale for the withdrawal of this post and information on how the funding for adult service development has been reallocated.

(AQW 39723/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHST) has confirmed that a lead clinical psychologist for the WHST Adult Autism Spectrum Disorder services was appointed in 2013 and remains in post.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the rationale for the assessment tool for Translarna being put on hold; and for his assessment of the implications this will have for patients.

(AQW 39727/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department is guided by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in making decisions about which of the many new drugs should be made routinely available to patients in Northern Ireland. NICE will be consulting on the scope for a technology appraisal for Ataluren (also known Translarna) for this indication. Until NICE guidance is available my Department wouldn't expect this drug to be routinely available. In the interim the commissioning of this drug is a decision for the Health and Social Care Board, either on a cost per case basis or routinely in line with the NHS England commissioning policy.

NHS England started consultation on a draft policy statement regarding access to Ataluren for the treatment of nonsense mutation Duchenne muscular dystrophy. That consultation process has been halted due to a judicial review challenge regarding NHS England's process for considering clinical commissioning priorities. My Department is not party to that action.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Health and Social Care Board has chosen not to commission the breast cancer diagnostic test Oncotype DX; and for his assessment of the effectiveness of this test in identifying early stage breast cancer.

(AQW 39744/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) recognises the potential benefits of the oncotype DX test and would wish to move towards commissioning the test for those patients (approximately 12% of those diagnosed each year with breast cancer) for whom it is clinically appropriate.

The oncotype DX test is being considered by the HSCB in the context of identifying commissioning priorities for 2015/16.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the potential provision of the drug Translarna as an effective means to treat sufferers with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy.

(AQW 39759/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department is guided by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in making decisions about which of the many new drugs should be made routinely available to patients in Northern Ireland. NICE will be consulting on the scope for a technology appraisal for Ataluren (also known Translarna) for this indication. Until NICE guidance is available my Department wouldn't expect this drug to be routinely available. In the interim the commissioning of this drug is a decision for the Health and Social Care Board, either on a cost per case basis or routinely in line with the NHS England commissioning policy.

NHS England started consultation on a draft policy statement regarding access to Ataluren for the treatment of nonsense mutation Duchenne muscular dystrophy. That consultation process has been halted due to a judicial review challenge regarding NHS England's process for considering clinical commissioning priorities. My Department is not party to that action.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given there is great concern over the future provision of kidney dialysis in the rest of the UK, whether there are any proposed changes planned for this provision locally. (AQW 39760/11-15)

Mr Wells: Kidney dialysis services in Northern Ireland are commissioned on a regional basis by the Health and Social Care Board; the Board has no plans to change these arrangements.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38812/11-15, whether The Cottages in Derry City will continue to offer respite care for children. (AQW 39763/11-15)

Mr Wells: I can confirm that The Cottage in Londonderry will continue to offer respite care for disabled children.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any adverse effects have been discovered following an organ transplant from donors with illnesses or contamination of the organ, excepting rejection under normal circumstances; and if so, to detail (i) the number of instances; (ii) whether recipient patients have been informed; and (iii) the consequences for recipient patients. (AQW 39765/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department is not aware of any instances of a solid organ recipient residing in Northern Ireland developing any disease from a donor.

Mr Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many looked-after children have been relocated by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to other regions of the UK or Ireland in the last five years; and to detail the (i) reasons for; and (ii) cost of the relocations. (AQW 39766/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number, the reason for, and the cost of children/young people relocated to other regions in the UK or Ireland from the Western Health and Social Care Trust during the last five years is as follows:

Year At 31 March	Number of children/young people	Reason for relocation	Cost
2010	1	Therapeutic	No costs available
2011	1	Therapeutic	£51,189
2012	4	Therapeutic	£186,916
2013	8	4 Therapeutic 4 Kinship care	£1,043,534
2014	6	2 Therapeutic 4 Kinship care	£216,958

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what impact the decision to no longer use independent health providers is having on hospital and treatment waiting lists, broken down by (a) speciality; and (b) Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 39807/11-15)

Mr Wells: Where Health Service capacity is insufficient to meet demand for elective services in the timescales required, historically the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has funded Trusts non-recurrently to undertake additional activity. While Trusts are expected to undertake as much of the approved volumes of additionality as possible in-house, typically, they would have procured a significant proportion from the Independent Sector (IS).

In view of the wider HSC financial position, the HSCB is unable to fund Trusts to undertake additional activity in the second half of this year in elective care specialties where there is a recurrent capacity gap. Given the gap between demand and funded capacity, this position will inevitably lead to an increase in the number of patients waiting longer than the Ministerial maximum waiting time standards across a range of specialties in all Trusts.

Additional funding received as a result of the October 2014 monitoring round for elective care will be utilised to secure additional diagnostic capacity from Trusts and, as appropriate, from the IS. In addition, some additional specialist elective surgical cases in both cardiac surgery and specialist spinal surgery will be funded in the remainder of 2014/15.

I continue to look to the HSCB and its Local Commissioning Groups (LCGs) to work with each Trust to address shortfalls in elective capacity within the resources available.

Northern Ireland Waiting Times Statistical Bulletins for the Quarter Ending December 2014 are due to be published by my Department on the 26th February 2015 in line with current practice. These will provide information on the number of people waiting for a first outpatient appointment, a diagnostic test or inpatient treatment at hospitals in Northern Ireland.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients, who had been previously been waiting for treatment by independent healthcare providers, have been referred to each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 39808/11-15)

Mr Wells: This question has been answered on the assumption that it refers to the repatriation of patients who were 'paused' in the Independent Sector earlier this year.

The Health and Social Care Board have advised that no patients have been referred back to HSC Trusts.

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of vacancies, broken down by grade or title, in (i) his Department; and (ii) arm's-length bodies as of 1 March, in each of the last five years. (AQW 39812/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i) The numbers of vacancies in DHSSPS that were actively being recruited to at 1st March in each of the last five years is shown in the table below. Specialist grades have been combined with their analogous general service grades.

Table A – DHSSPSNI Vacancies by grade, 2010-2014

Grade	1 March 2010	1 April 2011	1 March 2012	1 March 2013	1 March 2014
Grade 3	1	3	0	0	0
Grade 5	5	4	2	6	3
Grade 6	0	1	0	1	1
Grade 7	3	1	2	11	2
DP	1	1	1	11	0
SO	3	0	0	3	0
EO1	0	0	1	2	1
EO2	1	0	0	3	0
AO	0	0	2	1	1
AA	1	0	2	0	0
Total	15	10	10	38	8

Source: DHSSPS

- (ii) In terms of arms length bodies, the numbers of vacancies in HSC organisations that were actively being recruited to at 31st March and 30th September each year are published in the biannual HSC Workforce Vacancies publication. These can be found online at <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/publications-statistics.htm?SelThemes=THW&SelTopic=TPSV&Year=>

NI Fire & Rescue Service, also a DHSSPS arms length body, has provided below a comparison of the establishment levels against strength for each of the main staffing groups within NIFRS. Please note that this does not necessarily mean that these are vacancies which the organisation was actively trying to fill at the time. During the period requested, a number of structural reviews were required and as such several vacancies were filled on a temporary basis with Agency Workers.

Year	NIFRS Staff Category			
	Firefighters		Controls*	Support*
	Wholetime	Retained		
31 March 2010	0	1	2.1	37.5
31 March 2011	17.5	0	3.8	43.9
31 March 2012	6	15	5.3	52.2
31 March 2013	0	49	5.3	59.3
31 March 2014	0	20	6.3	54.4

* Vacancies for Controls and Support staff are reported as FTE.

The above information is not available broken down by grade for the period stated for the following main reasons:

- For Operational staff, (i.e., Wholetime & Retained Firefighters and Controls) this is primarily due to the nature of temporary promotions within NIFRS – both the frequency and the number of promotions. For clarity, Operational

vacancies are filled at the level of Firefighter and thereafter the majority of vacancies are filled through internal promotional processes. This in turn gives rise to a chain of vacancies in order to backfill all gaps which arise.

- For Support staff, the information relates to the number of full-time equivalent posts and the number of vacancies has been calculated by comparing strength versus establishment as opposed to actual number of posts which are vacant. The majority of Support vacancies during the 5 year period were filled by Agency staff as shown in the right hand column above. This was primarily to enable structural reviews to be carried out throughout Support Directorates. The number of agency staff has been reduced to 39 while the reviews have been progressed.

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how vacancies in his Department and its arm's-length bodies are filled.

(AQW 39813/11-15)

Mr Wells:

Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)

Recruitment activity for the NICS is administered via HRConnect under an outsourcing contract.

NICS External recruitment policy is contained in the Recruitment policy and procedures manual which can be found on the NICS recruitment website (<https://irecruit-ext.hrconnect.nigov.net>). Filling vacancies internally within the NICS is governed by the NICS vacancy management policy.

Health and Social Care (HSC)

The Business Services Organisation (BSO) conducts recruitment on behalf of the HSC arms length bodies, in accordance with HSC policy. Vacancies are advertised through the e-recruitment system, with short listing and interviewing of applicants undertaken by the employing organisation. Vacancies are normally advertised through local media outlets. On occasions as part of its financial and workforce controls some posts are trawled internally.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS)

The NIFRS conducts its own recruitment in line with the NIFRS Code of Procedure on Recruitment and Selection. The code details the methods of selection and advertising required dependant on the level of the role.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what elements of the Government's Military Covenant his Department has designated funding to; and what elements have yet to be funded.

(AQW 39816/11-15)

Mr Wells: "Delivering Healthcare to the Armed Forces - A Protocol for Ensuring Equitable Access to Health and Social Care Services" was developed by my Department in 2009 with the aim of ensuring that the health service in Northern Ireland fulfils its statutory obligations in respect of health and social care services for members of the Armed Forces, their families and Veterans. The protocol also gives practical effect to the principles contained within the Ministry of Defence document; "The Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans", which aims to ensure these groups suffer no disadvantage in accessing health and social care services.

The position on funding for health and social services provided in Northern Ireland for members of the Armed Forces, their families and Veterans is in line with services commissioned for the wider population based on clinical need. In addition my Department chairs the Armed Forces Liaison Forum, which provides a forum for the military and charities representing the Services to raise any concerns that they may have about the provision of services directly with Health and Social Care commissioners and providers.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support he is providing to the Western Health and Social Care Trust to provide palliative care in Tyrone County Hospital.

(AQW 39819/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) is responsible for the commissioning of health and social care services. The Board has advised that it funded ten palliative care beds for the southern sector of the Western Local Commissioning Group area as an interim position until the Outline Business Case (OBC2) for the new local enhanced hospital was to be completed. The needs analysis undertaken in the preparation of the OBC2 established the future need for six palliative care beds in the new local enhanced hospital. It is the commissioner's intention to work with the Western Health and Social Care Trust to continue to fund palliative care beds at the Tyrone County Hospital in 2015/16 moving towards funding six beds within the new hospital model when it opens. It is a matter for the Western Trust to discuss with the HSCB the Trust's aspiration to fund an additional four beds over and above the planned commissioned service.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many GP practices are still using an 0844 number; and when he anticipates this practice will cease.

(AQW 39824/11-15)

Mr Wells: Of the 351 GP Practices across Northern Ireland 16 Practices are still using a 0844 number: 4 contracts were due to expire in June 2014; 1 is due to expire in December 2014; 8 are due to expire in 2015 and the remaining 3 are due to expire in April 2016.

The 4 Practices with contracts that were due to expire in June 2014 are based in Omagh Health Centre, within the member's constituency. My officials are currently exploring with the relevant GP Practices in Omagh the status of their 0844 contracts and how they have met their obligation to ensure that persons are not paying more to make calls to their Practice than they would to make equivalent calls to a geographical number.

The use of 0844 numbers is not prohibited, however, in March 2013 my Department amended the Health and Personal Social Services (General Medical Services Contract) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 requiring GP Practices not to enter into, renew or extend a contract or arrangement for telephone services unless they are satisfied that, having regard to the arrangement as a whole, persons will not pay more to make calls to their Practice than they would to make equivalent calls to a geographical number.

With effect from 1 April 2013 Practices which renewed, extended or entered into a new contract without being satisfied that persons would not have to pay more to make relevant calls to their Practice than they would to make equivalent calls to a geographical number would be in breach of the Regulations.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he will (i) immediately abide by the interim relief judgement made in regard to the Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle to bring the hospital back up to normal service levels; and (ii) ensure that details of the Multiple Sclerosis Respite Unit is immediately circulated to MS sufferers and their carers in all of Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 39826/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has stated that it will comply fully with the Court's ruling granting Interim Relief regarding the decision to temporarily close units in Dalriada Hospital. The Trust has done so on a daily basis by increasing the staffing complement and admitting additional patients in order to return the services at Dalriada to the status quo. This means that MS sufferers and their carers can access the services as they would have done prior to the decision to temporarily close the unit. Those patients seeking a referral to the Dalriada MS Respite Unit should contact their local HSC Trust which is best placed to advise on the appropriate care path for individual patients.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the plans which his Department is making to increase provision of terminal care in light of figures provided by Marie Curie Cancer Care which suggest that death rates in Northern Ireland will have risen by 28 per cent by 2036.

(AQW 39831/11-15)

Mr Wells: "Living Matters:Dying Matters" my Department's palliative and end of life care strategy for adults in Northern Ireland was published in March 2010. The vision set by the Strategy is that any person with an advanced non-curative condition lives well and dies well irrespective of their condition or care setting. The Public Health Agency (PHA) is leading the strategy implementation. The Strategy's 25 recommendations are designed to improve the quality of life to those with palliative and end of life care needs.

The Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency, in conjunction with Marie Curie and working with statutory, voluntary and independent sector partners, are taking forward the Transforming Your Palliative and End of Life Care Programme. The Programme, which complements the strategic direction set out in the Living Matters:Dying Matters Strategy, aims to improve the design and delivery of co-ordinated services to enable people across Northern Ireland with palliative and end of life care needs to have as far as possible, choice in how and where their care is provided. A number of priority areas for improving palliative and end of life care have been identified following extensive engagement with stakeholders and the potential for service re-design will be considered in the coming months.

More immediately, in terms of specific service developments, in January 2015 the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) will be extending a Palliative Care Rapid Response Nursing Service currently in place five days a week in the Northern and Southern Local Commissioning Group (LCG) areas to a full seven-day service and commencing the service in the northern sector of the Western LCG area on a twelve month pilot basis.

In addition the HSCB has also been working with Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs) to put in place at local level new care pathway arrangements for patients who are frail and elderly, have had a stroke, or who have chronic respiratory conditions. These new pathways will support people with those conditions to be cared for at home, which is often the preferred place of care at the end of life.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39139/11-15, how many of the 5,310 news articles monitored were from (i) news websites; and (ii) other internet sites, as opposed to printed publications; and how many of the 24 instances of media contact expressing concerns related similarly to news websites and other internet sites.

(AQW 39844/11-15)

Mr Wells: The media monitoring system used by the Public Health Agency was established predominantly to monitor the print media in Northern Ireland. Online articles were monitored on one occasion and, as a result, the Public Health Agency raised concern about one online article.

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the areas of the Health Service in which he intends to make redundancies.

(AQW 39855/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have currently no plans to make redundancies in any area of the Health Service in Northern Ireland.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Specialist Parkinson's nurses are currently employed by the Northern Health and Social Services Trust; and how long this staff complement has been in place.

(AQW 39864/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Trust, through a partnership funding arrangement with Parkinson's UK, has employed 1 full-time Parkinson's Nurse Specialist since April 2012. The Parkinson's UK funding has now ceased and the Trust is seeking HSCB support for recurrent funding of this post.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total number of staff employed by his Department in (i) Human Resources; and (ii) Finance in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 39871/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table below shows the total number of staff (FTE) employed by my Department in Human Resources and Finance at September each year.

Details of staff numbers by function are only available from September 2009 onwards.

Year	(i) Human Resources	(ii) Finance
2009	20.71	51.94
2010	21.08	47.28
2011	17.85	43.07
2012	16.60	40.26
2013	15.80	40.99
2014	11.03	40.84

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what equipment, including ancillary equipment, has been removed from Erne Hospital prior to demolition.

(AQW 39885/11-15)

Mr Wells: Following the transfer of equipment to the new South West Acute Hospital, approximately 90% of the equipment remaining in the Erne Hospital prior to demolition was removed and taken to other Western Trust facilities.

In addition, following a public notice on 20 November 2013 calling for expressions of interests from charities, the remaining non-medical equipment was grouped into 29 lots and offered for charitable donation, with an additional 4 lots of overseas packages.

A small number of items of redundant medical equipment were assessed as not suitable for re-use. These items were safely disposed of in accordance with the trust equipment disposal policy.

A comprehensive list of all the equipment referred above is available in the NI Assembly Library. This list includes equipment from the operating theatres which was transferred directly to the new South West Acute Hospital and also to other Western Trust facilities

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any of the equipment in operating theatres at Erne Hospital was (i) transferred to the new South West Acute Hospital; (ii) transferred to other hospitals within the Western Health and Social Care Trust; or (iii) offered to any other Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 39886/11-15)

Mr Wells: Following the transfer of equipment to the new South West Acute Hospital, approximately 90% of the equipment remaining in the Erne Hospital prior to demolition was removed and taken to other Western Trust facilities.

In addition, following a public notice on 20 November 2013 calling for expressions of interests from charities, the remaining non-medical equipment was grouped into 29 lots and offered for charitable donation, with an additional 4 lots of overseas packages.

A small number of items of redundant medical equipment were assessed as not suitable for re-use. These items were safely disposed of in accordance with the trust equipment disposal policy.

A comprehensive list of all the equipment referred above is available in the NI Assembly Library. This list includes equipment from the operating theatres which was transferred directly to the new South West Acute Hospital and also to other Western Trust facilities

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, to ensure transparency and compliance with Judge Treacy's ruling, whether he will direct the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to publish and place a copy in the Assembly Library, on a weekly basis, the number of patients admitted and discharged from the units previously announced for closure in Dalriada Hospital.

(AQW 39895/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has stated that it will comply fully with the Court's ruling granting Interim Relief regarding the decision to temporarily close units in Dalriada Hospital. The Trust has done so on a daily basis by increasing the staffing complement and admitting additional patients in order to return the services at Dalriada to the status quo. The Member can obtain up to date information regarding patient numbers directly from the Trust.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of General Practice Surgeries which are operating currently with a financial deficit; and how this is impacting on healthcare delivery.

(AQW 39902/11-15)

Mr Wells: Under the terms of their GMS Contract GP Practices are required to notify the HSCB in writing, as soon as reasonably practicable, of any serious incident that in their reasonable opinion affects or is likely to affect their ability to meet their obligations under the Contract. The HSCB has received no such notifications.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the review of Individual Funding Requests, to detail (i) all organisations/individuals invited to give evidence; (ii) all organisations/individuals who have given evidence; and (iii) how patients have been approached to give evidence.

(AQW 39904/11-15)

Mr Wells: During the course of the evaluation of the Individual Funding Request process the following organisations gave written and or oral submissions or responded to a questionnaire:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ■ Action Cancer | ■ The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust |
| ■ Cancer Focus NI | ■ The Western Health and Social Care Trust |
| ■ Cancer Research UK | ■ The Northern Health and Social Care Trust |
| ■ Macmillan Cancer Support | ■ The Southern Health and Social Care Trust |
| ■ The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry | ■ The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust |
| ■ Queens University Belfast | ■ Patients both individually and as representatives of a charity |
| ■ The Health and Social Care Board | |

The evaluation is due to be concluded by the end of the year. I will update the Assembly on the outcome of the evaluation once I have considered its conclusions.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has considered implementing the proposals contained within the Committee for Finance and Personnel's Report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector that are applicable for his Department and its agencies.

(AQW 39910/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Report produced by the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector contains many useful observations and proposals. My Department as part of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, has been proactive in implementing a range of alternative working patterns to assist staff in achieving a good work-life balance and it has also been exploiting new technology to support flexible working practices.

Arrangements for flexible working in the wider Health and Care Sector are subject to the provision of round the clock services. Notwithstanding this essential provision, employers have developed a wide range of flexible working arrangements.

I believe that it is imperative that we continue to explore new ideas and technologies that could help us deliver high quality services in the most effective way.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39366/11-15, whether he is referring to his comment "The only proposal that I am making is that there will be no new admissions — no new admissions".

(AQW 39924/11-15)

Mr Wells: My response to the Member's previous question did not refer to one specific comment but rather to my overall participation in the Assembly debate on 25 November 2014 which reflected the Northern Trust's position in relation to Dalriada Hospital at that time. The Member will be aware of the Court's ruling on Interim Relief on 4 December and the Trust's subsequent commitment to comply with that ruling and restore services to the status quo.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of hours the Health Service employed nursing staff from recruitment agencies; and (ii) the amount paid to recruitment agencies to employ nursing staff in each of the last five years.

(AQW 39930/11-15)

Mr Wells: The number of hours worked by agency employed nursing staff in HSC Trusts is not centrally held, however, the expenditures by each Trust on agency nursing staff for each of the last five financial years are shown in the table below.

Year	Belfast HSC Trust (£)	Northern HSC Trust (£)	South Eastern HSC Trust (£)	Southern HSC Trust (£)	Western HSC Trust (£)	Total (£)
2009-10	6,066,000	481,465	3,303,414	1,185,710	1,268,818	12,305,407
2010-11	2,818,000	612,964	3,398,887	452,734	1,525,742	8,808,327
2011-12	3,114,000	836,225	2,031,664	263,240	2,070,303	8,315,432
2012-13	3,742,000	1,078,594	2,768,074	672,111	1,591,350	9,852,129
2013-14	5,326,064	1,153,486	2,187,685	232,546	2,224,631	11,124,413

Source: HSC Trusts

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of recruitment competitions for paramedics in the last ten years, broken down by date; (ii) the number of vacancies available in each competition; (iii) the number of applications; (iv) the number of paramedics appointed; and (v) whether there was a reserved list resulting from the competitions.

(AQW 39935/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust (NIAS) have supplied the table below, showing the dates of each recruitment competition held by NIAS for Paramedics and Paramedics in Training since 2004. The title of the post being recruited to, the number of applicants, the whole-time equivalent (WTE) of appointees and whether the competition resulted in a reserve list are also included. It was not possible for the NIAS to supply the number of vacancies active during each competition, as this was subject to normal change during each recruitment period.

Competition Date	Title of Post	No. of applicants	WTE of appointees	Reserve list? Y/N
07/04/2004	Paramedic	10	8.0	No
21/05/2004	Paramedic	33	Post Withdrawn	No
24/09/2004	Paramedic in Training	31	No results recorded	No
09/09/2005	Paramedic in Training	21	8.0	No
11/11/2005	Paramedic in Training	20	3.0	No
19/01/2006	Paramedic	2	2.0	No
31/08/2005	Paramedic	8	5.0	No
22/09/2006	Paramedic in Training	27	None Shortlisted	No
09/02/2007	Paramedic in Training	19	None Shortlisted	No
31/03/2008	Paramedic	9	5.0	No
25/05/2007	Paramedic in Training	73	40.0	No
17/08/2007	Paramedic in Training	707	39.0	No
18/07/2008	Paramedic in Training	66	30.0	No
06/02/2009	Paramedic in Training	187	12.0	No
31/03/2010	Paramedic in Training	1931	65.0	Yes
04/11/2011	Paramedic (Temporary/ Bank)	9	3.0	No
16/12/2011	Paramedic (Temporary/ Bank)	7	5.0	No
05/10/2012	Paramedic	61	41.0	Yes
27/06/2014	Paramedic	87	48.0	Yes

NIAS notes that all Paramedic Training up until 2010 resulted in candidates being offered a Paramedic post after successful completion of the training programme. For the 2010 training programme, applicants were advised that they needed to apply for Qualified Paramedic posts when they arose.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will introduce a central register for children and adults with Down Syndrome.

(AQW 39949/11-15)

Mr Wells: There are no plans to introduce a central register for children and adults with Down's Syndrome or for any other learning disability.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on plans for Ravara House in Bangor.

(AQW 39966/11-15)

Mr Wells: The legal ownership for Ravara House in Bangor is held by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust). Demolition of this property, which was previously an Elderly Persons Home until its closure in March 2013, was completed by the Trust in November 2014.

I am advised that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has nominated Ark Housing Association to work with the Trust to develop a supported living scheme for older people in the North Down area and that the Ravara site has been identified as the preferred location. Business Case approval for this scheme is currently being considered.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progress of the Internet Safety Strategy for Children.

(AQW 39994/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am currently seeking the approval of Executive Ministers to commission and fund the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland to develop an e-safety strategy on their behalf. In accordance with the protocol governing the confidentiality of Executive business, I am unable to offer any further response to the question asked.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update following his recent meeting with the Chairperson of the Fire and Rescue Service Board, in respect of implementing cost saving measures within the Fire Service.

(AQW 39996/11-15)

Mr Wells: The meeting with The Chairperson of Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service(NIFRS) Board was constructive and allowed an open and frank discussion on the challenges that lie ahead.

NIFRS has been asked to develop a range of savings proposals that could deliver the best possible outcomes under three scenarios, 5%, 10% and 15% reductions. NIFRS has been asked to risk assess and prioritise savings proposals before submission to my Department, on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery, the fire-fighter and public safety will be key considerations.

A decision on NIFRS 2015/16 budget allocations, in common with all ALBs within my Department will only be taken after full consideration has been given to the service delivery impacts identified in each ALBs proposal.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39545/11-15, how Health and Social Care Trusts are actively encouraging people who are fulfilling a role as a carer, but are unknown to the Trust, to identify themselves in order to have an assessment carried out.

(AQW 39997/11-15)

Mr Wells: In order to fulfil their statutory duty to make information regarding a carer's right to an assessment widely available, all Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts continue to undertake a high level engagement process across all Programmes of Care (POC) to identify as many 'hidden' carers as possible.

Each Trust has longstanding Carer Co-ordinators in post who drive policy on the identification of carers of all ages. This is achieved through a wide range of initiatives including: service wide communication strategies which incorporate information packs on the carers assessment, these packs are made available to all Trust teams and information can be accessed on each of the individual Trust websites; GP initiatives, Trust contracts with voluntary and community sector organisations to encourage carers to recognise themselves as carers; and supporting specific projects like the Carers Trust 'Mind the Gap' project, which specifically targets older, hidden carers.

A summary of individual Trust initiatives is attached.

Annex A**Northern HSC Trust**

1. In line with the Northern Trust Carers Strategy, 8000 information leaflets & information packs on Carers Assessment and Carers Register are disseminated each year. This information is distributed through Health and Social Care Teams within all Programmes of Care (POC). Similar information is displayed in GP surgeries across the Trust with particular emphasis during Carers Week in June, where the Northern Trust promotes carer support and Carer Assessment by distributing information throughout Trust hospitals, and local supermarkets. In order to raise awareness in Black Minority Ethnic (BME) carers, these information leaflets have been translated into 11 different languages.
2. The Northern Trust run 12 carer support events per year. These events are promoted widely through Trust mechanisms and also through local press releases, and external organisations - such as churches, community and voluntary groups, supermarkets etc. In partnership with Carers NI, seven carer support groups are facilitated in the Trust area. These groups continuously raise awareness of the rights of carers to a carer assessment.
3. The Northern Trust website also contains a comprehensive list of carer support which is updated on a monthly basis.

Western HSC Trust

4. The Western Trust's Carers Support Team attend a wide range of events in order to identify hidden carers and work closely with the Trust's communications team to promote carer awareness. The Support Team also facilitates a Carers' Worker network, which is open to community and voluntary sector staff that come in contact with carers with the aim of providing up-to-date relevant information, to raise awareness of carers' rights and issues, as well as encouraging the uptake of carer's assessment.
5. A Carers Newsletter (updated throughout the year) and information booklet has been produced and is circulated to 3,150 carers currently registered on the Trust's Carers' Register, as well as all Trust staff, GP practices and community and voluntary sector organisations. Further, the Trust has established a pathway for GPs to refer carers for a Carer's Assessment.
6. The Western Trust is actively engaged in supporting the 'Mind the Gap' project funded by the Big Lottery via Carers Trust, which specifically targets older, hidden carers.

Belfast HSC Trust

7. Over the past four years the Belfast Trust has been implementing their Strategy, Belfast Carers at the Heart of the Belfast Trust. This strategy outlines our commitment to carers and provides a framework to promote, develop and improve support services for them in Belfast. Some of the outcomes from this work have led to earlier identification of carers.
8. The Belfast Trust has two Carer Co-ordinators and one of their key roles is to promote awareness of carers, their right to an assessment and the ways in which the Trust can support them. This is done in a number of ways. The Carer Co-ordinators regularly go out to groups to speak about carer assessments and support. These include church groups, senior citizen forums and voluntary groups. Both Carer Co-ordinators have established networks within the voluntary and community sector who are aware of how to refer carers for a carers assessment. The Trust has developed information on a carers right to a carers assessment and these leaflets have been distributed widely in the Trust area to these groups. Information on carer assessments is also promoted on the Trust website.
9. The Trust contracts with a wide range of voluntary and independent organisations to encourage carers to identify themselves including Alzheimer's Society, Belfast Carers Centre, CAUSE and Praxis. Work has also been progressed with GP surgeries across Belfast where they have a pathway to refer carers for a carer assessment and information. This work is being currently reviewed to ensure the Trust is effectively identifying carers in primary care.
10. To identify specific groups of carers, strategic partnerships have been developed. The Belfast Trust works with Mind the Gap project to identify older carers in the area who are not known to the Trust. The support worker in turn makes referrals for carer assessments for all older carers identified by the project.

South Eastern HSC Trust

11. The South Eastern Trust has a carer information booklet containing a range of information about the supports available within the Trust through Trust services or organisations in the community and voluntary sector. These booklets are available in Trust Offices and GP surgeries across the entire Trust area, as well as through a range of organisations which support carers including Carers NI. The Trust website has a dedicated carer section on its internet site about the supports/initiatives available within the Trust area for carers.
12. The Trust Carers Development Officer has strong links with a range of organisations and groups in the community and voluntary sector to ensure that the already well established network of support is maintained and kept up to date. For example, the Safe and Well Project, a Lottery funded project in the Down and Lisburn areas, aims to identify and support older people aged 65 and over who are socially isolated. As well as other areas of input, this project actively seeks to identify hidden carers.

13. The Trust Carers Development Officer also has an initiative with all GP surgeries across the Trust area to promote the identification of family carers. There is a specific referral pathway for carer assessment and carer support through the Trust carer database. In addition, there is regular communication with GPs to ensure they are aware of the supports available for carers.

Southern Trust

14. As part of the Southern Trust Carers Action plan, a GP protocol has been developed informing practices of Carers right to a Carers assessment and how to access support. Plans are in place to disseminate this within all GP practices within the Southern Trust.
15. The Southern Trust are partners in the Big Lottery funded Mind the Gap project and the Carers' Coordinator attends meetings as part of the expert reference group. This projects aims are to identify Carers over the aged of 60 not known to services and signpost on to relevant supports including the SHSCT for Carers Assessment. The Southern Trust has also in place a contract with an organisation, Carers Matter, to support Carers by providing a community based outreach programme that works with relevant local statutory and community based organisations to identify both rural and urban locations from which to provide carers support services.
16. The Trust Carers Coordinator works with voluntary & community Groups across all POCs including the regional BME Carers group, and has developed a Carers information booklet which has been circulated to all teams and GP surgeries in the Southern Trust. The Communications department have developed a webpage for Carers sharing all the resources and up to date information. The Carers Information booklet and Carers assessment leaflet can be downloaded from this page. Up to date information is shared on the Trust Social Media accounts.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the level of funding provided to services for (a) children; and (b) adults with autism, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) the budget and/or programme of care from which each service originates; and (iii) how funding has been spent, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 40024/11-15)

Mr Wells: The tables in the attached Annex set out the investment made in children and adult Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) specific services in the last 3 years broken down by Trust. Some of the funding is allocated as "in-year" funding to address specific areas/initiatives. Funding for children's and adult services have been broken down, however some resources have been allocated to address needs across both services, for example training and equipment.

In 2013/14, the Health and Social Care Board committed an additional recurrent FYE investment of £2.5m specifically for children with disability, including their carers, to support children with disability with challenging behaviour and children with disability with complex needs.

The definition of children with disability includes all children with a disability, including those with ASD, and reflects that many children with disability may have a range of diagnoses/co-occurring conditions and varying needs. As a result, a specific investment amount for ASD cannot be identified within the £2.5m funding.

These additional funds are provided for children with disability and their carers on the basis of an assessment of need, in line with the statutory functions to support children with disability and are not delivered or funded on a condition/diagnosis specific basis.

Annex

Allocations to Trusts for ASD 2012/13

Purpose of funding	Programme of care	BHSCT	SEHSCT	NHSCT	SHSCT	WHSCT	Total
ASD Children's Waiting Lists (non-recurrent funding, in-year only)	Mental Health	£41 063 CYE					£41 063 CYE
Autism Services Waiting List for Speech & Language Therapy (non-recurrent funding, in-year only)	Family and Child Care			£140 893 CYE			£140 893 CYE
ASD/Autism Services Training Materials (non-recurrent funding, in-year only)	Learning Disability	£3 556 CYE	£2 337 CYE	£2 307 CYE	£2 993 CYE	£4 083 CYE	£15 276 CYE

Allocations to Trusts for ASD 2013/14

Purpose of funding	Programme of care	BHSCT	SEHSCT	NHSCT	SHSCT	WHSCT	Total
Diagnostic, assessment and support services for adults with ASD	Learning Disability	£26 000 CYE	£22 500 CYE	£30 500 CYE	£24 500 CYE	£21 500 CYE	£125 000 CYE
		£52 000 FYE	£45 000 FYE	£61 000 FYE	£49 000 FYE	£43 000 FYE	£250 000 FYE
ASD - Summer/Autumn Activities (non-recurrent funding, in-year only)	Learning Disability					£9 768	£9 768
ASD Children's Waiting Lists (non-recurrent funding, in-year only)	Mental Health	£46 847	£43 153	£75 000	£48 153	£48 153	£261 306
Health & Wellbeing Improvement for adolescents & young adults (14 - 25) with ASD	Learning Disability				£10 494 CYE		£10 494 CYE
					£20 000 FYE		£20 000 FYE
Installation and upgrade of equipment for assessment in ASD (non-recurrent funding, in-year only)	Learning Disability				£7 000		£7 000
ASD Training undertaken on behalf of RASDN (non-recurrent funding, in-year only). This regional training was co-ordinated by the SEHSCT- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Personal Construct Psychology ■ ASD and Attachment ■ ADOS 2 training ■ Consolidation Scoring for ADOS 	Learning Disability		£11 850				

The figures above are the actual funding allocations unless indicated CYE and FYE

Allocations to Trusts for ASD 2014/15

Purpose of funding	Programme of care	BHSCT	SEHSCT	NHSCT	SHSCT	WHSCT	Total
Following recent confirmation of funding there is a planned allocation for diagnostic, assessment and support services for Adults with ASD. In addition to this investment, the Trust is expected to deliver a further £46,240 CYE and FYE worth of service activity as a result of productivity gains.						£ 72 831 CYE	£ 72 831 CYE
						£128 339 FYE	£128 339 FYE

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQO 7234/11-15, why the figures provided differ those provided in AQW 39103/11-15.

(AQW 40025/11-15)

Mr Wells: The figures provided in AQW 39103 were based on data recorded on the HSC's Human Resources systems (the Human Resources Management System until 2013, and Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence system since 2013). These figures exclude members of staff with a whole-time equivalent (WTE) of less than 0.03, bank staff, staff on career breaks, and members/Chairs of Boards. These exclusions are in place in order to produce a consistent count of staff in post across the different HSC organisations. Human Resources data is extracted on a quarterly basis by Departmental statisticians - the figures given in AQW 39103 are as at 31st March in each year.

The figures provided in AQO 7234 were based on audited financial accounts from the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), and represent an average WTE across the financial year in question. The difference between the two sets of figures appears both because of the differences in which members of staff are included, and in the period of time (averaged or at 31st March) to which each set of figures refers.

The larger differences in the figures for the period between 2009/10 and 2010/11 are likely to have been caused by the differences between Human Resources and Finance systems and practices, in terms of when and how quickly employees were re-assigned to the organisations created following the Review of Public Administration, including the HSCB.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the findings of the most recent Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority investigations into Muckamore Abbey.

(AQW 40026/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have been briefed on the RQIA's Report and recommendations arising from its unannounced inspection of Moylena ward in Muckamore Abbey Hospital on 8/9 July 2014, and the subsequent actions of the Belfast HSC Trust.

I was pleased to note that sixteen of the twenty-three recommendations made from an earlier inspection had been fully met and disappointed that some of the recommendations had to be restated.

I am however assured that, following this inspection, the Belfast Trust immediately put in place a number of priority actions and improvements. The Trust has provided a robust action plan to address all of the recommendations made in the Quality Improvement Plan contained in the Report.

I will ensure that this plan is regularly reviewed to monitor progress of implementation and completion.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a breakdown of the £251m identified from 'External Income' in the draft budget for 2015/16.

(AQW 40033/11-15)

Mr Wells: The external income for 2012/13, as outlined in the DHSSPS consultation document on the draft Budget for 2015/16, is detailed in the following table. This income is largely generated by the HSC trusts, and is offset against the expenditure of those organisations.

	£'000
Client contributions to social care	125,777
Other income from non-patient services	80,255
Other - mostly cost recovery re Road Traffic Accidents	14,682
Other Income	13,479
Private patients	5,519
Charitable and other contributions to expenditure	4,901
HSS Trusts	4,134
GB/ROI Income	2,342
Profit on Sale of Land	16
Total	251,105

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the £251m identified from 'External Income' in the draft budget for 2015/16 is returned to the Health Service budget.

(AQW 40035/11-15)

Mr Wells: The external income for 2012/13, as outlined in the DHSSPS consultation document on the draft Budget for 2015/16, is detailed in the following table. This income is largely generated by the HSC trusts, and is offset against the expenditure of those organisations.

	£'000
Client contributions to social care	125,777

	£'000
Other income from non-patient services	80,255
Other - mostly cost recovery re Road Traffic Accidents	14,682
Other Income	13,479
Private patients	5,519
Charitable and other contributions to expenditure	4,901
HSS Trusts	4,134
GB/ROI Income	2,342
Profit on Sale of Land	16
Total	251,105

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will introduce a central register for people with a learning disability to replace the current voluntary list.

(AQW 40046/11-15)

Mr Wells: There are no plans to introduce a central register for children and adults with Down's Syndrome or for any other learning disability.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all funding provided by his Department, or its arm's-length bodies, to organisations providing support to people withdrawing from drug misuse or providing preventative intervention during 2014.

(AQW 40048/11-15)

Mr Wells: Through my Department's New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs (NSD) Phase 2, the Health & Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency commission a full range of addiction services, aimed at addressing both alcohol and drug misuse, from education and prevention through to treatment and support. Details of the full range of addiction services available to people living in all five Health and Social Care Trust areas and currently provided by both the Statutory and the Voluntary/Community sectors across Northern Ireland can be found by accessing the following link:

<http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/drug-and-alcohol-directories-services>

Given the nature of these services, it is impossible to provide a breakdown of funding which can disaggregate between alcohol and drug services. However, approximately £7 million is provided through my Department and the Public Health Agency in support of the NSD Phase 2. A further £8 million is allocated through the Health and Social Care Board and the local Health and Social Care Trusts for the provision of alcohol and drug treatment services.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all funding provided by his Department, or its arm's-length bodies, to organisations providing support to people withdrawing from drug misuse or providing preventative intervention in the Ballymena Borough Council area.

(AQW 40050/11-15)

Mr Wells: Through the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase Two, the Health & Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Public Health Agency (PHA) commission a full range of alcohol and drug services. Details of the alcohol and drug services available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHST) area can be found by accessing the following link:

http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/DrugsAlcohol_Directory_Northern_12_12.pdf.

Given the Trust-wide nature of alcohol and drug services, it is impossible to disaggregate funding to the Ballymena Borough Council area for alcohol and drug services. However, approximately £3.15m is provided by the PHA, the HSCB and the NHST towards addiction services, ranging from prevention to inpatient treatment and support, across the whole of the Northern Trust area, and these are available to people living in the Ballymena area.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the Northern Health and Social Care Trust is to relocate approximately eight people from Larne Adult Centre to a proposed satellite unit, whether this unit will be in Larne town centre.

(AQW 40053/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has not yet reached a final decision regarding moving anyone out of Larne Adult Centre.

In keeping with strategic direction of day care services, the Trust does however plan to provide a range of "satellite" services for more able individuals who can make use of local community facilities. It would be preferable that such facilities are situated

close to amenities that meet the needs of the individuals attending. Any decision to open a satellite facility in the Larne area will be based on the assessed needs of individuals and in consultation with primary caregivers.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the annual leave arrangements for staff across each sector of the Health Service.

(AQW 40061/11-15)

Mr Wells: Annual leave arrangements for Agenda for Change (AfC) staff, salaried doctors and dentists and Health and Social Care (HSC) Senior Executives are set out in the following terms and conditions of service (links attached for convenience):

- Section 13 of the Agenda for Change Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook
- Schedule 17 of the Associate Specialist Terms and Conditions of Service (Northern Ireland) 2008
- Schedule 17 of the Specialty Doctor Terms and Conditions of Service (Northern Ireland) 2008
- Part 205 of the Hospital Medical and Dental Staff and Doctors in Public Health Medicine and the Community Health Service (Northern Ireland) Terms and Conditions of Service 2008
- Schedule 18 of the Consultants Terms and Conditions of Service (Northern Ireland) 2004
- Community Dentists – Terms and Conditions (see attachment)
- HSC Senior Executives
 - HSS (SM) 3/2001 Pay and Conditions of Service (2001 contract) (see attachment)
 - HSS (SM) 3/2008 Contracts and Performance Management Scheme;

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when Dalriada Hospital will have the same complement of staff in place prior to the decision to temporarily close the hospital.

(AQW 40070/11-15)

Mr Wells:

1. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) has advised that all staff who were redeployed have been offered the opportunity to return to their original post in Dalriada or they each have the option of remaining in the new post, where the post is viable as a long term option.

I am assured that Management Side and Trade Union Side are working in partnership to facilitate staff postings at Dalriada.

2. The NHSCT has advised that it is anticipated that full staffing complements will be achieved early to mid-January 2015.
3. (i) The NHSCT had advised that staff were redeployed to:
 - Treatment Room Services
 - Laurel House – Cancer Services - Antrim Hospital site
 - Coronary Care Unit – Causeway Hospital
 - Day Procedure Unit – Causeway Hospital
 - Medical Ward - Causeway Hospital
 - Rehabilitation Ward – Causeway Hospital
 - Robinson Community Hospital
- (ii) The NHSCT has advised that all posts listed in (i) above would be considered front line services.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (a) doctors; (b) nurses; (c) social workers; (d) physiotherapists; and (e) occupational therapists had been working in Dalriada Hospital prior to the Health and Social Care Trusts decision to temporarily close the hospital; and to detail the current number of posts as of 10 December 2014.

(AQW 40073/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust have provided the requested information, shown in the table below. These staffing levels refer to staff in post, excluding vacancies, relating to intermediate care beds and Multiple Sclerosis respite services. The temporary closure took effect on the 1st December 2014, with no new admissions from that date. In the table below, the 'Before Temporary Closure' shows the position prior to the change, and the 'After Temporary Closure' column shows the position at 10th December 2014.

Staff Group	Before Temporary Closure		After Temporary Closure	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Staff Grade Doctors 1, 2	1	0.50	1	0.50
Qualified Nurses	23	19.07	15	12.58

Staff Group	Before Temporary Closure		After Temporary Closure	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Nursing Support	16	13.53	13	11.07
Social Workers	1	1.00	1	1.00
Physiotherapists	2	0.65	2	0.65
Occupational Therapists	1	1.00	1	1.00

Notes:

1. The Trust also maintains a Service Level Agreement with local GPs to provide further medical support.
2. The Staff Grade doctor referred to works between Dalriada Hospital and Robinson Hospital.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, of the staff moved from Dalriada Hospital when the Health and Social Care Trust decided to temporarily close the hospital, to detail (i) where they were relocated to; and (ii) what roles they filled, including how many were classed as front line roles.

(AQW 40075/11-15)

Mr Wells:

1. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) has advised that all staff who were redeployed have been offered the opportunity to return to their original post in Dalriada or they each have the option of remaining in the new post, where the post is viable as a long term option.

I am assured that Management Side and Trade Union Side are working in partnership to facilitate staff postings at Dalriada.

2. The NHSCT has advised that it is anticipated that full staffing complements will be achieved early to mid-January 2015.
3. (i) The NHSCT had advised that staff were redeployed to:
 - Treatment Room Services
 - Laurel House – Cancer Services - Antrim Hospital site
 - Coronary Care Unit – Causeway Hospital
 - Day Procedure Unit – Causeway Hospital
 - Medical Ward - Causeway Hospital
 - Rehabilitation Ward – Causeway Hospital
 - Robinson Community Hospital
- (ii) The NHSCT has advised that all posts listed in (i) above would be considered front line services.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why staff, who were working in Dalriada Hospital before the court decision on the trusts non-admissions policy, have been informed that if they go back to work in Dalriada Hospital they may not get the same posting again should Dalriada Hospital close; and for his assessment of the actions of the Health and Social Care Trust in this regard.

(AQW 40077/11-15)

Mr Wells:

1. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) has advised that all staff who were redeployed have been offered the opportunity to return to their original post in Dalriada or they each have the option of remaining in the new post, where the post is viable as a long term option.

I am assured that Management Side and Trade Union Side are working in partnership to facilitate staff postings at Dalriada.

2. The NHSCT has advised that it is anticipated that full staffing complements will be achieved early to mid-January 2015.
3. (i) The NHSCT had advised that staff were redeployed to:
 - Treatment Room Services
 - Laurel House – Cancer Services - Antrim Hospital site
 - Coronary Care Unit – Causeway Hospital
 - Day Procedure Unit – Causeway Hospital
 - Medical Ward - Causeway Hospital
 - Rehabilitation Ward – Causeway Hospital

■ Robinson Community Hospital

- (ii) The NHSCT has advised that all posts listed in (i) above would be considered front line services.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the level of cuts proposed to the budget of the Safe Food (the Food Safety Promotion Board) by his Department's budgetary proposals.

(AQW 40085/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Food Safety Promotion Board (FSPB) has prepared its 2015 Business Plan to reflect the agreed efficiency savings detailed in the guidance "2015 Business Plan and Budget Guidance for Sponsor Departments and North/South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland Limited", which was issued jointly by the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. FSPB is required to achieve a cumulative 8% efficiency saving using the 2013 agreed budget as the baseline.

Working from the 2013 baseline of €8.5m, FSPB will be delivering efficiencies of £550k/€680k (8%) in 2015.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how much (i) has been spent this year carrying out the nasal influenza vaccine in primary schools; and (ii) will be spent in 2015 when the vaccine will be rolled out to all primary and post-primary schools.

(AQW 40145/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety allocated approximately £5.3m to enable the children's flu vaccination programme to be implemented by GPs and school nursing teams during the autumn of 2014.

Approximately £4.9m of the funding provided in 2014/15 is recurrent. Details of the children's flu vaccination programme planned for the autumn of 2015 have still to be finalised and therefore the full costs are not available at this stage.

Vaccination is true primary prevention, as it stops a disease occurring in the first place, rather than dealing with the symptoms or after effects. In July 2012 the UK Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, following a detailed cost-effectiveness analysis, recommended vaccinating all children aged 2 to 16 years against flu. This is a new approach to reducing the burden of flu across the population, as by vaccinating all healthy children not only are the children protected, but they do not carry infection to others, so transmission across the population is interrupted and overall flu levels should be reduced. This should have a significant impact on reducing the number of people seeking appointments and treatment from their GP; the number of people attending emergency departments; the number of people requiring intensive care; and the number of deaths from flu. Achieving a high flu vaccine uptake is key to increasing resilience across the entire health and social care system through the winter period.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust plans to develop car parking facilities at Lagan Valley Hospital; and if so, to detail the projected costs of the plans.

(AQW 40147/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Trust has no plans to provide any additional car parking spaces for the Hospital at Lagan Valley.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of times this year theatres at Downe Hospital have been in use at weekends; and of these occasions, how many of the procedures carried out were by independent/private organisations.

(AQW 40148/11-15)

Mr Wells: The theatres at Downe hospital have not been used at weekends by either the Trust or Independent/ Private companies this year.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions he is taking to address the provision of services for people affected by Huntington's Disease, given that there are no services currently in place.

(AQW 40151/11-15)

Mr Wells: People diagnosed with Huntington's Disease (HD) have access to the full range of core community health and social care services across Northern Ireland including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, community nursing, speech and language therapy, dietetics, social work / social care, domiciliary care, day care and day time opportunities and respite, including specialist respite.

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the Regional HD service is funded for two HD nurses. However, the Band 7 HD Nurse is currently on long term sick leave and the Trust has experienced challenges in recruiting a Band 6 HD Nurse due to the lack of suitable applicants. The Trust has further advised that the Band 6 HD Nurse post was re-advertised again on 9 December 2014. I understand that this is the Trust's fourth such attempt to recruit to this post.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he is addressing the lack of counselling services for people under the age of 16 who have been the victim of sexual assault, particularly in light of recent findings and

given that there are no services in place other than the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service which deals with mental health issues as opposed to counselling facilities for victims of abuse.

(AQW 40152/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department currently provides the regional Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) with £450,000 per year to provide specialist services in the aftermath of a sexual assault, rape or an incident involving childhood sexual abuse. The SARC offers a comprehensive range of services, which include emotional support for victims of sexual abuse and a 24-hour advice and information line.

Children and young people who have been sexually abused can avail of counselling provision through existing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Psychological Therapies Services and the Family Trauma Centre.

In addition, counselling support is also available to children and young people who have been victims of abuse, through a range of community and voluntary sector organisations including Barnardo's, NSPCC and Nexus NI.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant AQW 39043/11-15, whether the injunctions are open to the Department to apply for in these instances, and if so, whether (i) any such injunctions have been sought and/or granted in the past; and (ii) this is being considered for further use, particularly in light of the findings of the Marshall Report.

(AQW 40190/11-15)

Mr Wells: The option of applying for an injunction is available to Health and Social Care Trusts in the circumstances described. However, this is subject to sufficient evidence being available. I can confirm that injunctions of this nature have been pursued in the past and, where appropriate, will be sought in the future. Also, it has been demonstrated in the past that injunctions have deterrent value when seeking to safeguard children.

The Health and Social Services (HSC) Board has confirmed that court orders have been sought and served on individuals to refrain from association with certain young people and, not to be within the vicinity of certain addresses. HSC Trusts, conjointly with PSNI, have been proactive in this regard and will continue to factor this into their thinking in light of the recommendations contained within the Marshall Report.

Regular meetings take place between HSC Trusts and PSNI Public Protection Teams where discussions take place to review risk assessments and associated action plans in respect of individual children.

My department is actively considering the Marshall recommendations. This is being undertaken jointly with the HSC Board and Trusts and in partnership with the Departments of Justice and Education.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 37153/11-15, for an update on (i) the progress of the evaluation of the Individual Funding Request process currently being carried out by departmental officials; and (ii) the expected completion date for this evaluation.

(AQW 40199/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have received the initial findings of the evaluation and further work is now being carried out. I will update the Assembly as soon as possible on the outcome once I have considered the final evaluation report.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment has been made on the impact the proposed cuts to the Sure Start budget will have on the costs of care for looked-after children.

(AQW 40208/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have been advised by the Department of Education that the Sure Start programme currently receives £25m funding per year and that the draft budget for the Department of Education for 2015/16 includes a proposed reduction of £2m from the Sure Start programme. I have also been advised that the programme will continue to be managed within available funding for 2015/16 in line with Department of Education priorities.

The Sure Start programme is principally an early intervention service, which works with parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual, social and emotional development of pre-school children, particularly those who are disadvantaged, to ensure they can flourish at home and when they get to school.

There are a range of early intervention initiatives currently being pursued across government. Key among them is the Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP), which is led by my department and is designed to support families and intervene earlier to, among other things, reduce the risk of children coming into care in the first place. EITP has a proposed budget of £25m spread over a 4 year period, with OFMDFM (Delivering Social Change) contributing £10m, Atlantic Philanthropies (£10m) and DE along with DHSSPS, DEL, DOJ, DSD jointly contributing a further £5m over a three year period between April 2014 and March 2017.

In addition, my Department's Families Matter Strategy supported the development of Family Support Hubs and the Family Support NI (FSNI) website, www.familysupportni.gov.uk. Family Support Hubs accept referrals and signpost families and children to appropriate services. They are coalitions of agencies that provide services locally with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention. FSNI is an information and signposting resource for families, communities and professionals looking for family support services and registered childcare.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patient appointments have been cancelled by doctors/consultants in the Western Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.

(AQW 40214/11-15)

Mr Wells: The table overleaf shows the number of consultant-led appointments cancelled by the Western HSC Trust between 1st July 2013 to 31st March 2014 and provisional data for the period 1st April to 30th September 2014. The data has been provided broken down by 'reason for cancellation' as there are a number of reasons why an outpatient appointment may be cancelled by the hospital. Figures do not include patient cancelled appointments.

Due to the variable 'reason for cancellation' only being made mandatory from March 2013 and changes as to how the variable was recorded, data prior to July 2013 is not comparable.

Number of Consultant-Led Outpatient Appointments Cancelled in the Western HSC Trust, by Reason for Cancellation

Reason for cancellation	Number of consultant led outpatient appointments cancelled by Western Trust	
	July 2013 – March 2014	April 2014 – September 2014 ^P
Consultant not available	6,482	3,919
Medical staff not available	1,056	984
Patient treated elsewhere	346	209
Consultant cancelled appointment	1,747	1,165
Appointment brought forward	2,565	1,558
Appointment put back	2,888	2,057
Cancelled following validation/audit	366	106
Administrative error by hospital/GP	2,388	1,643
Hospital transport not available	18	19
Cancelled by hospital in order to rebook as alternative booking method	210	3
No reason or incorrect reason recorded	721	382
Total	18,787	12,045

Source: Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return (QOAR)

^P Data are currently provisional

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the selection of the Chair and Board of the Public Health Agency will be placed on hold until the review of administration structures within the Health and Social Care System is complete.

(AQW 40220/11-15)

Mr Wells: The review which I announced on Friday 28 November relates specifically to the administrative structures in place within the Health and Social Care system. As such, I see no reason to delay the selection process for the Chair and Board of the Public Health Agency.

Department of Justice

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown of all the costs to date, including legal aid, in case 12/002192 and other prior proceedings connected to the charges in question at various courts in the Fermanagh and Tyrone division.

(AQW 39560/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The estimated costs to date, including legal aid, in case 12/002192 and other prior proceedings are given in the table below.

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
Legal Aid ¹	£48,670
Prosecution ²	£576

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
Court Costs ³	£19,742
Total ⁴	£68,988

- 1 Fees payable in Magistrates' Court proceedings are determined in accordance with the Magistrates' Courts and County Court Appeals (Criminal Legal Aid) (Costs) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2009. Fees payable in Crown Court proceedings are assessed in accordance with the Legal Aid for Crown Court Proceedings (Costs) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2005 as amended by 2011 Rules.
- 2 In the absence of detailed records of time spent on individual cases it is not possible to produce precise costs for a particular case. Regarding prosecution counsel, under the current guidelines fees incurred are not calculated until the case has fully concluded. To date approximately £576 has been paid in witness expenses.
- 3 The estimated court cost include judicial and staff salaries, facilities and juror costs
- 4 Costs for individual investigations and subsequent court appearances for PSNI Officers/Staff are not recorded separately.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Justice how many people have applied to be independent members of the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships this year; and how this compares to the number of people who applied in 2011.
(AQW 39588/11-15)

Mr Ford: Responsibility for the process of recruitment for Independent Members of the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships rests with the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

The Policing Board has informed me that it received 414 completed applications to fill 119 independent positions that will be available in line with the new Council structures.

The first PCSP Independent Member competition in 2012 resulted in 591 applications, at which stage 254 independent positions were available.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether it is routine for two prison officers to be in charge of fifty prisoners; if so (ii) how often this occurs; (iii) in which circumstances; and (iv) in which prison facilities.
(AQW 39638/11-15)

Mr Ford: The only location where it is routine for two prison officers to be in charge of fifty unlocked prisoners is in the Alpha Unit in Magilligan Prison on Saturdays and Sundays.

I am satisfied that this is an appropriate supervision level.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what audit was conducted on the knock-on financial impact, in terms of increased reliance on the health service, of the decision to force the closure of Railway Street Addiction Centre in Ballymena by withdrawing its funding.
(AQW 39654/11-15)

Mr Ford: The decision to cease my Department's contribution to the Railway Street initiative was required in order to meet the financial pressures faced by my Department and not on the basis of an audit. Decisions on the future configuration of services are for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what risk assessments have been carried out for prisoners and prison officers, on circumstances where two prisoner guards were put in charge of fifty prisoners, particularly if a prisoner becomes ill and one officer has to remain with them whilst the other summons assistance, or any other similar instance; and what situations are deemed as priorities.
(AQW 39729/11-15)

Mr Ford: Work area risk assessments are completed across the prison estate to inform decisions on the required target staffing level. On any given day, management take decisions on deployment of staff depending on prevailing circumstances and operational needs.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the costs to date associated with the continuing use of staff within the Northern Ireland Prison Service who are implementing the staff reduction programme, including (i) salary; (ii) travel; (iii) accommodation and (iv) other associated expenses.
(AQW 39730/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not have a staff reduction programme.

A number of staff are temporarily based in Northern Ireland to take forward the NIPS Reform Programme, and their salary, travel, and accommodation costs, as a percentage of the time dedicated to this work, is broken down into financial years (to 30 November 2014) as follows.

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Salary	2,500	94,669	166,872	110,312
Travel	0	30,900	11,310	10,336
Accommodation	0	0	7,586	3,900
Associated costs	0	0	0	0

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38850/11-15, how many people served a custodial sentence as a result of the committal warrant.

(AQW 39731/11-15)

Mr Ford: 245 people have served a custodial sentence on foot of a committal warrant for non-payment of fines since April 2014.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice for an update on his Department's funding for Railway Street Community Addiction Services, indicating the correlation between such preventative work with those suffering from drug addiction and the individual, community and the criminal justice system benefits in terms of reduced offending rates.[R]

(AQW 39741/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following the Departmental notification to the Northern Trust that the financial contribution to the Railway Street Service would cease, I have discussed this matter with Trust representatives. I have also met with a stakeholder delegation led by Daithí McKay MLA that included medical practitioners and service user representatives.

I listened to their views on the positive outcomes achieved by the current service and to their concerns regarding the impact that this decision may have within the local area. In exploring alternative means of finance, I can advise that, following an application to the Assets Recovery Community Scheme, additional funding has been secured that will extend the period of DOJ funding available until 31 March 2015.

However, it remains the position that while I remain supportive of preventative approaches such as this, the prioritisation required to meet the financial pressures faced by my Department means that I will not be able to continue to fund this project at the level of recent years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the grants available from his Department for community groups.

(AQW 39772/11-15)

Mr Ford: Across the Department of Justice a wide range of work is being undertaken with voluntary and community groups to address criminal justice and community safety related issues.

The Department also provides funding to Community Safety Partnerships, who work with a wide range of bodies including voluntary and community groups.

Each year the Department runs the Assets Recovery Community Scheme to allocate funds confiscated from criminals to schemes designed to fight crime or the fear of crime. The application process is a competitive one and applications are generally submitted through the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships though many of the successful projects are run by community groups. The competition for funding in the 2015/16 year is due to be issued soon.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland website stating that violent offenders who meet the criteria for risk assessment under the public protection arrangements will be assessed to determine if the risk they pose requires multi-agency management and that at least three months prior to their release from custody, a Local Area Public Protection Panel meeting is held to assess the risk posed and to agree a risk management plan which begins as soon as the offender is released from custody, (i) whether this applied to Dwayne Mullan prior to his most recent release; (ii) if so, whether a structure or management plan was put in place; and (iii) if not, why it was not applied.

(AQW 39791/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Manual of Practice, published on the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI) website, identifies that individuals should be referred into the PPANI arrangements by the police investigating officer on their conviction for a relevant offence. The Northern Ireland Prison Service should then ensure that such cases are referred to the PPANI Links team for assessment by the Local Area Public Protection Panel prior to the individual's release from custody. These procedures were not followed on Mr Mullan's conviction on 5 November or prior to his release from custody later that month.

There are specific threshold criteria, within the Manual of Practice, relating to the instigation of a serious case review which would not be met in this case. However the PPANI Strategic Management Board has asked the agencies involved to conduct internal reviews of the handling of the case and present these to the Board which may make recommendations in light of the findings.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice why staff from England continue to be funded to implement staff reduction and changes within the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

(AQW 39792/11-15)

Mr Ford: Staff continue to be involved based on merit, having come through a secondment application process. This work will continue until the end of the Prison Reform Programme.

The formal structures for implementation and oversight of the Reform Programme are due to be brought to an end in March 2015, with the transfer of ongoing Programme Work into NIPS business as usual and the closure of the Programme Office to be completed by September 2015.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, based on the date of sex-offender convictions resulting in a requirement to sign the Sex Offender's register, (i) how many people have been convicted of a sexual offence in each of the last six years; (ii) how many had a previous record for sexual offences; and (iii) how many committed any further sexual offences.

(AQW 39794/11-15)

Mr Ford: Databases held by the Department of Justice only contain details on those required to sign the Sex Offenders register for convictions completed from 2010 onwards. Therefore, it has not been possible to provide information relating to those required to sign the Sex Offenders register as a result of a conviction in 2008 or 2009.

Information relating to persons required to sign the Sex Offenders register as a result of a conviction for a sexual offence, 2010 - 2013

Year	Persons convicted for a sexual ^{1, 2} offence	Individuals with previous record for sexual offences	Individuals with subsequent convictions for sexual offences
2010	102	4	0
2011	113	10	0
2012	178	14	4
2013	169	10	0

Notes:

1. Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.
2. The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
3. Figures relate to convictions up to the end of 2013. As discussed in 'Northern Ireland Reoffending Methodology: Methodology and Glossary Part 1', the time between the date a sexual offence is committed and the date of conviction can be lengthy. A majority of the offenders detailed in the table received a custodial sentence on conviction, for example, 66 of the 102 individuals listed as convicted in 2010, 62 of the 113 individuals listed as convicted in 2011, 106 of the 178 individuals listed as convicted in 2012 and 113 of the 169 individuals listed as convicted in 2013 received a custodial sentence. This will inevitably affect subsequent convictions information, given the short time period covered and the length of periods of detention concerned.'

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the Local Government Auditor is fully apprised of the cost to the Northern Ireland Prison Service of staff travelling from England to implement the staff reduction programme; and whether he will order a full audit on these costs to examine if best practice and appropriate value for money is being achieved.

(AQW 39846/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not have a staff reduction programme.

The Local Government Auditor is responsible for auditing the accounts of local government bodies (i.e. councils) and has no authority to audit the accounts of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office has full access to the Northern Ireland Prison Service accounts and is responsible for auditing the accounts at the end of each financial year.

It would be for the Department of Justice Internal Audit team to consider whether best practice had been implemented and value for money achieved in relation to the NIPS Programme Reform Team. Any decision to put this forward to the priority based internal audit programme would be taken by the Audit Committee. There are currently no plans to do so.

Secondments are in line with Northern Ireland Civil Service policy and costs reflect the additional expenditure incurred.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 39125/11-15, (i) to address point (i) (c) of the question and provide written clarification confirming a case of mistaken identity; (ii) why departmental agencies chose to state verbally this was mistaken identity and refused to supply this in writing when requested to do so; and (iii) how confirmation of

mistaken identity could infringe the person in question's rights or the Probation Board policy of not providing information on an individual's location post-release, if this was not the person in question, but would significantly allay concerns in the community.

(AQW 39847/11-15)

Mr Ford: As outlined in my previous answers to AQW38144/11-15, AQW38779/11-15 and AQW39125/11-15 the Probation Board for Northern Ireland does not provide information on specific cases. The agencies involved in public protection have offered to facilitate a meeting with public representatives to discuss local concerns raised.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of applications received for independent members of the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, broken down by Partnership area.

(AQW 39887/11-15)

Mr Ford: Responsibility for the process of recruitment for Independent Members of the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) rests with the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

The Policing Board have informed me that they received 414 completed applications to fill 119 independent positions that will be available in line with the new Council structures.

A breakdown of the number of applications received for each of the new partnership areas is as follows:

PCSP	Applications
Antrim and Newtownabbey	35
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	45
Belfast	81
Causeway Coast and Glens	38
Derry and Strabane	25
Fermanagh and Omagh	36
Lisburn and Castlereagh	21
Mid and East Antrim	24
Mid Ulster	34
Newry, Mourne and Down	29
North Down and Ards	46
Total completed forms	414

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice, in light of the Prisoner Ombudsman's Report into the Death in Custody of Geoffrey Singleton at Maghaberry Prison on 6 May 2013, specifically Recommendation 6; (i) why the Northern Ireland Prison Service failed to comply with its Policy For The Safe Use and Custody of Hoffman Cut Down Knives, in particular, the requirements to ensure the issue of such knives to those working in close proximity of prisoners, that staff are equipped with Hoffman knives; that House/Block Managers record the issue of such knives in journals at the beginning and end of each shift, and ensure that during patrols staff have safe custody of same; and (ii) whether disciplinary action has been taken against any members of staff who failed to meet the requirements of this policy, including management responsible for its implementation.

(AQW 39896/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The Policy for the safe use and custody of Hoffman cut down knives was not applied at the time of Mr Singleton's death, as staff responding to the initial emergency were not carrying any Hoffman Knives because of their non-issue with the landing keys. However, the Hoffman Knife was available and located close by in the Senior Officer's office.
- (ii) There has been no disciplinary action taken against any members of staff or management.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38321/11-15, to address part (iii) of the original question, specifically whether there is a forensics backlog; and if so, how many cases are currently affected.

(AQW 39922/11-15)

Mr Ford: There was no part (iii) to this question.

As at 9 December 2014, there were at the Agency 218 "open" casework allocations / reports in progress which exceeded their turnaround times as defined in the SLA with the Investigating Authority. Of these, 4 have been identified - in conjunction with PPS information - as impacting on delay in court proceedings ongoing or in preparation. These have been highlighted to the relevant staff and are being expedited.

There has not been any delay in the analysis of the drugs related to the case referred to in AQW/38321/11-15.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 39726/11-15, whether this matter merits a Serious Case Review into the risk management of Dwayne Mullan following his release from a custody sentence handed down at Dungannon Magistrates Court in November 2014.

(AQW 40013/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Manual of Practice, published on the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI) website, identifies that individuals should be referred into the PPANI arrangements by the police investigating officer on their conviction for a relevant offence. The Northern Ireland Prison Service should then ensure that such cases are referred to the PPANI Links team for assessment by the Local Area Public Protection Panel prior to the individual's release from custody. These procedures were not followed on Mr Mullan's conviction on 5 November or prior to his release from custody later that month.

There are specific threshold criteria, within the Manual of Practice, relating to the instigation of a serious case review which would not be met in this case. However the PPANI Strategic Management Board has asked the agencies involved to conduct internal reviews of the handling of the case and present these to the Board which may make recommendations in light of the findings.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) why recommendation 6 of the Northern Ireland Prisoner Ombudsman's report into the death in custody of Geoffrey Singleton was not implemented given that the same recommendation was made again on 10 December 2009 by the Ombudsman; (ii) whether the 2009 recommendation was accepted by the Northern Ireland Prison Service; and if so, (iii) why it was not implemented.

(AQW 40014/11-15)

Mr Ford: Recommendation 6 from the report into the death in custody of Geoffrey Singleton has been accepted by the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Hoffman knives are already issued alongside each set of landing keys. Maghaberry are currently looking at whether this arrangement can be improved further.

The recommendation made in 2009, and accepted by NIPS, was that staff should be provided with appropriate equipment, including access to a Hoffman knife. In response NIPS made Hoffman knives available in each residential area.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many cases of drugs possession have reached magistrates court and been deemed suitable to be dealt with by caution in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 40015/11-15)

Mr Ford: Drugs offences may be prosecuted under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, the Medicines Act 1968, the Criminal Attempts and Conspiracy (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

The numbers of instances where a charge concerning possession of drugs was withdrawn at court and a caution subsequently administered in the years 2011 – 2013 are provided in the table below.

Court Division	2011	2012	2013
Antrim	16	16	20
Ards	17	11	17
Armagh And South Down	22	19	27
Belfast	21	35	26
Craigavon	16	16	19
Fermanagh And Tyrone	20	31	8
Londonderry	5	12	10
Total	117	140	127

Notes:

1. The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
2. Where an individual received a caution in relation to more than one offence as part of a resolution to a case, only one instance is counted.
3. Only instances where a cautionary disposal which was associated with a charge being withdrawn at court have been included. Not all instances of out of court disposals were recorded as withdrawn at court.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for an update on each of the proposed court house and hearing centre closures.

(AQW 40016/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 22 November 2012 I announced my decision to close Magherafelt and Limavady Hearing Centres following the implementation of court boundary reforms contained in the Justice Bill which is currently before the Assembly.

In response to significant budgetary pressures, the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service is reviewing the court estate to identify potential options for rationalisation. It is intended to launch a consultation paper in the new year.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to detail the funding provided by his Department, or its arm's-length bodies, to organisations providing support to people withdrawing from drug misuse or providing preventative intervention during 2014. **(AQW 40057/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The funding provided by the DOJ and its arm's length bodies is attached at Annex A.

Annex A

Source	Organisation	Description	Amount
PCSP Limavady	Divert	Legal High awareness campaign targeting young people	£500
PCSP Limavady	Local Pharmacies	An education programme targeting the mis-use of prescription medication	£3,000
PCSP Ballymena	Hope Centre	Prevention of reoffending by alcohol and drug addicts	£2,769
PCSP Coleraine	Simon Community	To work with young people aged 16-25 living in homeless accommodation in the Coleraine area who are active drug users	£7,700
PCSP Antrim		Drug and Alcohol Counselling project	£10,000
PCSP Antrim		Summer BEAT - Detached youth engagement programme	£29,320
PCSP Antrim		Bee Safe - transition from primary to secondary education includes drug and alcohol awareness.	£2,000
PCSP Antrim		Community Safety Wardens - onward referrals to appropriate agencies	£26,000
PCSP Antrim		At Risk Youth Intervention – specific substance misuse programmes undertaken when required	£24,000
PCSP Antrim		Off Licence Code of Practice - encouraging responsible sale of alcohol and reporting by off-trade.	£3,000
PCSP Antrim		Drug Dealers Don't Care Campaign	£1,000
PCSP Derry / L'Derry	DIVERT	Provision of information leaflets, flyers, banners and posters in relation to 'legal highs'	£500
PCSP Derry / L'Derry	Hurt	Support for volunteer training on OCN Level 1 Substance Misuse course and Millennium Volunteer Award	£500
PCSP Derry / L'Derry	Hurt	Provision of awareness session to schools, higher education pupils on the subject of drug misuse and 'legal' highs	£2,250
PCSP Derry / L'Derry	Yes Project	Youth Educated in Safety Initiative –Primary School events – drug awareness	£9,876.25
PCSP Derry / L'Derry	Drink Think	Alcohol awareness programme to first offenders in breach of the Council's on street drinking bye-laws.	£7,453.84
PCSP Derry / L'Derry	Public Meeting	PCSP Public meeting held at the end of August themed on drug misuse and 'legal' highs	£400
PCSP Ballymoney		Makin Sense – Drug and Alcohol Workshop and Performance (Limavady, Ballymoney, Coleraine and Moyle Clusters)	£5,000
PCSP Ballymoney		Drug Dealers Don't Care Campaign	£2,500
PCSP Ballymoney		Drug & Alcohol Arrest Referral Programme.	Not available

Source	Organisation	Description	Amount
PCSP Ballymoney		Suicide campaign	Not available
PCSP North Down	FASA	Preventive information and personal development workshops for vulnerable youth.	£10,000
PCSP Omagh	Omagh Drug and Alcohol Forum	Educational Conference – Post Primary Parents (Legal Highs)	£1,000
PCSP Omagh	Divert	'We don't take drugs, drugs take us" Campaign	£1,000
PCSP Omagh	Street Safe Project	Weekend Volunteers provide information on Drug and Alcohol support	No Cost
PCSP Omagh		Hosting Popping Candy play	No Cost
PCSP Castlereagh	Dundonald Sea Cadets	Series of workshops focusing on underage drinking and drug awareness to teenage girls.	No Cost
PCSP Castlereagh	Hanwood Centre/ Midnight Street Soccer	FASA are involved in undertaking drug and alcohol awareness sessions to approximately 30/40 teenage boys.	No Cost
PCSP Castlereagh	TAGIT Fishing Club	Educational workshops being undertaken to approximately 60 young persons, led by FASA, focusing on the effects of drug and alcohol misuse, not only to the users but to those included in the family and local community.	No Cost
PCSP Castlereagh	Christ Church, Dundonald	Youth leaders providing talks to young persons on the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.	No Cost
PCSP Castlereagh	Dundonald Football Club	Workshops and facilitator provided to deliver educational sessions on drugs and alcohol to teenage boys.	£480
PCSP Castlereagh	Belvoir Women's Group	Providing a drop-in service for the organisation whereby FASA undertaking seminars concerning drugs and alcohol awareness for parents and young people.	£750
PCSP Castlereagh	Milltown Community Association	Programme involved drug and alcohol awareness sessions focusing on young persons who reside in the area.	No Cost
PCSP Castlereagh	Braniel Community Church	Drop in centre in the Braniel Estate, includes a seminar held by FASA to educate young persons on the dangers of drugs.	No Cost
PCSP Castlereagh	Carryduff Boxing Club	Drug awareness education programmes by the PSNI, focusing on young people between the ages 11 - 19 yrs.	No Cost
PCSP Castlereagh	Dreamscheme	Youth workers undertaking drugs awareness educational programme.	No Cost
PCSP Castlereagh		PR promotional campaign in association with Belfast PCSP focusing on the dangers of "Drug Dealers" operating in the Castlereagh Borough. Campaign includes the use locally of adshels and billboards. Campaign shall take place in Feb'15.	£1,800
PSCP Ards	FASA	Saltwater project	£8000 (approx. 25% in 2014)
PSCP Ards	LINC	Project 23	£6250 (approx. 25% in 2014)
PSCP Ards	FASA	Young Peoples support	£9600 (approx. 75% in 2014)
PCSP Strabane	HURT	Addictions Educational and Awareness Raising Programme for schools and community groups	£28,153
PCSP West Belfast	Beechmount - Mothers Against Drugs	Leaflets Informational DVD ROI Visit	£120 £150 £899

Source	Organisation	Description	Amount
PCSP East Belfast		Preventative intervention programmes	£5,500 (cost for 2013-15)
PCSP North Belfast		Financial Contribution to City Wide Drugs Campaign	Not available
PCSP South Belfast		Financial Contribution to City Wide Drugs Campaign	Not available
PBNI	New Life Counselling	support to people withdrawing from drug misuse or providing preventative intervention	£7,300
PBNI	Breakthrough	support to people withdrawing from drug misuse or providing preventative intervention	£40,000
PBNI	React (Newry/Downpatrick)	support to people withdrawing from drug misuse or providing preventative intervention	£34,000
PBNI	Northwest Counselling	support to people withdrawing from drug misuse or providing preventative intervention	£8,400
PBNI	Hope Centre	support to people withdrawing from drug misuse or providing preventative intervention	£8,000
PBNI	React (Portadown/ Armagh)	support to people withdrawing from drug misuse or providing preventative intervention	£14,300
YJA	FASA	Range of substance misuse initiatives	£13,700
NI Prison Service		Pilot programme for prisoners with addiction problems	£30,000

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice (i) to detail the support provided to the Railway Street Addiction and Rehabilitation Unit by his Department; (ii) to outline the business case which supported his Department's investment; and (iii) for his assessment of the expected implications of the withdrawal of funding by his Department.

(AQW 40058/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice has provided financial support of approximately £330,000 per annum over the last three financial years. In 2014- 15 I expect my Department to provide them with £370,000 from a range of funding sources. In addition my officials have provided other support to assist with the development and implementation of this service.

A business case was developed for the Department's contribution to the Railway Street initiative. However, due to the overall pressures faced by my Department, it was not possible to secure the full amount.

Following discussions with Trust officials, I have asked my officials to consider whether it would be possible to provide a more modest contribution in order to continue to provide a measure of support to a recalibrated service.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice whether he has considered using money recovered from the proceeds of crime to help fund Railway Street Addiction services.

(AQW 40059/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following the decision to cease funding to Railway St an application was made to the Assets Recovery Community Scheme and it was successful. The Northern Trust has been advised. This will provide further funding to the Trust and assist in maintaining the Railway Street service until 31 March 2015.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to the introduction of legislation making internet trolling and cyber harassment or bullying a criminal offence.

(AQW 40079/11-15)

Mr Ford: Harassment and bullying are already criminal offences in Northern Ireland, whether perpetrated directly or in the form of cyber bullying. The maximum penalty for harassment is 2 years' imprisonment, which may be increased to 7 years where there is the threat of violence, or 10 years where a person threatens to kill another.

I am aware of the Justice Secretary's proposals in the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill in relation to malicious communications or "internet trolling". As part of those changes the time limit for prosecutions for sending grossly offensive messages by public communications networks will be extended in certain circumstances to 3 years of the offence being committed.

That proposed change will apply to Northern Ireland and whilst I have no further plans to change our laws at this time, along with my officials I will be keeping developments in England and Wales under review.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 38321/11-15, whether he wishes to review his answer given that the forensic backlog was the reason for splitting the cases provided to the court in question.

(AQW 40083/11-15)

Mr Ford: As noted in my answer to AQW/38321/11-15 it is a police decision to send separate files to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and for the PPS to decide whether to prosecute a complaint. My reply to AQW/38908/11-15 confirmed there has been no delay in the analysis of drugs in this case.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the reform of prison healthcare, previous recommendations or issues of concern raised over a number of years by the Prisoner Ombudsman and various Independent Inspectors, for his assessment of the communication, recording and sharing of information and informed handovers in Maghaberry prison; and how the Northern Ireland Prison Service will address these issues in conjunction with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 40086/11-15)

Mr Ford: Maghaberry Prison works closely with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) in all operational matters to provide the duty of care and healthcare needs for all prisoners. Recording of prisoner information is a matter for both the Trust and Maghaberry using the appropriate electronic systems, with SEHSCT having access to Maghaberry's records system. Sharing of information and handovers are completed when appropriate between operational staff.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what measures his Department has in place to ensure that court orders banning people from keeping animals are implemented and enforced.

(AQW 40088/11-15)

Mr Ford: The legislation in respect of animal welfare is the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 which is the responsibility of DARD.

Enforcement of the legislation, including implementation and enforcement of disqualification orders sits with the appropriate enforcement body, which is, in the case of:-

- Farmed animals – DARD
- Non Farmed animals – Councils and
- Welfare cases involving Animal fighting, wild animals and where other criminal activities are involved – PSNI.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has any plans to keep a central register of people who are banned from keeping animals.

(AQW 40091/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials from my Department are currently working closely with their colleagues from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in relation to the review of the implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which was established by the DARD Minister earlier this year.

One of the proposals being considered is the feasibility of establishing a central register of those convicted of animal welfare offences.

The review's steering group is due to provide an interim report to me and to the DARD Minister in January which will include emerging recommendations based on the analysis of the evidence to date. The interim report will also be brought to the attention of MLAs and posted on the DARD and DOJ websites. I expect that the Review team will provide a final report in Spring 2015.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what criteria is applied by Access NI in providing enhanced disclosure to employers; and how this process is monitored.

(AQW 40103/11-15)

Mr Ford: Eligibility for enhanced disclosures is prescribed in paragraph 9 of the Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) (Disclosure) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008, as amended.

AccessNI conducts audits with organisations listed as Registered Bodies to ensure compliance with a published Code of Practice. These Audits include a review of the positions applied for on enhanced disclosure applications to ensure due consideration has been given against the prescribed eligibility criterion in the Police Act regulations.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given his departmental responsibility for the Police Federation of NI Regulations, whether he also has responsibility for monitoring or accountability of adherence to these Regulations.

(AQW 40114/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Federation comprises all police officers in the Police Service of Northern Ireland up to the rank of chief inspector. It is their representative body, run by them for them. My responsibilities lie with approving the formal Rules within which the Federation operates. Rules are changed at the request of the Federation after approval by the members at the annual conference.

I have no role in the day-to-day running of the PSNI, or the Police Federation or in its internal affairs.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions for driving without insurance have been secured in the Fermanagh and Tyrone Court Division in each of the last three financial years, shown by the court which dealt with each case. (AQW 40115/11-15)

Mr Ford: Uninsured driving is an offence under Article 90(4) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. The most recent financial year for which the information requested is available is 2012/13.

Convictions for Driving with no insurance in Fermanagh and Tyrone Court Division by Court Office, 2010/11 – 2012/13

Court Office	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Dungannon Court Office	368	372	382
Enniskillen Court Office	239	208	139
Omagh Court Office	214	168	150
Strabane Court Office	131	173	225
Total	952	921	896

Note:

- 1 Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.
- 2 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offence specified.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he has any plans to investigate the comments made by Mr Justice Weir on 9 December 2014 that it's all too common that Maghaberry pay no attention to correspondence. (AQW 40116/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have no plans to investigate the comments from Mr Justice Weir on 9 December 2014.

Staff in Maghaberry Prison, where appropriate, forward all correspondence regarding medical care to the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust for answer. A letter is issued informing the sender of this.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, since taking over responsibility for the approval of amendments to Police Federation of NI Regulations, to detail the amendments that (i) were requested; (ii) were granted; (iii) were refused; and (iv) remain under consideration for amendment. (AQW 40117/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Regulations are "The Police Association for Northern Ireland Regulations". Since taking over responsibility I have made no changes to them. I have been asked to make the following amendments to the Police Federation for Northern Ireland Rules:

In August 2012, following the closure of the Full Time Reserve, I agreed to the removal from the Rules of references to the Full Time Reserve with regard to membership and representation on committees. This change was approved having first been ratified by delegates at the Federation's Annual Conference, in line with Federation Rules.

In August 2012, at the request of the Federation, I also agreed that the Treasurer and Assistant Secretary would be added to Central Committee as ex-officio members, thus allowing two additional Federation representatives to be elected and ensuring the post-holders will be automatically on Central Committee. This change was approved having first been ratified by delegates at the Federation's Annual Conference, in line with Federation Rules.

In September 2013, the following amendments to the Rules were requested by the Federation and approved:

Members of the Central Committee shall elect a Chairman, Secretary, Assistant Secretary and Treasurer from within the Committee or, with the approval of the Chief Constable, some other members of the PSNI who are willing to serve in the capacity. Voting by a show of hands.

Members of Central Committee shall elect a vice-chairman from within the Committee by a show of hands.

The office-holders so appointed during their term of office will be ex-officio members of Central Committee. The Chairman will hold a casting vote.

Where a member of Central Committee is appointed as Chairman or Secretary the members of his/her Board shall elect another representative to fill the vacancy created on the Committee.

These changes were approved having first been ratified by delegates at the Federation's Annual Conference, in line with Federation Rules.

The Federation also sought a proposed change that in order to be in a position to fully represent colleagues on committee, each candidate for, or member of, a Regional Board of the Federation, must be a subscribing member of the Federation. This request was not approved.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Justice to list the community and voluntary groups in East Londonderry that have received funding from his Department since 2011.

(AQW 40127/11-15)

Mr Ford: The community and voluntary groups in East Londonderry that have received funding from the Department of Justice, including its Agencies but not its arm's-length bodies, since 2011 are shown below:

2011/12

- Creative Holistic Art Therapy (CHAT)
- The Glens Community Association
- Patchwork (Ireland)

2012/13

- Bovalley Community Association
- Roe Valley Residents
- West Bann Athletic Football Club

2013/14

- Bovalley Community Association
- Roe Valley Residents

All groups received their funding through the Youth Justice Agency Small Grant Scheme.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Justice how his Department is working with the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland to address levels of crime against older people.

(AQW 40167/11-15)

Mr Ford: DOJ officials met with representatives from the Commissioner for Older People's office in July 2012 to take their views on the outcomes for older people contained in the Community Safety Strategy 2012-2017 and to invite a nominee to sit on the Delivery Group responsible for those outcomes. Whilst not in a position to take up the offer of a nominee at that time, my officials continue to liaise with the Commissioner's staff on related issues arising as required.

I have personally met with the Commissioner, including in March 2013, when I met with her and a number of stakeholders to discuss the Department's performance on community safety issues. In June this year, I met with the Commissioner to discuss her report 'Protecting our Older People in Northern Ireland: A Call for Adult Safeguarding Legislation' which considered the adequacy and effectiveness of the law in protecting older people from abuse.

The Policing Plan 2014-2017 includes an outcome to improve services to vulnerable groups, one of which is older people, and contains a specific measure which states 'In partnership with PCSPs and key stakeholders, to reduce the number of burglaries and robberies where older people are victims'. Linked to this is the measure to increase the outcome rate for domestic burglary by 2%. In line with the Policing Plan, PCSPs deliver a range of initiatives aimed at tackling crime against older people and they engage with the Commissioner in relation to this where relevant. For example, the Commissioner has been the principle speaker at the Newtownards PCSP funded AGENDA (Age North Down and Ards) Annual General Meeting for the last two years, addressing policing and safety concerns of older people. Also, in partnership with Belfast City Council's Age Friendly Team, Belfast PCSP links directly with the Commissioner's Office to develop age friendly initiatives and assist the delivery of the Age Friendly Strategy.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how the maximum sentence tariffs for crimes connected with manslaughter compare with those in (i) Scotland; (ii) Wales; (iii) England; and (iv) the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 40176/11-15)

Mr Ford: The maximum sentence for manslaughter which can be imposed in Northern Ireland, England and Wales (a single jurisdiction) and the Republic of Ireland is life imprisonment. The maximum sentence for culpable homicide in Scotland is also life. In Northern Ireland, where a life sentence is passed for manslaughter, the determination of an appropriate tariff is a matter for the Judiciary, under the terms of the Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001.

Offences of manslaughter can fall within several different categories covering a wide range of circumstances. The same is true of culpable homicide where there can be a great variation between individual cases including whether or not the act was voluntary or involuntary.

For this reason it is highly problematic to compare overall sentencing data on manslaughter convictions across jurisdictions or, indeed, between different years within the same jurisdiction.

In Northern Ireland, the Court of Appeal has given a number of important guideline decisions in cases of manslaughter and there have been a large number of decisions at first instance in which these guidelines have been applied.

I have no plans to review the sentencing arrangements for manslaughter. I have, however, already made public my intention to review the legislation governing the determination of tariffs where the Court has imposed a life sentence.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has any plans to review, or legislate on, the maximum sentence tariffs for crimes connected with manslaughter.

(AQW 40178/11-15)

Mr Ford: The maximum sentence for manslaughter which can be imposed in Northern Ireland, England and Wales (a single jurisdiction) and the Republic of Ireland is life imprisonment. The maximum sentence for culpable homicide in Scotland is also life. In Northern Ireland, where a life sentence is passed for manslaughter, the determination of an appropriate tariff is a matter for the Judiciary, under the terms of the Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001.

Offences of manslaughter can fall within several different categories covering a wide range of circumstances. The same is true of culpable homicide where there can be a great variation between individual cases including whether or not the act was voluntary or involuntary.

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In Northern Ireland, the Court of Appeal has given a number of important guideline decisions in cases of manslaughter and there have been a large number of decisions at first instance in which these guidelines have been applied.

I have no plans to review the sentencing arrangements for manslaughter. I have, however, already made public my intention to review the legislation governing the determination of tariffs where the Court has imposed a life sentence.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, following the announcement on 11 December 2014 by the Chairperson of the Probation Board of Northern Ireland of budgetary cuts impacting on sex offender and violent offender monitoring, to detail the reductions which have been carried out in recent months, including (i) when they commenced; (ii) the resulting changes in practice; and (iii) the alterations or reductions of offender monitoring contact.

(AQW 40181/11-15)

Mr Ford: Each criminal justice organisation has had to review how it delivers its services in order to live within current budgetary constraints. The Probation Board for Northern Ireland researched, assessed and implemented changes to probation practices from 1 April 2014, based on an agreed hierarchy of priority, with a commitment to meet the needs of sentencers by the provision of court assessments, and informed by levels of risk posed by those under supervision. These changes included:

- new guidelines for the frequency of contact in accordance with the level of risk an offender presents. PBNI has given priority to the supervision of sex offenders and violent offenders;
- reduction in overheads incurred through ending rental contracts and reassigning where offenders will meet their Probation Officers;
- reduction in discretionary payments to the Community and Voluntary sector in respect of secondary (desistance) related services;
- reduction in workforce capacity and a redistribution of workloads which has meant an increase in Probation Officer caseloads; and
- reorganisation of court attendance days for Probation Officers and implementation of agreements with Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service and Youth Justice Agency on the delivery of services.

The changes implemented on 1 April 2014 will be reviewed again when the 2015/2016 budget is finalised.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given his Department's responsibility for the Police Federation of Northern Ireland (PFNI) Regulations, to provide a copy of the PFNI internal complaints procedures.

(AQW 40182/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Federation for Northern Ireland's internal complaints procedure is a matter for the Federation and this information may be obtained by contacting the Federation directly.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 39639/11-15, whether he will undertake to answer this question as and when the stated restrictions are reduced, removed or relaxed.

(AQW 40183/11-15)

Mr Ford: In my reply to AQW/39639/11-15 I confirmed the Court ordered there should be no further publication of any material relating to the trial. Any further questions in relation to this case will be answered taking account of any active restrictions.

Department for Regional Development

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the new cycle lanes and boxes planned in each council area for (i) the rest of 2014; (ii) 2015; and (iii) 2016.

(AQW 38220/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Details of new cycle lanes and boxes planned and delivered during the 2014/15 financial year are set out in the table below:

Council Area	Cycle lanes and boxes planned and delivered during 2014/15
Antrim	3.0 km of shared use footway/cycleway at Stiles Way, Antrim.
Ards	900 m hard shoulder advisory cycle lane on A21 Comber to Newtownards (Ballyhenry Road to Moate Road).
Armagh	2.5 km hard shoulder conversion on A3 Armagh to Portadown Road (partly in Craigavon Local Government District).
Banbridge	1.3 km of advisory cycle lane on Newry Road, Banbridge.
Ballymoney	1.05 km of shared use footway/cycle route on C84 Corkey Road.
Belfast	5 advanced stop lines at Malone Road/ Balmoral Avenue junction.
Carrickfergus	2.0 km of shared use cycleway/footway at Prince Andrew Way.
Coleraine	1 advanced stop line at Millburn Road/Artillery Road junction; and 1.2km of shared use footway/cycle route on A29 ring road between Lodge Road and Ballycastle Road.
Craigavon	750m of cycleway at B2 Seagoe Road, Portadown. 160m of cycleway at Eastway Link, Craigavon.
Derry	600m of cycle lane on Springtown Road, Londonderry.
Down	650m of cycleway at A50 Newcastle to Castlewellan Road (legislation only). It is proposed to extend the cycleway along the A50 towards Castlewellan.
Fermanagh	140m of cycle lane on Lough Yoan Road, Enniskillen.
Larne	7.2 km of shared use footway/cycle route on A8 Belfast to Larne Dualling scheme.
Limavady	500m of shared use footway/cycle route on A6 Foreglen Road, Dungiven.
Lisburn	180m of contraflow cycle lane on Bridge Street, Lisburn; and 200m of contraflow cycle lane on Graham Gardens, Lisburn.
Magherafelt	400m of cycle lane on Castledawson Road, Magherafelt.
Newtownabbey	4.8 km of shared use footway/cycle route on A8 Belfast to Larne Dualling scheme. 1.2 km of shared use cycleway/footway and cycle lanes including Toucan crossing.
North Down	Legislation/signing for extended cycle facility along Belfast Road to Ballyrobert Road junction.
Omagh	Cycle path on Drumragh Avenue and Dublin Road, Omagh (dependent on additional funding).
Strabane	Cycle path at Bradley Way, Strabane (dependent on additional funding).

In addition, my Department is currently finalising a programme of infrastructure works at around 10 schools throughout Northern Ireland in order to promote active travel. Around £1million has been set aside for this programme.

I am unable to provide details for 2015/16 and 2016/17 as the budgets have not yet been agreed and Councils have not been consulted on the draft programmes.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 38222/11-15, whether his Department has taken disability access into consideration when following the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, in particular the needs of blind and partially sighted people.

(AQW 39259/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As I indicated in my response to AQW 38222/11-15, the Department's main design guide, the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), gives only general guidance on the 'standard' height of the kerb, which ranges from 100-125mm in urban situations to 75-100mm in rural situations.

However, DMRB was developed primarily for the design of Motorways and Trunk Roads, although it does allude to the fact that there may be circumstances where other standards may be more appropriate.

My Department has adopted a number of guidance documents aimed specifically at the design of infrastructure specifically for people with disabilities. These include "Inclusive Mobility" and "Guidance on the use of Tactile Paving Surfaces" and the provision of dropped kerbs and tactile paving at road crossing points is now the norm in new works, works developed as part of a pedestrian route strategy and on other routes in town centres.

I am aware of the issues Guide Dogs NI has had with kerb heights in some of the recent public realm schemes being delivered by the Department for Social Development and the relevant local council. Officials have had a number of meetings with Guide Dogs NI representatives and I met with them at the end of August. As a result of my meeting, I have asked that specific guidance, in terms of kerb heights, be developed to ensure that the needs of guide dog users and cane users are met when providing new infrastructure.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department and its arm's-length bodies are preparing for the winter weather in Co Fermanagh, including the stocking volumes of salt and grit; and how this compares with the last five years.

(AQW 39282/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are seven gritters (complete with snow plough attachments) available to deal with the gritting of roads in Fermanagh for this winter season. This includes one spare gritter to provide support in case of vehicle breakdown. In addition, there are also five contractors / farmers registered to assist with clearing snow in rural areas in the event of heavy snowfalls.

My officials have also been in discussions with Fermanagh District Council which has agreed to continue the previous arrangement for clearing town centre footways in the event of prolonged periods of ice or snow this winter.

There is currently a stock of 2564 tonnes of salt and 1150 tonnes of grit at the Silverhill Depot, Enniskillen.

This compares to: 2445 tonnes of salt in 2013;
2475 tonnes of salt in 2012;
2253 tonnes of salt in 2011; and
1972 tonnes of salt in 2010.

Records relating to the amount of grit stored in previous years are no longer available.

At present, salt bins and grit piles are being replenished throughout the county.

NI Water maintains a well developed Major Incident Plan to provide a fully planned, reactive response to any major incidents. The plan has been regularly activated and exercised in response to real life emergency situations during the year.

NI Water is also continuing to engage with a wide variety of stakeholders to further promote the 'Don't Wait Insulate' message. Media interviews will be used to advise customers on prevention of frozen pipes and wastage caused by burst pipes, including an in house video on precautionary measures.

Enniskillen and Omagh Ulsterbus depots hold small quantities of salt (approximately 150kg) to be used for gritting passenger boarding areas and bus yards at the two locations, as well as for use, if required, to assist recovery of stranded vehicles. Additional strategic stocks are available from Infrastructure & Property department in Belfast if required.

Local bus fleets are subject to a winterisation programme which includes additional checks to heating systems, antifreeze, screen wash as well as tyres and braking systems. This year's fleet programme commenced in mid-October and was been completed by December, as planned. In addition, all drivers are given supplemental information on winter driving skills and techniques.

All bus depots are issued with severe weather management procedures which are re-briefed annually to all staff prior to the onset of winter. An emergency winter communications plan is activated, as required, as part of this process.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to increase the number of public ecar charging points; and what measures will be taken to ensure that future ecar charging points will be more reliable.

(AQW 39348/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The existing EV charging infrastructure provides 320 fast and 14 rapid charge points at 174 locations across Northern Ireland and funding has been secured for a further two rapid chargers, currently planned for Sprucefield and North Belfast locations. These locations have been chosen to comply with Ten-T European funding requirements which seek to improve links on cross border arterial routes.

I am not proposing to further increase the number of charge points on the public network at this time.

However, my officials are continuing to work with both OLEV (Office of Low Emission Vehicles) and the EU to source funding streams which would allow improvements in the infrastructure with minimal impact on Departmental budgets.

Recently my Department was successful in securing £600,000 of grant funding to allow the installation of up to 100 charge points in the public sector estate. This further investment will assist in developing the infrastructure for use by fleet vehicles and will allow public access, where it is appropriate.

The Department is also working with partners in Northern Ireland Electricity and the Electricity Supply Board in the Republic of Ireland to put in place a new Charge Point Management System. This new system will be designed to improve services and provide a new customer access to live data streams, which will provide information as to the status of charge points at any given time.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any planned road maintenance works for the Carnalea area of North Down.

(AQW 39481/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's programme of potential new footway reconstruction and carriageway resurfacing schemes in North Down, including the Carnalea area of Bangor, is continually assessed with schemes being prioritised relative to each other, and timescales for implementation subject to the availability of funding.

As is the case across Northern Ireland, the Carnalea area of Bangor will continue to be inspected with defects identified and repaired in accordance with our established Road Maintenance Standards, subject to the availability of funding.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many requests have been made in North Down to cut overgrown trees in 2014/15; and how many were acted upon.

(AQW 39510/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: During 2014/15, following individual requests, my Department has asked 468 properties to take action on overgrowth and to date, 289 have complied.

With regard to large scale planting under the control of my Department, officials have received requests for action on thirteen sites, of which five sites have had work completed, five did not require work and three have not yet been attended to.

In relation to large scale private planting, my Department has received three requests, all of which are still being investigated.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development what initiatives are in place to encourage the use of seat belts by pupils travelling on Translink services.

(AQW 39516/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink actively encourages the use of seat belts by all passengers travelling on its buses where seatbelts are fitted. All seat-belted buses have notices/internal visual displays promoting the wearing of seat belts whilst the vehicles are in motion.

Additionally, Translink have produced a 'Travelsafe' DVD and this has been circulated to all schools. It addresses many safety related issues and contains a specific section dedicated to the safety benefits of seat-belt wearing.

In conjunction with schools, Translink has an on-going programme of visits by the 'Safety Bus' team, who deal with all aspects of safe travel by bus.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the costs incurred following the closures of the railway line in (i) Lurgan; and (ii) Upper Bann in the last three years, including the cost of the alternative forms of transport provided.

(AQW 39549/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise you that Translink does not have costs specifically allocated against such incidents. They are embedded within various account codes and do not lend themselves readily to separate extraction.

This encompasses a wide range of costs including redeployment of staff; additional staff coverage; supervision and management of incidents (i.e. overtime); strengthening of provision of passenger information (i.e. Contact Centre staff), technical staff to deal with breakdowns. There are also costs to cover bus substitution (including staff and fuel).

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to offer free on-street parking in the run up to Christmas.

(AQW 39584/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Christmas parking concessions have not been applied to on-street parking in recent years and are therefore not being considered.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the estimated cost for the planned upgrades of the (i) M2 to Moneynick; and (ii) Dungiven to Londonderry dualling projects.

(AQW 39600/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Randalstown to Castledawson scheme will cost between £120 million and £140 million for the 14 kilometre dual carriageway.

The Londonderry to Dungiven scheme, including a dual carriageway bypass of Dungiven, will cost in the region of £390 million to £420 million. If constructed in parts, the cost range for each part is:

- £55 million to £65 million for the 5 kilometre Dungiven Bypass between Derrychrier Road and Crebarkey Road;
- £45 million to £50 million for the 2.5 kilometre upgrade of the Clooney Road dual carriageway between Caw and Maydown roundabouts; and
- £290 million to £305 million for the 25 kilometre road between Maydown Roundabout and Derrychrier Road.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 33823/11-15, and following the experimental Traffic Regulation Order to provide a tidal urban clearway on three routes in south Belfast in November 2013, whether an assessment has been made if a similar scheme should be implemented for the Antrim Road in North Belfast.

(AQW 39603/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department introduced an experimental Traffic Regulation Order to provide a tidal urban clearway on three routes in south Belfast, namely the Malone Road, part of the Lisburn Road and Stranmillis Road in November 2013.

This trial was closely monitored to evaluate its impact, and legislation to make this change permanent is currently being processed.

Other routes, such as the Antrim Road, will now be considered for similar treatment, taking into account a number of factors, including the effect such a change would have on traffic flow and bus operations.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AWQ 38732/11-15, what measures are in place to ensure that disability awareness and equality training is (i) available for; and (ii) attended by, all frontline public transport staff.

(AQW 39609/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I recognise the need for all frontline public transport staff to be appropriately trained in disability and equality awareness, and the role that this can play in enabling people with a disability to fully participate in the community.

Translink has confirmed that it continues to provide disability awareness training to its driving staff as part of their induction process, and that equality and diversity issues are routinely covered in training modules to enable bus drivers to achieve the Certificate of Professional Competence. All other customer-facing staff such as Conductors, station staff, customer service co-ordinators and Translink Rail Services staff also receive regular training in these areas. Translink staff are bound by the company's Dignity at Work and Equal Opportunity policies.

Other transport providers such as the Rural Community Transport Partnerships and Disability Action which are funded by my Department have confirmed that they have provided disability awareness and equality training to all front line staff.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development what criteria determines the location of salt bins.

(AQW 39613/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Salt bins or grit piles may be provided for use by the public, on a self help basis, on roads which do not qualify for inclusion onto the gritting schedule, providing the necessary criteria are met. There are no limits placed on the number of salt bins which may be provided, although they will not normally be provided within 100 metres of another bin.

My Department will consider the provision of a salt bin when the following criteria are met:

- the location in question must be on the publically maintained road network;
- the gradient of the road in question must be over 5 per cent;
- no reasonable alternative route shall be available; and
- the subject road attains a minimum overall score, derived using a specific formula, where points are awarded depending on road geometry, residential usage, community welfare and commercial usage.

Salt boxes can also be provided to schools that are regularly affected by severe wintry weather.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) cost; and (ii) location of the new water and sewage pumping stations planned for North Down.

(AQW 39640/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The sewerage upgrade work at Bangor Marina and Luke's Point has recently been completed. Further work is planned for North Down which will be progressed subject to funding availability. The work is primarily to address premature spilling from sewer systems and improve environmental compliance and includes:

- A pumping station within the Kinnegar Wastewater Treatment Works site as part of the Holywood sewer catchment improvements at a total scheme cost of £4 million. Work has commenced and will extend into the 2015/16 period.
- The provision of a new pumping station in Castle Park as part of the Clandeboye Stream Work Package with a total scheme cost of £3.6 million. Work has commenced on the project but has been delayed due to archaeological issues around Bangor Abbey. Work will also be progressed within this package to provide storm storage with a pumped return within the grounds of Clandeboye Primary School
- Pumping station refurbishments within the Belfast Lough Work Package at an overall scheme cost of £2 million. Work has been identified at Strickland's Glen Sewerage Pumping Station and Brompton Sewerage Pumping Station.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total mileage of cycle lanes in North Down; and to outline any future plans to create more cycle lanes.

(AQW 39644/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has provided a total of 15.9 kilometres of cycle lanes and 4.9 kilometres of cycle tracks in North Down.

As the detailed budget for subsequent years has not yet been finalised, it is not possible to provide details of future works programmes at this time.

Potential cycling schemes will be assessed and developed as the year progresses taking account of the available funding and staff resources.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total cost of road bridge maintenance, in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 39645/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of my Department's expenditure on road bridge maintenance, in each of the last three financial years, are provided in the table below:

Year	Expenditure On Road Bridge Maintenance
2011/12	£2,601k
2012/13	£3,343k
2013/14	£2,855k

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total number of disused road bridges and any plans to demolish these bridges.

(AQW 39646/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm there are currently 6 disused road bridges. My Department is not proposing to demolish any of these bridges.

Disused road bridges may be the responsibility of my Department or may have been disposed of along with any surplus land.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the effectiveness of services such as Door-2-Door, concessionary fares, and improvements to rural transport provision in enhancing access to public transportation for older people and people with disabilities in urban and rural areas.

(AQW 39660/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Door-2-Door service (now known as the Disability Action Transport Scheme) is available to members in urban areas with a population over 10,000. In 2013/14 over 140,000 journeys were made by the membership of this scheme. The Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme supported in the same period nearly 13 million journeys made by holders of the Senior, 60+ or Half Fare smart pass. Rural Community Transport Partnerships (supported by the Rural Transport Fund) provided 530,000 journeys for their members in 2013/14 which included those who are elderly or have a disability.

The effectiveness of these schemes which are transport interventions aimed at addressing social exclusion or rural isolation will be considered in the context of development of a new Accessible Transport Strategy for the period 2015-2025.

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the current reliability, and availability, of the ecar charging points across Northern Ireland.

(AQW 39666/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Charge Point Availability:

The existing ecar charging infrastructure provides 320 fast and 14 rapid charge points at 174 locations across Northern Ireland and funding has been secured for a further two rapid chargers, currently planned for Sprucefield and North Belfast locations. These locations have been chosen to comply with Ten-T European funding requirements which seek to improve links on cross border arterial routes.

The public network was installed by Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) between March 2012 and July 2013 and provides full geographical coverage across Northern Ireland. Motorists are never more than 10 miles from a fast charge point or 30 miles from one of the 14 rapid chargers, which are installed along the main arterial routes in NI with a particular focus on cross border routes.

Recently my Department was successful in securing £600,000 of grant funding to allow the installation of up to 100 charge points in the public sector estate. This further investment will assist in developing the infrastructure for use by fleet vehicles and will allow public access where it is appropriate.

Charge Point Reliability

Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE), as owner and operator of the ecar public charge points, is responsible for the network maintenance. It manages and pays for any preventative maintenance and call out services on all of the charge points. The Department therefore incurs no costs in this regard.

(a) Charge point installation in each of the last three years

Year	Public Charging Points
2011/12	88
2012/13	260

(b) Charge point maintenance

Year	Number of call outs
2012	0
2013	27
2014 to date	121

My Department monitors the performance of the network and, based on the number of faults set against a 250% increase in usage of the charge points between 2013 and 2014, I am content with the overall performance of the infrastructure to date.

The Department is also working with partners in NIE and the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) in the Republic of Ireland to put in place a new Charge Point Management System. This new system will be designed to improve services in Northern Ireland and provide a new customer access facility to live data streams which will provide information as to the status of charge points at any given time.

Mr Ó Muilleoir asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress in commencing the provisions, within the Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (NI) 2010, that would enable local councils, with the consent of his Department, to close roads for sporting, social or entertainment events and for the purposes of location filming.
(AQW 39686/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 was enacted, under the previous administration, on 13 August 2010. However, the provisions of the Act aimed specifically at restricting or prohibiting traffic from using a road for special events have yet to be commenced and I am not minded to do so at this time.

Mr Ó Muilleoir asked the Minister for Regional Development what current procedures are in place that would enable local councils to request the closure of roads, or the restriction of motorised vehicles on certain roads, to facilitate their use by the community for purposes such as walking or cycling.
(AQW 39687/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are no established procedures to facilitate the closure of roads for community purposes. However the agencies involved, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, TransportNI and local Councils, co-operate in the same manner as they have always done to ensure that such events take place.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the disposal of the Conlig reservoirs.
(AQW 39689/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In May 2014, expressions of interest in a number of redundant reservoirs, including the Conlig reservoirs, were invited from the public sector in accordance with the Department of Finance and Personnel's Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property in NI guidance document. An expression of interest was subsequently received from North Down Borough Council who stated that given the Local Government Reform and the recent election of a Shadow North Down and Ards District Council, any further deliberations on this issue will be undertaken by the new Council, post April 2015.

Following on from the expression of interest, the Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Services, working on behalf of NI Water, contacted North Down Borough Council again in October 2014 and the Council responded requesting that they be allowed until April 2015 to have the matter considered by the new Council.

NI Water has confirmed that it is content to allow North Down Borough Council this additional time to consider the purchase of the Conlig Reservoirs.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the disposal of the Craigantlet reservoirs.
(AQW 39690/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In May 2014, expressions of interest in a number of redundant reservoirs, including the Craigantlet reservoirs, were invited from the public sector in accordance with the Department of Finance and Personnel's Disposal of Surplus Public

Sector Property in NI guidance document. An expression of interest was subsequently received from North Down Borough Council who stated that given the Local Government Reform and the recent election of a Shadow North Down and Ards District Council, any further deliberations on this issue will be undertaken by the new Council, post April 2015.

Following on from the expression of interest, the Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Services, working on behalf of NI Water, contacted North Down Borough Council again in October 2014 and the Council responded requesting that they be allowed until April 2015 to have the matter considered by the new Council.

NI Water has confirmed that it is content to allow North Down Borough Council this additional time to consider the purchase of the Craigtlet Reservoirs.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of disused reservoirs.
(AQW 39691/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water currently has 26 impounding reservoirs which are out of service and have therefore been declared surplus to requirements.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of complaints lodged against NI Water in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39692/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The number of complaints lodged against NI Water, in each of the last three years, is set out in the table below:

Year	Number of Complaints
2011/12	2,340
2012/13	3,173
2013/14	2,505
Total	8018

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the grants available from his Department for community groups.

(AQW 39693/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below provides information as to the programmes of funding and the schemes supported together with the level of funding for 2014/15.

Programme	Organisation Funded	Funding
Rural Transport Fund (RTF)	*Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTPS)	£3,627,519.00
	Community Transport Association (CTA)	£100,000.00
Transport Programme for People with Disabilities (TPPD)	Disability Action	£3,200,190.00
	Shopmobility	£377,015.52
	Inclusive Mobility Transport Committee (IMTAC)	£68,000.00
	Volunteer Now	£82,114.00
Total		£7,454,838.52

* DARD also provide grant support to RCTPS by way of support for the Assisted Rural Transport Scheme (ARTS). In 2014/15 this will be in the region of £500,000.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he is currently engaged in, or preparing to have, discussions with the new Chairman and Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners regarding the privatisation of Belfast Harbour Estate.

(AQW 39733/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I remain receptive to the progression of initiatives that demonstrate the potential to deliver significant economic and social benefits to Northern Ireland; that said, exceptional proposals relating to the privatisation of entities, such as the Port of Belfast, would require Executive agreement given the cross-cutting and contentious nature of any such proposition.

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he is working on any proposal to sell the Belfast Harbour Estate, or part thereof, within the next two to five years.

(AQW 39734/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I remain open to considering proposals and options which could include disposal. Any subsequent courses of action in this respect would of course require Executive agreement.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development when Portavoe reservoir will be restocked.
(AQW 40102/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) has advised that Portavoe Reservoir was stocked with 750 Rainbow Trout on 11 November 2014.

Department for Social Development

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 36153/11-15, why management of The Appeals Service (TAS) have not implemented voluntary unpaid development opportunities for Administrative Assistants (AA) in TAS, given that it was identified by management as a way of increasing AA workloads in TAS.
(AQW 38367/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): Personal development opportunities are an integral part of the NICS Performance Management System. Opportunities are agreed between members of staff and their line manager as part of the annual appraisal process and reviewed during the reporting period.

The review of TAS processes, roles and responsibilities including the loading and grading of posts is now underway. This will produce a staffing model to ensure TAS is staffed with the right number of people, possessing the relevant skill set to meet business needs.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the commercial hire companies that have provided vehicles to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; (ii) the total amount paid to each supplier; (iii) the nature and number of vehicles hired from each company; and (iv) how each contracted was tendered, in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 38453/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that they have only hired vehicles as a result of a major service delivery issue since 2013 when a number of major contractors went into administration which led to a significant TUPE transfer of personnel from the affected contractors to the Housing Executive's Direct Labour Organisation.

In relation to (i) and (ii), the Housing Executive has provided the following information detailing the companies and costs in relation to vehicles provided to them under a hire or lease agreement: -

	Spend	
	2013/14	2014/15 (to Oct 14)
Van Hire – Corrigan Van Hire	£505,758.55	£571,047.39
Van Lease – Ogilvie Fleet	£27,720.00	£27,720.00
Total	£533,478.55	£598,767.39

In addition, the NIHE advises that there was an amount of £297.50 for vehicle hire costs in 2013 to Lindsay Cars for one week's car hire to cover a central pool vehicle which was off the road for repairs.

In relation to (iii) there are 132 vehicles currently under a hire or lease agreement.

The Table below provides a breakdown of these vehicles.

Vehicle Type	Corrigan Van Hire	Ogilvie Fleet
Compact van	24	0
Short wheel base van	48	18
Medium wheel base van	6	0
Long wheel base van	17	0
3.5 Tonne tipper with single cab	5	0
3.5 Tonne tipper with double cab	13	0
7.5 Tonne tipper lorry	1	0

In relation to (iv) the Housing Executive advises that, in order to continue to deliver a service to their tenants as per their legislative requirements an urgent need for vans was identified, and the short timeframe and related urgency resulted in a situation where a traditional tender exercise was not possible. The Housing Executive therefore applied Regulation 14 of

the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended) which allows a contracting authority to expedite a tender process for reasons resulting from urgency and circumstances not attributable to the contracting authority. In doing so, the Housing Executive carried out a market test, consisting of nine local providers, to procure the requisite number of vans to ensure the service provision could be continued. The award of the subsequent contract was based on availability and cost.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of how the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (i) tenders for; and (ii) obtains the services of commercial vehicle hire suppliers.
(AQW 38455/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that, historically, they have not had commercial hire supply contracts. Should a requirement for vehicles arise, the Housing Executive purchases such from the Crown Commercial Services Framework Agreement for the supply of vehicles.

However, in early 2013 the Housing Executive faced a major service delivery issue when a number of major contractors went into administration. In order to continue to deliver a service to their tenants as per their legislative requirements an urgent need for vans was identified, and the short timeframe and related urgency resulted in a situation where a traditional tender exercise was not possible. The Housing Executive therefore applied Regulation 14 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended) which allows a contracting authority to expedite a tender process for reasons resulting from urgency and circumstances not attributable to the contracting authority. In doing so, the Housing Executive carried out a market test, consisting of nine local providers, to procure the requisite number of vans to ensure the service provision could be continued. The award of the subsequent contract was based on availability and cost.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 37446/11-15, when the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is seeking temporary sites, what consideration is given to the local homes and adjacent historic sites, dating back to the 1600's.
(AQW 39376/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that in the normal course of events a planning application will lead to Planning NI deciding who requires neighbour notification. In the exceptional circumstances that the Housing Executive is faced with an emergency situation, the Housing Executive would consider if the occupation of land for a temporary site affected the conditions of the tenancy agreement that the Housing Executive has with its tenants. For example, the Housing Executive would consider if such action would affect the rights and enjoyment of the tenants in respect of their tenancy and would always balance the needs of both the settled community and the needs of Traveller community. This balancing exercise would consider if the Housing Executive's actions will impact on the tenancy conditions and enjoyment of the tenancy in deciding as to whether consultation is a prerequisite to temporary provision.

It should, however, be noted that the Housing (NI) Order 1983 does not impose upon the Housing Executive any responsibilities to the settled community in allocating a Traveller site, above and beyond the role that Planning NI might undertake as part of the planning process. The Housing Executive does, of course, have obligations to its tenants within the general conditions of tenancy. Part 11 paragraph 3 states that "if the tenant pays the rent and observes and performs all the tenant's obligations under this agreement, the tenant may quietly enjoy the dwelling without any interruption by the Executive or any person claiming through or under the Executive". The Housing Executive protects this tenant right through its anti-social behaviour policy. It would be the Housing Executive's position that the provision of temporary accommodation for Travellers should not affect the quiet enjoyment of a person's tenancy.

Finally, as part of the planning process Northern Ireland Environment Agency is likely to be consulted in the normal manner with regard to any temporary provision.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people who have presented to the Housing Executive as homeless in East Londonderry, broken down by council, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 39544/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information is not available in the format requested because the Housing Executive does not collate homelessness data by Council area. However, the Housing Executive has advised that their District Office areas of Limavady and Coleraine mirror the same Council areas in East Londonderry and their Waterside office in Londonderry contains the Wards which form part of the East Londonderry constituency.

Therefore, the table below provides details of the number of people who have presented to the Housing Executive as homeless in those areas.

NIHE Office area	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Coleraine	536	529	533
Limavady	276	295	270
Waterside	571	525	556

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

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development how many people currently on the waiting list for social housing in each constituency require ground floor accommodation (i) as applicants; and (ii) as transfers.

(AQW 39548/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information is not fully available in the format requested because some of the Common Landlord Areas, the geography by which Waiting List information is collated, overlaps the Parliamentary constituencies of Belfast East/South, Belfast South/Strangford, Belfast West/North, and Belfast West/South.

Therefore, the Housing Executive has provided Table 1 and Table 2 below regarding the numbers of applicants and number of transfers seeking ground floor accommodation respectively at 30 September 2014.

Table 1 – Applicants seeking ground floor accommodation

Parliamentary Constituencies	Number of Applicants Seeking Ground Floor Accommodation
Belfast East	317
Belfast East/South	123
Belfast North	558
Belfast South	339
Belfast South/Strangford	10
Belfast West	265
Belfast West/North	46
Belfast West/South	249
East Antrim	470
East Londonderry	361
Fermanagh South Tyrone	295
Foyle	533
Lagan Valley	388
Mid Ulster	164
Newry & Armagh	343
North Antrim	397
North Down	683
South Antrim	255
South Down	315
Strangford	388
Upper Bann	527
West Tyrone	261
Total	7,287

Table 2 – Transfers seeking ground floor accommodation

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of Transfers Seeking Ground Floor Accommodation
Belfast East	191
Belfast East/South	74
Belfast North	331
Belfast South	167
Belfast South/Strangford	4
Belfast West	233
Belfast West/North	18

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of Transfers Seeking Ground Floor Accommodation
Belfast West/South	140
East Antrim	159
East Londonderry	158
Fermanagh South Tyrone	111
Foyle	244
Lagan Valley	161
Mid Ulster	58
Newry & Armagh	113
North Antrim	128
North Down	186
South Antrim	112
South Down	92
Strangford	162
Upper Bann	204
West Tyrone	127
Total	3,173

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Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 38729/11-15 for a breakdown of (i) the number of Disabled Facilities Grant applications received; and (ii) the number approved, by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in (a) Northern Ireland; and (b) East Londonderry in the 2013/2014 financial year.

(AQW 39608/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that in relation to:-

- (i) In 2013/14 there were 2,535 Initial Enquiries for Disabled Facilities Grants received across Northern Ireland of which 107 originated from the East Londonderry constituency; and
- (ii) Over the same period there were a total of 1,177 Disabled Facilities Grants approved in Northern Ireland, 67 of which were in the East Londonderry constituency.

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Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department are working with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure that the homes of older people are a priority target for fuel poverty assistance, in order to avoid ill-health during the winter months.

(AQW 39656/11-15)

Mr Storey: Since 2001 my Department has spent over £160 million through the Warm Homes Scheme to improve the energy efficiency of more than 125,000 low income households including the homes of many older people. The Warm Homes Scheme will end in March 2015.

Research and piloting has taken place for over 2 years which has allowed us to develop a targeting tool and build fuel poverty risk maps for Northern Ireland. These maps listed the households most at risk of fuel poverty at census output area level, Councils staff involved in the pilot then called at properties in each council areas a completed a detailed survey. Assistance was then offered to the households who took part in the survey, of those homes identified more than 50% of the occupants were over 60 years of age.

During the course of the pilots officials from my Department met with representatives from the Public Health Agency (PHA), to discuss the development of the new scheme, and the important role which PHA has to play.

On 15 September 2014 my Department introduced a new Affordable Warmth Scheme working in partnership with councils and the Housing Executive to deliver energy efficiency improvements to low income households using a targeted area based approach. I am confident that the new Affordable Warmth Scheme will improve the energy efficiency of the homes of many older people.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of homes considered to be in fuel poverty in East Londonderry; and to outline the measures being taken to ensure that these homes receive assistance this winter through fuel poverty schemes.

(AQW 39657/11-15)

Mr Storey: The 2011 House Condition Survey reported that 42% of Northern Ireland households were in fuel poverty. This information is not available by parliamentary constituency. However, some modelling work was carried out at District Council Area (DCA) level and the 2011 figures for these DCAs were published in bands. Banded figures for the two DCAs that are most closely aligned with East Londonderry are as follows:

- Coleraine (52-56%)
- Limavady (47-51%).

In terms of ensuring that relevant households receive appropriate assistance, the following measures are being taken by the Housing Executive:

Housing Executive Stock

- Heating programme to switch to gas, where available, and to oil or wood pellets elsewhere.
- Increased levels of loft insulation in on-going maintenance programmes. All stock brought up to 150mm – now being upgraded again to 270mm.
- Double Glazing programme being completed for all Housing Executive stock.
- HEATSMART project provides direct energy advice to tenants getting new heating, at Change of Tenancy (COT) stage or for elderly tenants.
- Tested external wall insulation on three rural cottages in Coleraine.
- Technology Strategy Board (TSB) funded SIMPLER Scheme to test and install external insulation to our 'No Fines' dwellings in Antrim.
- Electricity brokering project undertaken in 2012 and 2013; tariff sheets regarding switching electricity were provided to all tenants in 2012 and are currently provided to all new tenants at COT stage.
- Renewables Programme funded in 2006/08 to install solar thermal panels in 2,030 dwellings.

Action to tackle Fuel Poverty in privately owned and privately rented sector

- Housing Executive administers the Department for Social Development's (DSD) Warm Homes Scheme, the main grant dealing with fuel poverty. (This scheme will end on 31 March 2015 and will be replaced by the Affordable Warmth Scheme.) I would encourage householders who think they may qualify for the Warm Homes Scheme to contact freephone 0800 988 0559 now. Further information about the Warm Homes Scheme can be found at <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/warm-homes-grant-scheme>.
- The Affordable Warmth Scheme will target privately owned and privately rented properties considered to be most at risk of fuel poverty and who have an income of less than £20,000. Further information can be found at <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/affordable-warmth-grant-scheme> or Telephone: 0300 200 7874.
- The Housing Executive manages the Boiler Replacement Scheme on behalf of DSD. The Boiler Replacement Scheme is aimed at owner occupiers with an income of less than £40,000 and provides a grant of up to £1,000 towards replacing an old inefficient boiler with a new more energy efficient one. Further information about the Boiler Replacement Scheme can be found at <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/environment-and-greener-living/energy-wise/energy-saving-grants/boiler-replacement> (Telephone: 03448 920 900).

Social Security Agency

In addition, my Department provides the Winter Fuel Payment and Cold Weather Payment to qualifying households. The 'Make the Call' campaign, where people can check they are receiving all the benefits they are entitled to, can be contacted by phoning 0800 232 1271 (text phone 0800 232 1715) or (text CHECK to 66101) to receive a call back.

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

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 37446/11-15, to detail (i) how much public money has been spent in relation to application T/2014/0223; and (ii) any other costs to date.

(AQW 39672/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Housing Executive has advised that in relation to:

- (i) the costs for a temporary planning application at Rathenraw was the standard fee of £831.00; and
- (ii) any other costs to date are: -
 - £780.00 for the temporary provision of skips;
 - £2,310.00 for the temporary provision of portaloos; and
 - £2,694.76 for the provision of a water supply.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding has been supplied by his Department to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups since May 2011.

(AQW 39719/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department has directly supported LGBT Groups through its Neighbourhood Renewal Programme; and indirectly through its Small Grants Volunteering Scheme; Laganside/Belfast City Centre Events Grant and through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) part funding of the Advocacy Worker Project.

The tables below provide details of the Groups and the amount of funding from 2011 to date:

Neighbourhood Renewal Programme

Financial Year	Name of LGBT Group/s Funded	Amount of Funding (£)
2011/12	Strabane & Lifford LGBT Group	41,710.51
2012/13	Strabane & Lifford LGBT Group	42,120.19
2013/14	Strabane & Lifford LGBT Group	42,120.19
2014/15	Strabane and Lifford LGBT Group	42,120.19

Small Grants Volunteering Scheme

Financial Year	Name of LGBT Group/s Funded	Amount of Funding (£)
2011/12	Strabane & Lifford LGBT Group	1,300
2013/14	Strabane & Lifford LGBT Group	510
2013/14	Cara Friend	1,500
2014/15	Strabane & Lifford LGBT Group	1,300
2014/15	LGBT NI	500

Laganside/Belfast City Centre Events Grant

Financial Year	Name of LGBT Group/s Funded	Amount of Funding (£)
2011/12	Belfast Pride	4,000
2011/12	Outburst Queer Arts Festival	2,900
2012/13	Belfast Pride	7,000
2013/14	Belfast Pride	7,000
2013/14	Outburst Queer Arts Festival	4,500
2014/15	Belfast Pride	7,000
2014/15	Outburst Queer Arts Festival	4,500

Advocacy Worker Project (part funded by NIHE)

Financial Year	Name of LGBT Group/s Funded	Amount of Funding (£)
2011/12	The Rainbow Project	6,000
2012/13	The Rainbow Project	6,000
2013/14	The Rainbow Project	6,000
2014/15	The Rainbow Project	3,000

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development what options he is pursuing for emergency provision of accommodation for newly homeless people.

(AQW 39738/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) has a statutory duty to assess homelessness and provide temporary and/or permanent accommodation for certain groups of homeless clients in certain circumstances.

The NIHE uses a range of temporary accommodation options. Primarily:

- 19 Housing Executive hostels.

- Approximately 69 Voluntary Sector hostels (including refuges/young person accommodation).
- Private single let properties to provide temporary accommodation. These can be sourced as required and the number will change as households move through onto permanent housing solutions. At any one time there are around 1,000 – 1,200 single let properties in use for temporary accommodation.
- In exceptional circumstances or emergency situations, for example, fire damage, flooding, etc. the Housing Executive has the facility to provide temporary accommodation in Hotels and Bed &Breakfasts for a limited period.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the grants available from his Department for community groups.

(AQW 39773/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department provides an annual Belfast City Centre Community Activity Grant. The objective is to support activities (arts, sports, educational, cultural and environmental) that address the needs of and provides benefit to the Belfast City Centre local community and continues to bring life to the Belfast City Centre.

The Belfast City Centre Community Activity Grant is a discretionary grant and has a limited annual budget. The maximum grant award for each activity is £1,000 and there is a limit of two applications for different activities per annum per applicant.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how many clerks were recruited to the Appeals Service (Social Security Appeals) in each of the last three years.

(AQW 39785/11-15)

Mr Storey: The number of clerks recruited to The Appeals Service in each of the last three years is detailed within the table below.

Year	Number of Clerks ¹
2012/13	29
2013/14	12
2014/15 (April – November)	0

1 The statistics relate to the number of Administrative Officers recruited which is the equivalent to the historic grade of Clerk in the wider NICS

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Lifetime Home Standards have statutory force in Northern Ireland; and if not, what status they have for (i) private; and (ii) social housing.

(AQW 39793/11-15)

Mr Storey: Lifetime Homes is a voluntary standard and compliance with this standard is not required under current Northern Ireland Building Control Regulations.

There is therefore no mandatory requirement in new build private housing developments.

However, for social housing it is a specific requirement within my Departments Housing Association Guide, that all new build Housing Association homes are built to incorporate 16 design criteria as well as an additional eight requirements as specified by my Department.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development why people with disabilities from Mid Ulster, are being requested to go to Portadown for Employment and Support Allowance medical examinations.

(AQW 39840/11-15)

Mr Storey: As part of the process for determining eligibility for the Employment and Support Allowance benefits, claimants must undergo a Work Capability Assessment.

In approximately 47% of Employment and Support Allowance claims received, there is sufficient information provided in the limited capability for work questionnaire to enable the service provider to provide a medical assessment report to the Department to inform entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance. This also means that the claimant is not required to undergo a face to face medical assessment.

Where it has not been possible to decide a claim at this stage, the service provider will contact the relevant claimants by letter to make arrangements for a face to face medical assessment. This is usually carried out in a medical examination

centre nearest to the claimant's home. Without specific details or the postcodes of claimants, it is not possible to comment on whether the choice of Portadown Medical Examination Centre to conduct assessments was the nearest for all claimants scheduled to attend. Claimants can request that their examination is carried out at another centre or ask to have their appointment scheduled at another centre.

In circumstances where the claimant's GP has indicated they are unable to travel to the medical examination centre on health grounds, or if the claimant requests a home visit and provides supporting medical evidence, a healthcare professional will consider the information and, if appropriate, a home visit will be carried out.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the criteria used for access to a crisis loan.
(AQW 39842/11-15)

Mr Storey: Crisis Loans are repayable, interest free and designed to assist people who need to meet expenses in an emergency or as a consequence of a disaster. They are available to anyone aged 16 or over where they are the only means of preventing a serious risk to health and safety. A person does not need to be in receipt of benefit to apply and there is no minimum amount that can be paid.

Entitlement to a Crisis Loan is determined by a Decision Maker who will take account of the relevant Departmental Directions and each person's individual circumstances. When assessing whether a Crisis Loan is the only means by which a serious risk to health and safety could be prevented, the Decision Maker is obliged to look for the existence of alternative resources from which the need may be met or the possibility that some other person or body may wholly or partly meet the need. This is also contingent that there is a realistic expectation that any such help would be available in time to alleviate or avert the crisis.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development, in conjunction with the Department of Justice, what progress has been made as to the introduction of audio recordings of benefit appeal tribunals.
(AQW 39845/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Department for Social Development, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service, has recently commissioned the Business

Consultancy Service, Department for Finance and Personnel to undertake an extensive organisational review of the administrative processes within The Appeals Service.

The recommendations and outcomes of the review will inform the pilot to audio

- record benefit appeal tribunal hearings and once completed a date to commence
- the pilot will be agreed by the Department for Social Development. The review
- is anticipated to be completed by the end of this financial year.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Social Development how many people claimed Jobseeker's allowance in each of the last twelve months.
(AQW 39880/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information requested is set out in the Table below.

Month	*JSA Claims Received which includes repeat claims
Dec-13	5,346
Jan-14	7,984
Feb-14	7,066
Mar-14	5,850
Apr-14	5,213
May-14	5,351
Jun-14	6,507
Jul-14	7,346
Aug-14	6,889
Sep-14	8,403
Oct-14	7,235
Nov-14	5,408
Total	78,598

* This information has been taken from internal monitoring systems.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 39508/11-15, whether any funding and rental arrangements, similar to that afforded to Clonard Residents Association, have been undertaken by his Department in respect of any other community organisations; and if so, to detail (i) when; (ii) why; and (iii) with which organisations.

(AQW 39952/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Making Belfast Work initiative was launched in July 1988 to address economic, educational, social, health and environmental problems facing people living in the most disadvantaged areas of Belfast. Its purpose was to strengthen and focus efforts being made by the community, the private sector and the Government.

The model of assistance provided to Clonard Residents' Association is not in any way unique. I understand for example that the Department for Social Development provided funding for construction of a hostel and community facilities for Farset International initiated by Making Belfast Work and completed in 2003. Funding for the development was also provided by the International Fund for Ireland, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Invest NI, the Belfast Local Strategy Partnership Board and the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. Other examples part or fully funded by the Department include the development of a community facility and shopping units with the Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project, Ardoyne Community Enterprise Limited and Conway Mill Preservation Trust.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 39508/11-15, to detail (i) the level within his Department that arrangements relating to enriching Clonard Residents Association were approved (ii) the ministerial involvement; and (iii) whether the accounting officer provided his approval.

(AQW 39953/11-15)

Mr Storey: Decisions on funding the regeneration of 148158 Springfield Road, Belfast, were taken by officials in Making Belfast Work and the Department's European Unit.

The Department's File Disposal policy requires information to be retained for 6 years. As files on this project were closed in the early 2000s most papers on the subject have been disposed of. The remaining papers make no reference to any Ministerial or Departmental Accounting Officer involvement.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 39508/11-15, what was the rationale for his Department resolving to enrich Clonard Residents Association.

(AQW 39954/11-15)

Mr Storey: On 8 November 1996 Clonard Residents' Association submitted an application for assistance under the European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation for a two storey development. This application was assessed under the Programme's Urban Regeneration Sub-Programme 2A; Measure 1 criteria and 75% grant aid was awarded. The aim of Sub-Programme 2A was to promote peace and reconciliation by renewing urban areas affected by multiple deprivation, especially by resourcing local residents to tackle social and environment needs within their communities.

Making Belfast Work provided 25% match funding to allow the development to proceed. The Making Belfast Work initiative was launched in July 1988 to address economic, educational, social, health and environmental problems facing people living in the most disadvantaged areas of Belfast. Its purpose was to strengthen and focus efforts being made by the community, the private sector and the Government.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 39508/11-15, why he wishes to continue enriching Clonard Residents Association by transferring its leasehold interest in the subject premises to the Association.

(AQW 39955/11-15)

Mr Storey: As I advised in my previous answer, the Department's original intent in committing part-funding to the development in 1998 was to provide the Association with a 999 year lease for the first floor, at a peppercorn rent, for its use and to let for income to help encourage the sustainability of the organisation. The Department took the lease on the property as a temporary measure to complete the development of the premises and has recently initiated discussions with the property owners and Clonard Residents' Association to consider the reassignment of the lease to Clonard Residents' Association.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 39508/11-15, whether he will provide a breakdown of the £280,000 grant bestowed on Clonard Residents Association, including the reasons for the grant and the criteria used.

(AQW 39956/11-15)

Mr Storey: On 8 November 1996 Clonard Residents' Association submitted an application for assistance under the European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation for a two storey development. This application was assessed under the Programme's Urban Regeneration Sub-Programme 2A; Measure 1 criteria and 75% grant aid was awarded. The aim of Sub-Programme 2A was to promote peace and reconciliation by renewing urban areas affected by multiple deprivation, especially by resourcing local residents to tackle social and environment needs within their communities.

Making Belfast Work provided 25% match funding to allow the development to proceed. The Making Belfast Work initiative was launched in July 1988 to address economic, educational, social, health and environmental problems facing people living in the most disadvantaged areas of Belfast. Its purpose was to

strengthen and focus efforts being made by the community, the private sector and the Government.

The £280,000 grant related to 52% of the construction costs and professional fees for a two storey building at 148 – 152 Springfield Road, Belfast, the remainder being provided by the developer, Rooney Brothers.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in the Upper Bann constituency which have single glazed windows; and when these properties will have new double glazed windows installed.

(AQW 39964/11-15)

Mr Storey: The information is not available in the format requested because the Housing Executive does not collate data on double glazing by Parliamentary constituency. However, they have advised that there are 166 properties in the Banbridge council area and 232 properties in the Craigavon council area, which cover the Upper Bann constituency, that are currently single-glazed. These properties are included in two double glazing schemes due to commence on site in January 2015.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development what new build plans he has for the Upper Bann constituency in the next (i) six; and (ii) twelve months.

(AQW 39965/11-15)

Mr Storey: There are two social housing schemes planned for the next six months for the Upper Bann constituency delivering an anticipated 21 units. These are listed below:

Site No.	Site name	Housing Association	Description	Estimated Capacity (units)
1	Edward Street Portadown	Oaklee/Trinity	Supported Housing	15
2	Bayview Park, Derrymore	Clanmil	General needs	6

In the next twelve months there are six schemes planned social housing schemes for the Upper Bann constituency delivering an anticipated 65 units. These are listed in the table below:

Site No.	Site name	Housing Association	Description	Estimated Capacity (units)
1	Corcrair Walk, Portadown	Apex	Complex needs	3
2	Grattan Park, Lurgan	Clanmil	General needs	28
3	Woodlands, Gilford	Habinteg	Complex needs	1
4	118 Clonmeen, Craigavon	Apex	Complex needs	1
5	Curran Street, Portadown	Oaklee Trinity	General needs	6
6	Lake Street, Lurgan	Oaklee Trinity	Active Elderly (Cat 1)	26

Schemes can be lost or slip to future programme years for a variety of reasons such as failure to achieve planning permission. Schemes can also be added to the programme in year.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will extend the Warm Homes Scheme beyond 31 March 2015 to ensure that all councils and the Housing Executive have time to evaluate the effectiveness of the Affordable Warmth Scheme launched in September 2014.

(AQW 39974/11-15)

Mr Storey: Research undertaken by Professor Christine Liddell of the University of Ulster in 2011 said that 33,000 households in Northern Ireland need to spend more than a quarter of their income on heating and lighting for their home. In 2012 my Department undertook a pilot involving 19 local councils to test an area based approach to tackling fuel poverty, finding those homes in most need and offering assistance. This pilot surveyed 2,145 households and the evaluation of the pilot proved that the areas targeted had the highest prevalence of fuel poverty.

In 2013 my Department, in partnership with the Housing Executive, Mid Ulster council cluster (Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt) and Newtownabbey Council undertook a further pilot. This pilot involved some 1200 households being surveyed and using local installers of the householder's choice to complete energy efficiency improvement measures.

Research shows that those most in need often do not seek out the help available. As a result of both pilots it was clear that an area based approach to find those most in need was effective. My Department, working in partnership with all local councils and the Housing Executive launched the Affordable Warmth Scheme on 15 September 2014. The Warm Homes Scheme contract was due to end on 18 June 2014, however, the contract was extended to 31 March 2015 to ensure that the new Affordable Warmth Scheme is bedded in across all council areas. Officials continue to work closely with officials in the council clusters and the Housing Executive to monitor the progress of the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development how the needs of households in fuel poverty, outside of the targeted areas of Affordable Warmth, will be met should the Warm Homes Scheme end on 31 March 2015.

(AQW 39976/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department undertook a pilot scheme in 2012 and 2013 to test a targeted area based approach to tackling fuel poverty. Research carried out by the University of Ulster identified that 33,000 households in Northern Ireland needed to spend 25% or more of their income to adequately heat their home. These households are considered to be in extreme/severe fuel poverty. My Department asked the University to find these households.

The University developed a sophisticated tool to find the households considered to be most at risk of fuel poverty. Whilst councils will actively target these identified households, councils can exceptionally accept referrals from households not on the targeted list. For example from households, where the property is old or a member of the household is elderly, ill or infirm.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 39520/11-15, in each of the past five years, to detail (i) how many landlords, in accordance with the Statutory Registration Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in Northern Ireland, who were not registered with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, have been referred to the courts; and (ii) how many of these referrals resulted in a successful prosecution.

(AQW 40009/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Statutory Registration Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) is operated by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), subject to approval by the Department.

The number of Landlords referred to the courts and the resulting prosecutions, specifically relating to the non – registration of HMOs in accordance with the Statutory Registration Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation in Northern Ireland, is detailed below:

	Number of cases referred to court	Number of prosecution
2010	64	59
2011	42	41
2012	45	41
2013	73	49
2014	34	9

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

It should be noted that some cases will have been withdrawn after being referred to court, as the landlord will have registered the property in the interim period

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has considered implementing the proposals contained within the Committee for Finance and Personnel's Report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector that are applicable for his Department and its agencies.

(AQW 40044/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department acknowledges that the Report produced by the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector is a very comprehensive document that contains many useful observations and proposals. The Department of Finance and Personnel has policy responsibility for flexible working across the NICS and will introduce new policies and technologies as the need arises.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development whether staff who have transferred under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations provisions to assist in delivering the Warm Homes Scheme will be retained to help administer the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

(AQW 40107/11-15)

Mr Storey: Following legal advice, the Housing Executive remains satisfied that there is a fundamental difference between the Warm Homes Scheme, which is due to end in March 2015, and the Affordable Warmth Scheme which was introduced in September 2014. While both schemes will deliver similar energy efficiency works, there are fundamental differences in both the administrative process and in how the scheme will be delivered.

Furthermore, as there will be a fragmentation of how works are carried out, moving from the responsibility of the two scheme managers to individual contractors chosen by the householder, the Housing Executive does not believe that any Service Change Provision arises within the meaning of the Service Provision Change (Protection of Employment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006. The Housing Executive is therefore satisfied that Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) does not apply in the particular circumstances of this case.

Underpinning all of the above arguments is the fact that the Warm Homes Scheme, which was due to end on 18 June 2014, has been extended to 31 March 2015. The Affordable Warmth Scheme commenced in September 2014 and is currently

being rolled out. This evidence in itself clearly suggests that no service provision change can arise in circumstances where “activities” under one scheme are still running in parallel with the “activities” under the new scheme.

The above stance is the view of the Housing Executive after taking legal advice.

TUPE is a complex area of law and fact specific. It is always the case with TUPE issues that only a Tribunal can provide a definitive conclusion on its application. Accordingly the Housing Executive would strongly recommend that Bryson obtains its own legal advice on this matter as it is not appropriate for the Housing Executive to advise Bryson on its own legal obligations particularly with regard to any employees of Bryson who may be affected by the cessation of the Warm Homes Scheme in March 2015.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Social Development to list the community and voluntary groups in East Londonderry that have received funding from his Department since 2011.

(AQW 40129/11-15)

Mr Storey: The community and voluntary groups in East Londonderry that have received DSD funding from my Department since 2011 are:

Organisation Name

- | | |
|--|--|
| ■ Age Concern Causeway | ■ Gortnaghey Community Association |
| ■ Ardinariff Historical and Cultural Society | ■ Greysteel Community Association |
| ■ Asian Over 50 Club | ■ Harvest Moon |
| ■ Ballykelly Community and Youth Association | ■ Home-Start Causeway |
| ■ Ballyspallen Cricket Club | ■ Kevin Lynch Hurling Club |
| ■ Benedy Community Association | ■ Killowen Community Association |
| ■ Bovalley Community Association | ■ Kilrea Ageing Well Club |
| ■ Boveedy Community Assoc | ■ Limavady Community Development Initiative |
| ■ Building Ballysally Together | ■ Limavady Senior Citizens |
| ■ Burnfoot Community Development Association | ■ Limavady Wolfhounds GAC |
| ■ Castlerock Community Association | ■ Macosquin Village Community Association |
| ■ Castlerock Senior Citizens Wednesday Club | ■ Meeting Point Luncheon Club |
| ■ Causeway Enterprise Agency | ■ Millburn Community Association |
| ■ Causeway Rural & Urban Network | ■ Millburn Community Playgroup |
| ■ Causeway Volunteer Centre | ■ Moneydig Rural Network Group |
| ■ Causeway Women's Aid | ■ Movenis Area Community Association |
| ■ Chat | ■ Naiscoil Neachtain |
| ■ Coleraine FC Academy | ■ North West Tongues, Tones & Tappin |
| ■ Crafts With Love | ■ Portstewart Community Association |
| ■ Dromboughil Community Association | ■ Riding for the Disabled Association (Coleraine & District Group) Ltd |
| ■ Drumsurn Community Association | ■ Roe Valley Folk Club |
| ■ Dungiven Celtic Youth FC | ■ Roe Valley Residents Association |
| ■ Dungiven Retirement Club | ■ Stendhal Festival Ltd |
| ■ Ethnic Minorities Empowerment Association | ■ The Glens Community Association |
| ■ Feeny Community Association | ■ University of Ulster Coleraine |
| ■ Focus on Family | ■ West Bann Development |
| ■ Foreglen Community Association | ■ Windyhall 50+ Club |
| ■ Glens Community Association | ■ Windyhall Community Association |
| ■ Glenshane Care Association Ltd | ■ Windyhall Youth Club |

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr McCausland asked the Assembly Commission how the questions and options included in the EQIA on the flying of the Union flag at Parliament Buildings were determined; and by whom.

(AQW 39273/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Review of the Policy on the Flying of the Union Flag at Parliament Buildings and associated equality impact assessment (EQIA) are being carried out as a result of a Commission decision on 5 February 2013 which stated:

“That the Assembly Commission tasks officers to bring back a report, within 3 months, following consultation with Assembly Parties, reviewing the number of days upon which the Union flag flies from Parliament Buildings and detailing a range of options and how a process of public consultation could be carried out and arrangements for carrying out an EQIA.”

On 29 January 2014, the Commission agreed to procure an independent person/ organisation to conduct the EQIA and associated consultation process. Following completion of the procurement exercise, the contract was awarded to Policy Arc Limited and the contract commenced on 16 July 2014.

The EQIA process involves analysing data and research and using the analysis to assess the actual and potential impacts on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations of the policy under consideration. If it is considered that the policy may have an adverse impact on people in one or more of the Section 75 groups, then alternative policies and measures which might mitigate the adverse impact must be considered.

Consultants from Policy Arc conducted a pre-consultation process which ran from 1 October to 14 October 2014 inclusive and which offered one-to-one meetings with Commission Members, MLAs, party support staff, Secretariat staff, contract staff and Trade Union Side. The purpose of the pre-consultation was to inform key stakeholders about the EQIA process and the formal consultation; familiarise them with some of the key issues that the EQIA would consider; gather perceptions of the key issues; and identify any areas that may have needed special attention during the development of the Draft EQIA Consultation Report on the Policy on the Flying of the Union Flag at Parliament Buildings.

The Draft EQIA Consultation Report reflected on a range of data and research, including advice by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the findings of previous EQIAs of similar policies (in particular, the legal opinions sought during these EQIAs) and the results of the pre-consultation process carried out in October 2014. The Draft EQIA Consultation Report then set out preliminary conclusions regarding the impact of the current policy and the potential impact of changes to the policy.

The range of possible changes to the policy, which are set out as policy options in Section 4.1 of the report, were first identified as a result of the analysis of available data and research.

Further to this process of identification, the questions and options as included in the Draft EQIA Consultation Report were drafted by the consultants, and, following discussions with officials, the Report and associated response forms were considered by the Assembly Commission on 22 October 2014 and approved for consultation.

The formal consultation process began on 27 October 2014 and will conclude on 2 February 2015. This consultation provides an opportunity for users of Parliament Buildings and members of the public to give their views on the consultation report and the issues/ options contained within it. These views will form part of a final report, which it is hoped will be presented to the Assembly Commission for its consideration in April 2015.

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission whether at any time since 1998 party or MLA staff were permitted to sign funding requests on behalf of any MLAs.
(AQW 39651/11-15)

Mrs Cochrane (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): On submitting a claim for reimbursement of expenditure incurred or for a direct payment to supplier under the financial support framework, a Member is required to sign the appropriate claim form personally. Party and MLA support staff are not, and have not in the past, been permitted to sign the claim forms.

The Clerk/Chief Executive received one formal request from a Member seeking permission to use a nominated signatory. Permission was granted on this occasion as an exception to the normal procedures on the basis of the severity of the Member's ill-health.

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission what allegations in the recent BBC Spotlight programme on Assembly expenses is it inviting the PSNI to investigate.
(AQW 39653/11-15)

Mrs Cochrane (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly's Accounting Officer has made two referrals to the PSNI under the Assembly's Fraud and Bribery response plan in advance of the broadcast of the two BBC Spotlight programmes. It is not appropriate for the Assembly Commission to comment on the detail or nature of on-going PSNI investigations.

However the Assembly Commission takes all allegations of financial misconduct by Members or others very seriously. The content of the BBC Spotlight programmes is being reviewed by the Commission and consideration currently being given to what further action may be required, including whether any further matters require referral to the PSNI. If it appears that a Member or former Member has defrauded the Assembly, this will be dealt with appropriately.

Ms Lo asked the Assembly Commission, in order to make the Assembly more accessible for people working in Parliament Buildings, whether it would consider allowing Party support staff to avail of the Cycle to Work scheme.
(AQW 40179/11-15)

Mr Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): I can confirm that, as the Northern Ireland Assembly is not the employer of Party support staff unfortunately they would be unable to avail of the Northern Ireland Assembly's Cycle to Work scheme.

In 2013 HMRC reviewed the Assembly's Cycle to Work scheme and allowed the Assembly to open its scheme up to Members. HMRC deems Members, but not Party staff, to be employees of the Assembly.

Parties can however, set up a Cycle to Work Scheme and facilitate the salary sacrifice arrangements for their staff although, as each scheme is an "employment" based scheme it therefore needs to be approved by the HMRC for each employer.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 9 January 2015

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they plan to review the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 and bring forward legislation to remove the Teacher Exception under Article 71(3).
(AQW 32083/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): This is a policy issue under discussion between OFMDFM and the Department of Education. OFMDFM has legislative responsibility for this area however responsibility for developing any policy proposals rests with the Department of Education.

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the amount of capital receipts the Asset Management Unit has delivered in the current budget period.
(AQW 38348/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The capital receipts delivered by the Asset Management Unit, working with departments, are as follows:

2011/12	£2.83m
2012/13	£23.5m
2013/14	£22.16m
2014/15	£25.2m to 10 December 2014

Total 1 April 2011 to 10 December 2014 £73.69m

The target for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2015 is £71.8 million.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the measures in place to raise awareness of public appointment opportunities amongst women and members of other under-represented groups, as a step towards encouraging these groups to apply.
(AQW 39240/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We recognise that some sections of our society, including women, are under-represented on the boards of public bodies. We are committed to achieving greater diversity in public appointments, consistent with the overall principle of selection on merit, as a means of ensuring effective public bodies.

OFMDFM officials, in conjunction with other departments, are working to encourage greater participation from these groups and have put in place measures to raise awareness of public appointment opportunities amongst under-represented groups. This is an important step in encouraging a wider range of applications.

Steps being taken include:

- the establishment of an inter-departmental public appointments forum to share best practice across departments including increasing diversity;
- independent advice provided to the public appointments forum by a senior academic with considerable experience in equality and diversity issues;
- producing the twice-yearly All Aboard publication which gives details of public appointment opportunities arising over the next six months;
- circulating upcoming appointment opportunities to an extensive mailing list of several hundred individuals and organisations, including private and voluntary sector women's groups;
- departments to interview larger numbers of applicants for appointments;
- information sessions held with stakeholders and interested groups, including women's groups, to raise awareness of public appointments and explain the process;

- posts on public bodies are filled to address specific skills, in order to build effective teams; and
- departments are developing alternatives to established criteria such as better use of presentations, in order to encourage more applications.

Work is also ongoing to improve the baseline information available on public appointments, and to identify and address the barriers preventing people from applying for positions.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether funding is guaranteed to ensure the completion of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry; and if so, to detail how much has been allocated for (i) the remainder of the current budget year; and (ii) 2015/16.

(AQW 39424/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry has been carefully planned and costed to ensure that it meets the needs of victims and survivors and fulfils its Terms of Reference. Funding for the Inquiry has been ring-fenced centrally.

The current estimated cost of the Inquiry is £15.7million. The financial implications for the 12 month extension requested by the Inquiry chairperson are presently under consideration.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is the estimated (i) resource; and (ii) capital Departmental Expenditure Limit required for 2015/16 in order to administer Delivering Social Change, broken down by project.

(AQW 39425/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In relation to the six Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes, announced by us in October 2012 and out of a currently known revenue budget of £14m, for 2015/16, it is proposed to allocate some £5.5m as follows;

- Literacy and Numeracy (DE) £2.9m
- Family Support Hubs (DHSSPS) £0.6m
- Parenting Support (DHSSPS) £0.3m
- Nurture Units (DSD/DE) £0.4m
- Social Enterprise Hubs (DSD/DETI) £1.3m

The full budget requirement has already been met in respect of DEL's Community Family Support Programme and no capital Departmental Expenditure will be incurred during 2015/16.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much of the Social Investment Fund is (i) unspent; or (ii) unallocated; and whether it will be fully spent in the current financial year.

(AQW 39426/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: To date the Social Investment Fund (SIF) has made funding commitments to 24 projects worth £37.2m. This represents 46.5% of the total funding identified for SIF. Some spend will occur this financial year linked to the delivery of these projects. Work is continuing on achieving expenditure approval for the remaining projects which are within the allocations of each zone.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on discussions with the Minister for Justice and Equality regarding the alleged historical abuse of children from Northern Ireland at Bethany Home and Westbank Orphanage in the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 39450/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our dialogue with the Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence, on this matter has been by way of correspondence.

We were heartened to note that the Taoiseach announced in June that Bethany Home would be included in the Commission of Inquiry into Mother and Baby Homes in the Republic of Ireland. The full scope of that Inquiry will not be known until its terms of reference are published.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 36611/11-15, to detail the number of local social entrepreneurs and enterprises who have accessed and used the Social Enterprise Hub, which is operational in the Northern Social Investment Fund Zone through the Accelerating Social Enterprise Signature Programme.

(AQW 39466/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Accelerating Social Enterprise is part of the unique approach by the Executive to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

At present there are 29 groups from within the Northern Social Investment Fund Zone area who have accessed and used the services of the Northern Social Enterprise Hub.

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on REACH Across' application to the Central Good Relations Fund Programme 2014/15.

(AQW 39470/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The 2014/15 Central Good Relations Funding scheme closed for applications on 10 February 2014. There was a very significant demand for funding. Thirty-two applicants have already been awarded funding totalling around £1.6M.

Funding is being released in phases as it becomes available. The remaining applicants, including "REACH Across", will be advised of the outcome of their applications as soon as possible.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 37833/11-15, to detail (i) the programme of support which will be given to people in East Londonderry who are long term unemployed by the Community Work Programme; (ii) when this is expected to be delivered; and (iii) how the programme will be facilitated.

(AQW 39539/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The aim of the Community Work Programme is to provide 100 participants throughout the Derry/Londonderry Social Investment zone who are either long term unemployed or are not in employment, education and training with a two year work placement. The programme will target those who are furthest from the labour market and will include fully integrated educational, essential skills and training elements tailored to the individual needs of each participant. This will allow each individual to enhance their effectiveness to potential employers. The programme is currently being prepared for open tender and the aim is to commence delivery in the 2015/16 financial year.

The lead partner for the Community Work Programme, Greater Shantallow Area Partnership will manage the project. This is in keeping with the community focussed ethos of the Social Investment Fund.

Ms Sugden asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what assurance they can provide that funding to enable the implementation of the Active Ageing Strategy 2014-2020 across Departments will remain a priority.

(AQW 39942/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Once finalised, the draft Strategy will be submitted to the Executive for approval. Upon receiving Executive approval, all Ministers will be committed to the delivery of the Strategy's strategic aims and outcomes.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Active Ageing Strategy will have adequate resources and measurable targets; and what role the Pensioners Parliament will have in monitoring and supporting the strategy.

(AQW 40122/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The principal method by which the Active Ageing Strategy will be implemented is through the policies, programmes and strategies of the departments that have primary responsibility for the issues that impact on many older people here.

Once finalised, the draft Strategy will be submitted to the Executive for approval. Upon receiving Executive approval, all Ministers will be committed to the delivery of the Strategy's strategic aims and outcomes.

A set of draft outcomes have been produced and will be discussed with the Ageing Strategy Advisory Group, which includes older people as members, as well as representatives from the Pensioners' Parliament.

We are committed to working with the Advisory Group, on a twice yearly basis throughout the lifetime of the Strategy, to monitor its implementation.

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the level of funding provided by their Department to nurture units, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 40144/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Nurture Units Programme is one of the six initial Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes, announced by us in October 2012.

Up to October 2014 Monitoring Round, we have allocated a total of £2.32m to the Nurture Unit Signature Programme, broken down in each of the last three financial years as follows:

- 2012/13 £0.00m
- 2013/14 £1.32m
- 2014/15 £1.00m*

* As at October 2014

It is hoped that further funds will be allocated to this Signature Programme during the remainder of this financial year, and next.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has met the Together: Building a United Community Strategy commitment to introduce an impact assessment that assesses the extent to which her departmental policies and interventions contribute to the objective of building a united, rather than divided, community.

(AQW 40185/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I remain committed to ensuring that my Department fulfils its statutory duties across its functions through the effective implementation of our Equality Scheme. Integrating equality and good relations at all levels and stages of policymaking and service delivery is central to meeting our Section 75 commitments. My Department continues to adhere to the Equality Commission's current guidance on screening and EQIAs to assess the potential equality and good relations impacts of our policy proposals.

Once a new Equality and Good Relations Commission has been set up, work will likely begin under its leadership to enhance the good relations section of the current screening and Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) assessment process to ensure a thorough and consistent approach across Government and the public sector. At that stage, I will ensure that my Department works alongside others, and that it also adapts the new procedures to further assess how its policies may be able to contribute positively to the objective of building a united community.

The work that the Rural Support Networks undertake in relation to supporting individuals and groups to avail of Rural Development Programme (RDP) funding and the other Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) programmes and projects has contributed to community confidence and improvements in the lives of those living in the rural communities. The thematic events that they organise regularly to review the impact of social policy changes are well attended by the community groups from all areas and present opportunities to develop inter community relationships.

The Department is also represented on the 'Beyond Belfast' group which represents the views of rural stakeholders in relation to good relations. As part of Community Relations Week in June 2014 a Conference was held with the theme of "Together Building a United Community – Looking Beyond Belfast".

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that landowners were encouraged to plant trees under the Countryside Management Scheme, why landowners are now being denied having this land included in area-based support measures.

(AQW 40221/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, many farmers in agri-environment schemes received grant aid to plant small areas of their farms with native trees. These small areas, recommended to be no greater than 0.1ha, were often in field corners and awkward areas for farming. Farmers planted these areas voluntarily as part of the agreement and were grant aided for all planting materials, fencing and gates required. In addition, agreement holders received an annual payment for these areas under their agri-environment scheme. Under EU rulings, only those areas which were eligible and on which Single Farm Payment (SFP) was paid in 2008 and were subsequently planted remain eligible for SFP and the successor Pillar 1 payments while the agri-environment scheme is still active.

Entitlements will be re-allocated in 2015 and the total value of entitlements held by a farmer on 15 May 2014 will be divided by the eligible area declared by the farmers in 2015. In effect the value of the entitlements held on 15 May 2014 could be consolidated over the land that remains eligible provided the minimum claim size of 3 ha is met. In these circumstances, many farmers will find that they have retained in 2015 the value of the entitlements that were activated on the land that was planted with trees.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the progress of the Irish Language and Ulster Scots Language, Culture and Heritage strategies.

(AQO 6935/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Strategies are now being finalised and I intend to publish them in January 2015. My officials will then establish the structures for implementing the Strategies, working closely with the other Departments, all of whom will have a role to play in delivering the Strategies.

The Strategies set out roadmaps for the Irish language and Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture over the next twenty years in a wide range of areas, such as education, public services, the community and the media.

I have previously informed the Assembly that Ministers will be responsible for funding actions relating to the Strategies from their own budgets. As the Strategies are included as 'building blocks' in the Executive's Programme for Government, I expect Ministerial colleagues to ensure that funds are put in place to allow proper implementation.

Revised Strategies were shared recently with Ministers for final comments. This was the second opportunity that Ministers have had to comment on the Strategies.

As I said at the CAL Committee on the ninth of October, I will be a strong advocate to ensure that funding for the Strategies is forthcoming. There is much expectation in communities following the public consultations, when people put forward proposals based on their experience on the ground. I believe Ministers have a duty to fulfil their commitments to these Strategies.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the total spent on each of the (i) capital; and (ii) other projects which have not proceeded since May 2007, including the loss resulting from each project.

(AQW 39797/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The information requested is provided in the attached table.

DCAL - Projects not Continued with

Name of project	Total Amount Spent: £ or euro (thousands)	Amount spent which is deemed to be a loss (thousands)	Year spend incurred
Department - Multi-Sport Stadium (developing business case)	£2,748.2	£2,748.2	2007/08 mainly
Sports Council - Elite Facilities programme (sailing)	£14.1	Nil	2009/10
Sports Council - Elite Facilities programme (equestrianism)	£23.5	Nil	2009/10
Arts Council - BT Ticketing (centralised arts ticketing system)	£27.0	Nil	2013/14
Department - Create N Innovate Conference	£19.2	£19.2	2009/10
Libraries NI - Market Yard Development, Coleraine (cultural hub)	£75.3	Nil	2013/14
Waterways Ireland - study into accomodation at Portora	e2.0	Nil	2007
Waterways Ireland - Dredging works - Lough Beg	e20.9	Nil	2011
Waterways Ireland - Replace jetty at Knockninny	e1.0	Nil	2013
Waterways Ireland - Replace jetty at Galloon	e1.0	Nil	2013

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the grants available from her Department for community groups.

(AQW 39848/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are a number of grants available to community groups from my Department and its associated arm's length bodies (ALBs). Details of these are as follows:

DCAL

Grant funding is available to The Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland (GOLI) and the Ulster Council of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) to bring forward the objectives of the Cultural Awareness Strategy.

Through the Sign Language Partnership Group (SLPG), grants are available to Deaf organisations for projects to improve access to public services for British Sign Language users and Irish Sign Language users.

The Department also makes an annual allowance to local councils who match-fund and administer the Community Festivals fund. While the fund is closed to applications at present, local councils will be due to advertise the 2015-16 scheme in the New Year.

The following grants are currently available from DCAL's ALBs:

Arts Council NI

- Small Grants Programme, to assist organisations to deliver arts projects.

A number of Arts Council grants may be open for applications in 2015, subject to budgetary provision, e.g. Annual Funding Programme; Musical instruments for bands; and Arts and Older People Programme.

Ulster-Scots Agency

Community groups can apply for grants in the following areas:

- Music and dance tuition;
- Summer schools; and
- Community Festivals

The Agency also has a Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS) category, which funds projects that have a close correlation with the Agency's objectives. Details of the individual grant schemes are published on the Agency's website when they are open.

Foras na Gaeilge

The following grants are available to community groups:

- Community Radio Scheme;
- Irish in the Community Scheme;
- Scheme for establishing and developing language networks;
- Summer Camps Scheme;
- Youth Scheme – targeting children between 3 and 16;
- Festivals scheme;
- Drama companies scheme;
- Family scholarships;
- Investment fund for establishing pre-schools; and
- Colmcille – to assist applicants strengthening relations between Irish and Scottish Gaelics.

Sport NI have no programmes currently open - though community groups can register their interest regarding any future funding opportunities that they may be eligible for on Sport NI's website - <http://www.sportni.net/funding/funding-registrations/>

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, over the last three years, how many Assembly Questions her Department has not answered within a 28 day period.

(AQW 40023/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In each of the last three years, the number of Assembly Questions where a response was not provided to the member within 28 working days was as follows:

- 2012 - 15
- 2013 - 150
- 2014 - 13

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the £36.2m will be released to the Irish Football Association for Irish League Clubs to apply for capital projects.

(AQW 40052/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Given that funding for the development of sub-regional association football stadiums has still to be secured, no decision of any kind on funding to assist the development of any sub-regional stadiums has yet been taken.

My Department is developing a Strategy on how this programme might be delivered should money become available in the next CSR period.

I have met with the DFP Minister to discuss how my Department can start to resource this programme in the near future to allow the significant development phase of the programme to commence.

My Department has undertaken preparatory work on developing the Sub-Regional programme and is completing a Strategic Outline Case for DFP's consideration.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the funding opportunities for Irish League football clubs for infrastructure projects funded through the Irish Football Association and Sport Northern Ireland will be fair, balanced, and transparent.

(AQW 40054/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am unaware of any funding opportunities for Irish League football clubs for infrastructure projects funded through the Irish Football Association and Sport NI.

The Executive endorsed a proposal to provide an additional c. £36m for sub-regional stadium development for football as a priority area of spend in the next CSR period.

Whilst funding is still to be secured, a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) to demonstrate football's strategic needs at sub-regional level, and how those needs can be accommodated, is currently under development by my Department and shall shortly be submitted to DFP for consideration.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the two positions on the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Ulster-Scots Academy became vacant.

(AQW 40087/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: One position became vacant on 23rd January 2012 following the resignation of Alister McReynolds. The second position became vacant on 30th October 2012 following the resignation of Carol Baraniuk.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the community voluntary groups in East Londonderry that have received funding from her Department since 2011.

(AQW 40098/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The information you request is provided in the attached table.

Funding provided to voluntary/ community groups in the East Londonderry constituency since 2011

Year	ALB	Amount	Organisation
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,820	Ardinariff Historical & Cultural Society
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,648	Ardinariff Historical & Cultural Society
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£2,178	Ardinariff Historical & Cultural Society
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Articlave Flute Band
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£16,424	Coleraine Festival Committee
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,761	Coleraine Festival Committee
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,642	Coleraine Ulster-Scots Regeneration Group
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,128	Coleraine Ulster-Scots Regeneration Group
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£825	Ballysally Young Defenders
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Ballywillan Flute Band
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,575	Bellaghy Pipe Band
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,610	Blackhill Flute Band
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Dungiven Flute Band
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Edenmore Flute Band
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£669	Kilrea & District Ulster Scots Society
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Mascoquin First Flute Band
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,568	Star of the Roe Flute Band
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,350	Trench Memorial Flute Band
2011	Waterways Ireland	£20,000	Lower Bann Riverfest Ltd
2011/12	Foras na Gaeilge	£3,491.14	Glór Dhún Geimhin
2011/12	Foras na Gaeilge	£3,500	Gaelscoil Léim an Mhadaidh
2011/12	Sport NI	£750	Xplore Outdoors
2011/12	Sport NI	£3,269	John Mitchel's Glenullin GAC
2011/12	Sport NI	£5,500	Greysteel Community Enterprise
2011-2012	Arts Council NI	£105,000	Big Telly Theatre Company
2011-2012	Arts Council NI	£9,800	Awakin Ltd
2011-2012	Arts Council NI	£10,000	Treasure Pilgrim Ltd
2011-2012	Arts Council NI	£4,943	Lisnagrot Accordion Band
2011-2012	Arts Council NI	£4,048	Trench Memorial Flute Band
2011-2012	Arts Council NI	£5,000	Learmount Community Development Group Ltd.
2012	Waterways Ireland	£17,500	Lower Bann Riverfest Ltd
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£14,999	Coleraine Festival Committee
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,643	Aghanloo 656 Band
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,230	Articlave Flute Band

Year	ALB	Amount	Organisation
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,591	Ballinrees Pipe Band
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Ballyquin Flute Band
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,500	Ballywillan Flute Band
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,643	Blackhill Accordion Band
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Dungiven Flute Band
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,643	Mascoquin First Flute Band
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,395	Star of the Bann
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,215	Star of the Roe
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,500	Trench Memorial Flute Band
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	William King Mem. Flute Band
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,520	Ardinariff Historical & Cultural Society
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,118	Coleraine Ulster-Scots Regeneration Group
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,465	Ballysally Cultural Heritage & Dev Group
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,640	Coleraine Festival Committee
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£2,228	Ardinariff Historical & Cultural Society
2012/13	Foras na Gaeilge	£2,472	Gaelscoil Léim an Mhadaidh
2012/13	Foras na Gaeilge	£3,500	Naiscoil Léim an Mhadaidh
2012/13	Sport NI	£150	Xplore Outdoors
2012/13	Sport NI	£49,903	Bann Rowing Club
2012/13	Sport NI	£245,000	John Mitchel's Glenullin GAC
2012-2013	Arts Council NI	£155,000	Big Telly Theatre Company
2012-2013	Arts Council NI	£24,754	Big Telly Theatre Company
2012-2013	Arts Council NI	£2,200	Big Telly Theatre Company
2012-2013	Arts Council NI	£9,500	Uproar Comics
2012-2013	Arts Council NI	£9,984	Whittrick Press LLP
2012-2013	Arts Council NI	£3,374	Craigbane Accordion Band
2012-2013	Arts Council NI	£4,500	Aghanloo Flute Band LOL656
2012-2013	Arts Council NI	£4,536	Ballyquin Flute Band
2012-2013	Arts Council NI	£5,000	Limavady Drama Group
2012-2013	Arts Council NI	35,000	Eagle Glen Community Partnership
2013	Waterways Ireland	£12,500	Lower Bann Riverfest Ltd
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£10,100	Coleraine Festival Committee
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£3,663	Garvagh & District Development Association
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£2,822	Ardinariff Historical & Cultural Society
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Articlave Flute Band
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Edenmore Flute Band
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Freeman Flute Band
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Garvagh Pipe Band
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Killymuck Accordion Band
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Trench Memorial Flute Band
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£825	Mascoquin First Flute Band

Year	ALB	Amount	Organisation
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Kilrea Pipe Band
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,761	Ardinariff Historical & Cultural Society
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£998	Moneydig Rural Network Group
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Ulster Protestant Boys Flute Band
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,630	Windyhall Cultural/Community & Sports Action Group
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	£1,500	Glór Dhún Geimhin
2013/14/15	Foras na Gaeilge	£44,999	Naiscoil Ghleann an Iolair
2013/14	DCAL North West Team	£8,000	Stendhal Festival Ltd.
2013/14	Foras na Gaeilge	£3,089	Naiscoil Léim an Mhadaigh
2013/14	Sport NI	£22,518	Bann Rowing Club
2013/14	Sport NI	£750	Alive Surf School
2013-2014	Arts Council NI	£150,350	Big Telly Theatre Company
2013-2014	Arts Council NI	£16,000	Age Concern Causeway
2013-2014	Arts Council NI	£14,500	Big Telly Theatre Company
2013-2014	Arts Council NI	£42,381	Big Telly Theatre Company
2013-2014	Arts Council NI	£9,900	Whittrick Press LLP
2013-2014	Arts Council NI	£9,900	Uproar Comics
2013-2014	Arts Council NI	£4,920	Killaloo Accordion Band
2013-2014	Arts Council NI	£5,000	Ballyrashane Flute Band
2013-2014	Arts Council NI	£5,000	Bellarena Accordion Band
2013-2014	Arts Council NI	£4,995	Blackhill Accordion Band
2013-2014	Arts Council NI	£5,000	Articlave Flute Band
2014	Waterways Ireland	£11,500	Lower Bann Riverfest Ltd
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	8,582	Coleraine Festival Committee
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	1,950	Freeman Flute Band
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	1,950	Glenkeen Fife & Drum Band
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	2,040	Mascoquin First Flute Band
Year	ALB	Amount	Organisation
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	1,950	Windyhall Cultural/Community & Sports Action Group
2014/15	DCAL North West Team	£30,000	Stendhal Festival Ltd.
2014/15	Foras na Gaeilge	£1,600	Craobh Ghleann an Iolair
2014/15	Foras na Gaeilge	£2,203	Gaelscoil Léim an Mhadaidh
2014/15	Foras na Gaeilge	£1,050	Naiscoil Léim an Mhadaidh
2014/15	Sport NI	£1,427	Ballyspallen Cricket Club
2014/15	Sport NI	£7,448	Bann Wheelers Cycling Club
2014/15	Sport NI	£4,325	Coleraine and District Riding for the Disabled Association
2014/15	Sport NI	£9,060	Coleraine Rugby Football and Cricket Club
2014/15	Sport NI	£10,000	Greysteel Community Enterprise
2014/15	Sport NI	£9,978	Brighter Polo Paddlers
2014/15	Sport NI	£7,650	Coleraine Cougars Special Olympics Club
2014/15	Sport NI	£4,860	Dungiven Celtic FC

Year	ALB	Amount	Organisation
2014-2015	Arts Council NI	£150,350	Big Telly Theatre Company
2014-2015	Arts Council NI	£5,000	Garvagh Pipe Band
2014-2015	Arts Council NI	£5,000	Macosquin First Flute Band
2014-2015	Arts Council NI	£5,000	Kildoag Pipe Band

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many fishing licence applications have been received in each of the last three years.

(AQW 40113/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The tables below detail the numbers of recreational angling and commercial fishing licence sales in the last three years for which records are complete.

Angling

Year	2011	2012	2013
Total sales	25211	27511	26980

Commercial

Year	2011	2012	2013
Total sales	874	1002	1163

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has met the Together: Building a United Community Strategy commitment to introduce an impact assessment that assesses the extent to which her departmental policies and interventions contribute to the objective of building a united, rather than divided, community.

(AQW 40186/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: One of the key actions in the TBUC Strategy is the establishment of an independent and statutorily-based organisation to provide advice to and challenge all levels of government in terms of performance in improving good relations. The strategy states that "In Enhancing Policy Advice & Challenge to Government, we will:

- Amend the remit, roles and responsibilities of the existing Equality Commission into an Equality and Good Relations Commission; and
- Develop an augmented impact assessment that assesses the extent to which policies and other interventions contribute to meeting the objectives of this overarching Strategy"

As the Equality and Good Relations Commission is not yet in place, this impact assessment has not yet been designed. My Department will comply with the requirement to carry out an assessment of relevant policies and interventions when this is in place.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration has been given to the restoration of the Result schooner, currently residing at the Transport Museum, including its possible relocation to the Titanic Quarter.

(AQW 40206/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: National Museums has informed me that it has not recently undertaken a detailed assessment of the cost of restoring and displaying 'The Result' schooner. Any restoration is likely to involve significant financial investment which would impact on National Museums' ability to take forward other work areas in relation to its collections as well as essential repairs and maintenance across its range of sites. As a consequence preservation at its current location in Cultra, rather than restoration, remains the focus of activity for the organisation.

However, during 2014 a preliminary meeting was held between National Museums and a representative of the Museum of the Royal Navy to discuss the Result's potential for restoration and/or relocation to the Titanic area where the Nomadic is located. As yet no firm proposals have emerged.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department provided to Trade Unions in the last financial year.

(AQW 40244/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department provided no funding to Trade Unions in the 2013/14 financial year.

Department of Education

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education whether he has met the Together: Building a United Community Strategy commitment to introduce an impact assessment that assesses the extent to which his departmental policies and interventions contribute to the objective of building a united, rather than divided, community.

(AQW 40187/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy includes a commitment to establish an Equality and Good Relations Commission that will act as an independent, statutorily-based organisation to provide policy advice and a challenge to Government. OFMdfM is the lead department taking forward this commitment.

One of the stated objectives of the proposed Equality and Good Relations Commission is the development of an augmented impact assessment that will assess the extent to which public authorities contribute to the delivery of the strategy's overarching good relations objectives.

My Department is engaged on a range of actions in support of the strategy, including one of the headline actions to commence ten new shared education campuses.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how he will support the expansion of meanscoilleana in rural areas.

(AQW 40231/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my Statement to the Assembly on 4 November, I outlined my response to the Advisory Group Report on the Strategic Development of Irish-medium Post-primary Education. I warmly welcomed the overall direction of the Report, and I accepted the group's vision of Irish-medium education and their pathway to creating educationally sound post-primary provision which enhances the significant benefits provided through the medium of the Irish language.

The Group made several recommendations relating to specific plans and proposals for the future development of IM post-primary provision in a variety of geographical areas. I recognise the substantial consideration given to the development of these recommendations by the Group, which I accepted.

It will be for the Planning Authorities working with CnaG and the wider sector to bring forward practicable plans and proposals for the future development of IM post-primary provision in optimal geographical locations.

I will continue to consider each Development Proposal based on the pertinent facts in the context of Departmental policies and statutory duties.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to list the gaelscoileanna and the number of pupils at each school over the last five years.

(AQW 40232/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table overleaf shows enrolments in Irish medium schools from 2010/11 – 2014/15. Please note that the 2014/15 figures are provisional. Finalised figures will be available at the end of February 2015.

Irish medium primary and post-primary schools and their enrolments, 2010-11 – 2014/15¹

Primary schools²

School	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 ¹
Bunscoil An Chastil	80	80	97	107	101
Bunscoil An Iuir	109	92	86	79	78
Bunscoil An Traonaigh	37	31	37	36	38
Bunscoil An Tsleibhe Dhuibh	185	176	172	179	184
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	113	114	130	133	142
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	62	75	84	83	85
Bunscoil Cholmcille	142	126	123	117	114
Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain	61	61	61	61	82
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	285	280	287	294	307
Gaelscoil An Lonnain	47	41	44	49	51
Gaelscoil An Tseanchaí	20	29	47	59	103
Gaelscoil Aodha Rua	-	12	31	48	67

School	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir	149	146	139	140	138
Gaelscoil Eanna	50	70	104	136	152
Gaelscoil Eoghain	-	-	13	19	67
Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach	64	66	75	84	79
Gaelscoil Leim An Mhadaidh	-	18	30	36	53
Gaelscoil Na Bhfal	180	184	190	187	185
Gaelscoil Na Daroige	44	54	55	61	69
Gaelscoil Na Gcrann	93	110	116	123	131
Gaelscoil Na Mbeann	-	-	20	28	40
Gaelscoil Na Mona	84	83	92	94	93
Gaelscoil Na Speirini	26	27	33	36	41
Gaelscoil Neachitain	-	-	63	68	77
Gaelscoil Ui Dhocartaigh	153	152	155	163	160
Gaelscoil Ui Neill	169	172	177	191	189
Scoil An Droichid	139	143	146	156	154
Scoil Na Fuisseoige	103	107	113	115	125

Post-primary school

School	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Colaiste Feirste	553	550	541	564	581

Source: NI school census

Notes:

1. Figures relating to 2014/15 are currently provisional.
2. Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education for an update on the recommendations of the inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate.

(AQW 40272/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As you are aware the report of the Committee for Education on its inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and School Improvement made 16 recommendations. I gave an initial response to each recommendation at the Assembly debate on 17 June 2014. Since then officials from my Department have provided the Committee with a detailed written response and provided oral evidence on 12 November 2014. This set out my Department's position and provided an outline of any work that is being planned or taken forward in respect of the recommendations. A transcript of the evidence session is available.

More recently the Clerk of the Committee has written to the Department providing additional comments from the Committee in respect of the Department's response to the inquiry report, my officials are currently in the process of preparing a response which is required by 16 January 2015.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education to detail the existing educational programmes which raise awareness of domestic abuse among young people; and whether he plans to introduce further programmes.

(AQW 40276/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department supports education and awareness-raising through a number of approaches:

DE funds the Women's Aid Federation for the delivery of the 'Helping Hands' programme which addresses challenging issues for children of personal space, safety, planning, and awareness of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. It supports the aims and objectives of the Primary Curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2 and is designed for children aged between 8 and 11. Included within this is 'Social Guardians' training for primary teachers, allowing them to deliver and support the 'Helping Hands' programme.

The Department also supports schools through the 'iMatter' Programme, in promoting resilient emotional health for all pupils by providing advice and support to post-primary aged pupils on issues such as sex abuse, domestic violence and abusive relationships.

My Department is a contributor to the DHSSPS-led draft Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Strategy Section 2 of the draft contains 4 agreed priorities for Education viz:

- Teachers will have the necessary skills to teach about sensitive subjects, including child abuse, domestic and sexual violence.
- Teachers will be alert to pupils experiencing distress and trained to respond appropriately.
- Teachers will have access to a range of age appropriate and evaluated resources to support the teaching and learning of sensitive subjects and;
- Quality assurance arrangements will be established to ensure that the preventative curriculum offered in schools is effective.

These priorities will largely fulfilled by a project that has been commissioned from the NSPCC to develop an 'effective preventative education programme' involving a learning package of training, development and support for schools to implement delivery of 'keeping safe' messages to all primary school aged children. The project will involve the development, roll-out and evaluation of a comprehensive Continuing Professional Development package of training, development and ongoing support for school leaders, teaching and nonteaching staff, and parents in the primary school sector.

Department for Employment and Learning

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why students attending Medical School at Queen's University Belfast spend less time in General Practice during their course than students attending other such university courses across the United Kingdom.

(AQW 39898/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): My Department plays no direct role in setting the Medical Curriculum at Queen's University Belfast. The curriculum for undergraduate medical training is developed by individual medical schools to meet the standards set by the General Medical Council. Queen's University Belfast reviews the medical curriculum on an annual basis. This issue therefore falls outside the remit of my Department.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department applying to the European Social Fund for its own mainstream programmes meets the additionality requirements of the Fund.

(AQW 39985/11-15)

Dr Farry:

- (a) All applicants to the ESF Programme will have to meet the criteria as outlined in the Guidance Notes and application form fully. These criteria include outlining how duplication with other local/geographical provision or other government programmes will be avoided and/or additionality is demonstrated. It is very difficult to comment specifically on any application until it has been received and fully assessed by the process outlined at (b) below.
- (b) My Department is establishing Assessment Panels to examine all the applications that are submitted to the European Social Fund. The Assessment Panels will consist of members drawn from across the relevant business areas in the Department and also independent representation with relevant background in the specific Investment Priorities being assessed such as disability or young people.

The Assessment Panels will follow a robust and transparent process to ensure all applications are judged on merit and against the specific criteria detailed in the application form.

- (c) In the current financial context, it is important that we minimise duplication between programmes funded by the Department, and that is why we are seeking to focus the ESF programme on level 1 provision and other support required by learners with barriers to employability, in which voluntary and community providers have particular expertise. At the same time, Further Education colleges and other Departmental programmes will have to reduce their level 1 provision and concentrate on higher level courses.

The focus on level 1 in the ESF guidelines has been informed by a range of connected policy initiatives, including the review of youth training. You may recall that I announced the review of apprenticeships and youth training in February 2013. Securing our Success, the Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships, was published in June 2014, and the interim report of the review of youth training was published for public consultation in November 2014.

The youth training review's interim report and consultation, which is currently on-going, proposes the establishment of a new youth training system in Northern Ireland, available to all young people aged 16 – 24, that facilitates progression into an apprenticeship, further education or sustained employment. The system will be accessible to those commencing employment, those in existing roles, and those currently not in employment, and will deliver structured work-based learning for all participants.

To ensure progression for all participants, it is proposed that youth training will deliver a new, baccalaureate-style professional and technical award at level 2, equating to a minimum of 5 GCSEs at grades A* - C, including English and mathematics. Young people will be supported in their training through impartial careers advice and guidance, pastoral support, mentoring, and financial support. Additional flexibilities for those with additional requirements will be built into the system.

Learners need to be supported to progress to develop higher level skills – many of the voluntary and community sector organisations we have funded through ESF and other programmes specialise in offering such support, and it is important that learners develop the independence to pursue qualifications in settings which will prepare them effectively for entering and progressing in work.

I have considered the representations made on this issue and it has been agreed that the guidance for applicants should be amended to allow a degree of additional flexibility on the level of qualifications to be supported under strand TO 9(i) a of the ESF Programme, for participants with disabilities only.

- (d) My Department, while developing the new European Social Fund Programme, has worked to bring a uniform approach to the salary costs it will reimburse across the Programme to ensure value for money. European Social Fund funding is public funding, and it would be unfair at the current time of financial constraint for it to be used to remunerate people more generously than public servants. As the guidance notes for organisations applying to the ESF Programme make clear, my Department will support organisations in meeting their contractual commitments to staff within the recommended payscales. Voluntary and community organisations are free to top up the salaries set out in these payscales from their own resources if they consider it appropriate.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he will ensure that the departmental project applications for the next round of European Social Funding are judged on merit, given that it is his Department that award the funding. **(AQW 39988/11-15)**

Dr Farry:

- (a) All applicants to the ESF Programme will have to meet the criteria as outlined in the Guidance Notes and application form fully. These criteria include outlining how duplication with other local/geographical provision or other government programmes will be avoided and/or additionality is demonstrated. It is very difficult to comment specifically on any application until it has been received and fully assessed by the process outlined at (b) below.
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The Assessment Panels will follow a robust and transparent process to ensure all applications are judged on merit and against the specific criteria detailed in the application form.

- (c) In the current financial context, it is important that we minimise duplication between programmes funded by the Department, and that is why we are seeking to focus the ESF programme on level 1 provision and other support required by learners with barriers to employability, in which voluntary and community providers have particular expertise. At the same time, Further Education colleges and other Departmental programmes will have to reduce their level 1 provision and concentrate on higher level courses.

The focus on level 1 in the ESF guidelines has been informed by a range of connected policy initiatives, including the review of youth training. You may recall that I announced the review of apprenticeships and youth training in February 2013. Securing our Success, the Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships, was published in June 2014, and the interim report of the review of youth training was published for public consultation in November 2014.

The youth training review's interim report and consultation, which is currently on-going, proposes the establishment of a new youth training system in Northern Ireland, available to all young people aged 16 – 24, that facilitates progression into an apprenticeship, further education or sustained employment. The system will be accessible to those commencing employment, those in existing roles, and those currently not in employment, and will deliver structured work-based learning for all participants.

To ensure progression for all participants, it is proposed that youth training will deliver a new, baccalaureate-style professional and technical award at level 2, equating to a minimum of 5 GCSEs at grades A* - C, including English and mathematics. Young people will be supported in their training through impartial careers advice and guidance, pastoral support, mentoring, and financial support. Additional flexibilities for those with additional requirements will be built into the system.

Learners need to be supported to progress to develop higher level skills – many of the voluntary and community sector organisations we have funded through ESF and other programmes specialise in offering such support, and it is important that learners develop the independence to pursue qualifications in settings which will prepare them effectively for entering and progressing in work.

I have considered the representations made on this issue and it has been agreed that the guidance for applicants should be amended to allow a degree of additional flexibility on the level of qualifications to be supported under strand TO 9(i) a of the ESF Programme, for participants with disabilities only.

- (d) My Department, while developing the new European Social Fund Programme, has worked to bring a uniform approach to the salary costs it will reimburse across the Programme to ensure value for money. European Social Fund funding is public funding, and it would be unfair at the current time of financial constraint for it to be used to remunerate people more generously than public servants. As the guidance notes for organisations applying to the ESF Programme make clear, my Department will support organisations in meeting their contractual commitments to staff within the recommended payscales. Voluntary and community organisations are free to top up the salaries set out in these payscales from their own resources if they consider it appropriate.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why in the next round of European Social Funding voluntary and community providers will only be permitted to offer level one qualifications; why this restriction has been placed on an employability programme.

(AQW 39991/11-15)

Dr Farry:

- (a) All applicants to the ESF Programme will have to meet the criteria as outlined in the Guidance Notes and application form fully. These criteria include outlining how duplication with other local/geographical provision or other government programmes will be avoided and/or additionality is demonstrated. It is very difficult to comment specifically on any application until it has been received and fully assessed by the process outlined at (b) below.
- (b) My Department is establishing Assessment Panels to examine all the applications that are submitted to the European Social Fund. The Assessment Panels will consist of members drawn from across the relevant business areas in the Department and also independent representation with relevant background in the specific Investment Priorities being assessed such as disability or young people.

The Assessment Panels will follow a robust and transparent process to ensure all applications are judged on merit and against the specific criteria detailed in the application form.

- (c) In the current financial context, it is important that we minimise duplication between programmes funded by the Department, and that is why we are seeking to focus the ESF programme on level 1 provision and other support required by learners with barriers to employability, in which voluntary and community providers have particular expertise. At the same time, Further Education colleges and other Departmental programmes will have to reduce their level 1 provision and concentrate on higher level courses.

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Learners need to be supported to progress to develop higher level skills – many of the voluntary and community sector organisations we have funded through ESF and other programmes specialise in offering such support, and it is important that learners develop the independence to pursue qualifications in settings which will prepare them effectively for entering and progressing in work.

I have considered the representations made on this issue and it has been agreed that the guidance for applicants should be amended to allow a degree of additional flexibility on the level of qualifications to be supported under strand TO 9(i) a of the ESF Programme, for participants with disabilities only.

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Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether the latest European Social Fund guidance, which places restrictions on salary levels, specifies that staff should not receive cost of living increases and only those on existing contracts can receive annual increments on non-departmental public bodies, exposes his Department to potential employment tribunals.

(AQW 40001/11-15)

Dr Farry:

- (a) All applicants to the ESF Programme will have to meet the criteria as outlined in the Guidance Notes and application form fully. These criteria include outlining how duplication with other local/geographical provision or other government programmes will be avoided and/or additionality is demonstrated. It is very difficult to comment specifically on any application until it has been received and fully assessed by the process outlined at (b) below.
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Mr Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people with a learning disability are supported through mainstream employment programmes; and what percentage of people with a learning disability move from this provision into (i) employment; and (ii) training or further education.

(AQW 40034/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning, along with its delivery partners in the community and voluntary sector, and the Further Education college network, currently offers a range of training and employment services aimed specifically at providing support for people with disabilities, including those with a learning disability.

The Disability Employment Service (DES) is an integral part of the Department's Employment Service. Its specific role is to support and assist people with health conditions and disabilities, including those with learning disabilities, progress

towards, move into and sustain meaningful paid work. It should be noted that, for these mainstream disability employment programmes, moving into training or further education is not regarded as progression. However, transferring from the latter into mainstream employment programmes would be deemed so.

The mainstream disability employment programmes that are delivered by, or on behalf of the Disability Employment Service are as follows:

Work Connect

- Work Connect offers specialist pre-employment support to clients with health or disability related barriers to work, including people with a learning disability. The programme is delivered by the strong local disability consortium, Supported Employment Solutions (SES).

In the current financial year to the end of November 2014, 14 people with a learning disability have started on the Work Connect programme. Three of these clients (21%) have since gained employment.

Access to Work

- Access to Work is a flexible, individually assessed employment programme providing financial and other assistance to help overcome barriers faced by people with disabilities in accessing employment. Support can include special aids and equipment, adaptations to premises, provision of a support worker and travel to work costs.

At the end of November 2014, the programme was supporting 676 people with disabilities, 156 of whom have a learning disability. All of these people (100%) are currently in employment.

Workable (NI)

- Workable (NI) provides a flexible range of long term supports, to assist people with quite complex disability related barriers, to find and retain employment. Workable (NI) is delivered by a number of organisations with extensive experience of meeting the vocational needs of people with a range of disabilities, including learning disability. The supports provided include: a dedicated Job Coach to assist the disabled employee and his/her work colleagues adapt to the needs of the particular job, specific disability awareness training for the employer and other employees, a transitional employer subsidy to help with development costs etc.

At the end of November 2014, there were 543 employees availing of support under the Workable (NI) programme, 245 of whom have a learning difficulty or disability. As with Access to Work (NI), 100% of these clients are currently employed.

Further Education Pilot Project

- In 2012, the Disability Employment Service commenced a two year pilot project with Northern, North Western and Southern Regional Colleges of Further Education. The primary objective was to improve the relationship between the respective services and to enhance the transition between the colleges' vocational programmes for young people with disabilities and the Department's Employment Service.

The vast majority of the students involved have either a learning disability or Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Since 2012, 137 students have been referred to the project. To date, 44 of these students (32%) have secured paid employment, many of whom have been assisted by the offer of departmental support, such as the Youth Employment Scheme, Workable (NI) and Access to Work (NI).

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the rationale for the European Social Fund guidelines requiring community and voluntary education providers to hold a University of Ulster certificate in teaching, given that they are only permitted to deliver level one qualifications or below.

(AQW 40094/11-15)

Dr Farry: While developing the new European Social Fund (ESF) Programme for 2014 – 2020, my Department has worked to align the Programme with the tutor qualification requirements for those delivering training in other Departmental programmes.

The Guidance Notes that accompanied the application form for the European Social Fund stated the criteria for engaging relevant qualified training staff for the delivery of the programme. However, the Department has issued further guidance to clarify this position which will outline all the qualification levels that are permitted.

It will continue to advise that those organisations not meeting the requirements will potentially have a period of up to three years to implement a plan for bringing their staff up to the required qualifications levels.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the total cost of students from the Republic of Ireland studying or taking courses at the Regional Colleges in Northern Ireland in the 2013/14 academic year.

(AQW 40139/11-15)

Dr Farry: The cost to my Department for the 2013/14 academic year for students from the Republic of Ireland who were taking higher and further education courses at further education colleges in Northern Ireland was £6,257,534.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how Further Education Colleges are supporting (i) the creative industries; (ii) tourism food and drink sectors; (iii) the service sector; (iv) finance and business; (v) health service provision; and (vi) the construction sector.

(AQW 40166/11-15)

Dr Farry: The six further education colleges are key economic drivers in their areas, meeting the training and educational needs of local and international companies. Colleges also provide a full suite of business support services, including product development, rapid prototyping and support for innovation.

Colleges are the largest providers of professional and technical training in Northern Ireland, and they make a significant and high quality contribution to addressing the current and future skills needs of local and regional businesses. All of the colleges have a strong engagement with industry, offering training and learning development to employers and their employees.

Whilst my Department sets the strategic direction for the further education sector, each college is responsible for its own curriculum offer, including those areas which include the creative industries, tourism, food and drink sectors, the service sector, finance and business, health service provision and the construction sector.

Colleges offer a wide range of economically focused provision, tailored to meet local needs. Decisions on whether specific courses are offered is 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 locations in a cost effective way that ensures best use of public money.

Creative Industries

Colleges provide a flexible and important role in widening participation to provide students with a variety of routes and courses into the creative industries. The colleges work closely with the Creative and Cultural Skills Sector Skills Council on the provision of apprenticeships at Level 2 as well as supporting apprentices to achieve a full Level 3 qualification. Students can also access higher level skills such as Foundation Degrees in Digital Technology and Gaming and have the opportunity to use college state of the art facilities. In addition, the colleges recognise fully the importance of this sector to the Northern Ireland economy and students are able to develop practical and entrepreneurial skills to help prepare them for the world of work including self employment.

Food and Drink Sector

A Future Skills Action Group for the Food and Drink Manufacturing and Processing sector was established by my Department in 2011 to help the industry to identify and address the skills issues it faces. This group consists of a wide range of members from government, local employers and further and higher education providers who work collaboratively to develop and pilot interventions to ensure employers are getting people with the skills they need to grow this economically important sector.

One such intervention is the Food Engineering Apprenticeship which is currently being delivered by Southern Regional College. This initiative started in January 2014 and will see seven apprentices acquire both Level 2 and Level 3 accreditation in Engineering. Southern Regional College was instrumental in working with employers from the industry to develop the frameworks.

Services Sector

Colleges are represented and play an active role on the Ministerial Working Group for Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Services which brings together a range of employers, representative bodies, government officials, other government departments. Colleges are also working with Energy and Utility Skills Sector Skills Council, to train apprentices in the energy and utility sector.

Finance and Business & Health Sector

Colleges currently support the finance business and health sectors with various projects including one entitled Career Academies, a programme that prepares students for the world of work. A key element of this programme is to link students to employers through master classes, mentoring, workplace visits and internships. Career Academies UK provides a structured programme and support to the schools and colleges around the UK who operate Career Academies.

The Academy, focusing on the business and finance & health sectors, aims to enhance the aspirations and career prospects of young, enthusiastic people aged 16-19 and give participating students the opportunity to broaden the number of genuine choices they have about their future education and career pathways.

Construction Sector

Colleges in conjunction with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) organise an annual skills competition known as Skillbuild, which provides apprentices with an important stepping stone to participate in the UK Skills competitions and also World Skills. The Skillsbuild competition covers a wide range of craft occupations such as – Bricklaying/ Cabinet Making/ Carpentry/ Dry Walling Systems/ Joinery/ Painting and Decorating/ Plastering/ Roofing/ Stonemasonry/ Wall and Floor Tiling and provides a perfect platform to demonstrate and showcase the enormous talent we have in the construction industry in Northern Ireland.

In addition, colleges are responsible for registering students for skills competitions in a number of sector areas, and for hosting local campus, inter-campus and Regional / Northern Ireland heats. There are at present around twenty skills areas

in operation within the college network, covering all sectors of the economy. Successful students can go on to represent Northern Ireland at the UK Skills Show, and represent the UK at Worldskills. These competitions are designed to raise the awareness of young people, and those who influence them, to the opportunities available in sectors and raise the understanding in government, education and industry to the importance of skills training.

Assured Skills

My Department's Assured Skills programme is designed to help attract new foreign direct investment companies and the expansion of indigenous businesses by assuring them that the skills they need to be successful are available in Northern Ireland. Assured Skills support is also available to encourage existing companies who are considering expansion. This supports the companies' business plans by adding value to their training and development activity, and facilitates links with the further education and university sectors to design bespoke training solutions to up-skill existing staff, or to facilitate student or lecturer placements.

During this current year Assured Skills has created 2,073 potential jobs. Since the programme commenced in 2010/11, a total of 4,609 jobs across a number of sectors, including the service and financial services sector, have been created. Of the 4,609 jobs, 726 jobs relate to the financial services sector and over 1,000 are in the services sector.

Assured Skills also enhances the capability of NI to respond to the needs of potential investors by up-skilling lecturers to anticipate future needs, and by creating pools of talent with skills of interest to potential investors, for example by up-skilling unemployed graduates through the 'Academy' model. The Academy model is a short term intervention to help companies meet specific needs. To date, unemployed graduates have been up-skilled in software testing, cloud computing, data analytics, sales & marketing, financial services and professional software skills. All of the Academies mentioned above have been designed and delivered by further education colleges in partnership with Assured Skills.

Skills Solutions

Further Education colleges provide support across the sectors through provision of accredited training funded through my Department's Customised Training Programme which allows colleges to deliver bespoke training solutions in response to specific needs.

Colleges are dedicated to providing a wide range of support for local employers, through sector-wide initiatives and projects, to encourage businesses to engage with and embrace innovation and sustainability. Further education colleges with support from my Department will also continue to play a pivotal role in up-skilling our workforce to meet the future skills challenges and support the future economic success of Northern Ireland.

Employer Support Programme

Finally, I can advise you that the Department's Employer Support Programme, which is delivered by further education colleges, plays a vital role as a programme designed specifically for businesses with fewer than 50 employees. This programme helps small businesses to gain the skills and support to move forward in terms of innovation, by providing a unique, tailored training solution targeted at their individual innovation skills needs.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to reduce unemployment levels in North Down through training and apprenticeships.

(AQW 40170/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is committed to reducing unemployment levels across Northern Ireland irrespective of where an individual lives. A range of provision designed to meet the training needs of young people and adults is offer including: Training for Success; ApprenticeshipsNI; and Employment Service Support.

Through the Training for Success Programme, my department guarantees a training place for all 16 and 17 year olds who are not in education or employment, with extended eligibility for persons under 22 years with a disability and under 24 years for those who qualify under the Children Act NI (2002).

The programme offers young people the opportunity to gain relevant qualifications and work experience, as well as the personal and behavioral skills required to progress into employment.

The ApprenticeshipsNI programme supports employed apprentices, to gain an industry recognised apprenticeship framework qualification at Levels 2 and 3; comprising a technical certificate, a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and essential skills qualifications.

The 'Employment Service Support' programme supports the delivery of a number of Executive funded initiatives and is part of the wider transition arrangements that has facilitated the introduction of Steps 2 Success.

Steps 2 Success provision is available to anyone who is unemployed or economically inactive aged 18 years or over, lone parents aged 16 and over. The programme consists of six strands. Two of these strands provide the opportunity for participants to undertake training ranging from a short accredited training course to a full Qualification and Credit Framework certificate at Level 2 or above. Certain other eligibility criteria must be met before accessing some of these strands.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many local students attended universities in other parts of the United Kingdom in each of the last three years.

(AQW 40172/11-15)

Dr Farry: The tables below were produced from data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and include full and part-time undergraduate and post graduate students.

Table 1: Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled at Universities outside NI by country of institution - 2010/11 - 2012/13

Country of Institution	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
England	11,690	12,500	11,800
Scotland	4,520	4,440	4,195
Wales	515	570	575
Total	16,730	17,510	16,570

Table 2: Republic of Ireland domiciled students enrolled at Universities in Northern Ireland - 2010/11 - 2012/13

Year	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Number of students	4,285	3,520	2,835

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people from the Republic of Ireland attend universities in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 40173/11-15)

Dr Farry: The tables below were produced from data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and include full and part-time undergraduate and post graduate students.

Table 1: Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled at Universities outside NI by country of institution - 2010/11 - 2012/13

Country of Institution	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
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Table 2: Republic of Ireland domiciled students enrolled at Universities in Northern Ireland - 2010/11 - 2012/13

Year	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Number of students	4,285	3,520	2,835

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why new restrictions have been put on the European Social Fund applications; and how his Department will cushion the detrimental effect that this will have on the women's sector and the community and voluntary sector.

(AQW 40219/11-15)

Dr Farry: The European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020 is a new programming period and the regulations governing the Funds inevitably change from one programming period to the next.

European Social Fund funding will be awarded on a competitive basis and it is expected that significant numbers of successful bids will come forward from the women's and the voluntary and community sectors, as has been the case in previous ESF programmes. Statutory organisations will also be required to submit applications as part of the same process. However any applicant organisation must meet and adhere to the terms and conditions of any Government or European funding, and in the case of the ESF, these reflect requirements at European level.

In relation to one specific restriction, in the current financial context, it is also important that we minimise duplication between programmes funded by my Department, and that is why we are seeking to focus the ESF programme on level 1 provision and other support required by learners with barriers to employability, in which voluntary and community providers have particular expertise.

I have considered the representations made on this issue and have agreed that the guidance for applicants should be amended to allow a degree of additional flexibility on the level of qualifications to be supported under the ESF Programme, for participants with disabilities only.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the total grants awarded by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to events in the Mid-Ulster constituency, for each of the last five years; and (ii) the total estimated economic impact of the sponsored events.

(AQW 39745/11-15)

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

- (i) The total grants awarded by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to events in the Mid-Ulster constituency, for each of the last five years, is as follows:

1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015:

Scheme:	Event Name:	Award:
Sponsorship	Cookstown 100	£12,000
Sponsorship	On Home Ground, Seamus Heaney Festival	£15,000
	Total:	£27,000

1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014:

Fund:	Event Name:	Award:
National	Glasgowbury Music Festival 2013	£15,000
	Total:	£15,000

1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013:

Fund:	Event Name:	Award:
National	Glasgowbury Music Festival 2012	£30,000
	Total:	£30,000

1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012:

Fund:	Event Name:	Award:
National	Glasgowbury Music Festival	£20,000
National	Red Bull Pro Nationals	£15,000
	Total:	£35,000

1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011:

Not Applicable. The Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL) was responsible for events funding prior to 1 April 2011.

- (ii) Based on the information provided at application stage by the event organisers, the sponsored events are projected to generate £10.60 for every £1.00 of NITB's investment. NITB has not carried out any independent economic impact audits on the above events however unconfirmed or estimated economic impact information should be available from the event organisers directly.

Department of the Environment

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of occasions Planning Service has taken enforcement action in relation to paramilitary memorials erected without planning permission, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 37927/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): The Department does not hold information on its planning database relating to enforcement cases in such a manner where the number of 'paramilitary memorials erected without planning permission' can be accurately identified.

I can confirm however that no formal enforcement action, in the form of Enforcement Notices issued, has been undertaken in respect of unauthorised monuments/memorials/statues in the last five years.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications under CTY 2 of Planning Policy Statement 21 have been approved for the development of clachans around focal points in County Fermanagh since the policy was introduced.

(AQW 38679/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department does not maintain a record of planning approvals by planning policy and I am unable to provide any statistics on the number of applications approved under CTY 2 of PPS 21.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37257/11-15, particularly his response that the email "was part of an investigatory process and as such it is necessary to limit the disclosure of this information to protect the integrity of this and other investigatory processes" and AQW 37818/11-15, particularly his response that he does "not consider that an internal email summarising the observations of enforcement officers constitutes producing a formal report on the legalities of the taxi arrangements at Ravenhill rugby ground", whether these answers are diametrically opposed given that one answer upholds the alleged necessity to withhold information whilst the other answer plays down the content and the format in which it was contained.

(AQW 38711/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I believe that the answers to the two questions you refer to are mutually consistent.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for an update into the investigation of the illegal dump at Mobouy.

(AQW 39870/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Earlier this year, my officials submitted a case file to the Public Prosecution Service. PPS has initiated court proceedings against two companies and a number of their Directors and the case is scheduled to begin in early 2015.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 37027/11-15, whether his Department is aware of (i) any waste emanating from City Waste having been transported overseas for disposal or incineration; (ii) the make up of the waste; (iii) the quantities exported; and (iv) any costs accrued by the public purse as a result of having to dispose of this waste.

(AQW 40017/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Shipment of waste from Northern Ireland to a place outside of the UK (Overseas) for disposal or Incineration (classified in the Waste Framework Directive as Disposal operation D10) is not permitted under the UK Plan on Shipments of Waste. There was no waste emanating from City Waste that was shipped overseas for these waste operations.

Waste did emanate from City Waste to be shipped for recovery overseas to an Energy Recovery facility as categorised under Recovery Code R1 from September 2009 to May 2013. The total quantity exported overseas emanating from City Waste for Energy Recovery R1 was 42475t.

There were no costs accrued by the public purse as a result of having to dispose of the waste described shipped by City Waste.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) how much waste was transported from Northern Ireland for incineration in Majorca in (a) 2011; (b) 2012; (c) 2013; and (d) 2014; (ii) how much waste is expected to be exported in 2015; and (iii) the costs per tonne for incineration in Majorca and the total shipment costs, broken down by year.

(AQW 40018/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Waste was transported from Northern Ireland to Majorca as follows:-

- 2011 – 0
- 2012 – 0
- 2013 – 0
- 2014 – 17590 Tonnes verified to date (10/12/2014).

An application has been made to ship 60000 Tonnes in 2015. Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) does not hold information relating to the costs imposed by the recovery facility or shipping as these are commercially sensitive.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) what percentage of the budgets that will be allocated to new councils from his Department will be cut; (ii) whether his Department will have the power to alter the councils' budget following

the transfer of powers; (iii) what input local councils will have in the decision regarding their budget from central government; and (iv) what consideration has been given to reallocating rates to ensure councils receive their entire budget from rates.

(AQW 40105/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The financial allocations proposed for the DOE in the draft Budget would have significant adverse implications for the services provided by my Department and for its clients, stakeholders and staff.

Before the draft Budget proposals, the Executive allocated £25.8 million for De-rating Grant and £18.3 million for Rates Support Grant. These amounts were reduced by 15.1% (£6.7 million) in the draft Budget proposals. The DOE's previous baseline also included provision for a range of other grants to local government including the scheme of emergency financial assistance, emergency planning grant and construction products grant. Provision for these grants was similarly reduced by 15.1% in the draft Budget. The draft Budget also earmarked an allocation of £2 million of local government and this amount would be used to seek to maintain financial support for certain local government activities, albeit at a reduced level compared to previous years.

Despite these unprecedented proposed reductions in departmental budgets, DOE has remained committed to transferring to local government a planning function which is fit for purpose and adequately resourced both in terms of HR and financial assets to support local government and meet the challenges of the new environment. To this end, I aim to ensure that cuts are not applied to the DOE Planning element of the Transferred Functions Grant at the point of transfer.

Regarding the input councils have to the final budget allocation from central government - Councils have proactively contributed, through their due diligence exercise, to an assessment of the funding required to deliver the functions on a "rates neutral" basis at point of transfer. Engagement between those departments which are transferring functions and councils continues.

Finally, concerning what consideration has been given to reallocating rates to ensure councils receive their entire budget from rates. This is a rating policy matter and is, therefore, the responsibility of the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the "best available techniques" used by his Department to determine the basis for emission limit values designed to prevent and, where that is not practicable, generally to reduce emissions and the impact on the environment as a whole for planning proposals Z/2014/1473/F and Z/2012/1387/F.

(AQW 40106/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Planning proposals relating to the Full Circle Generation are subject to European Directive. This directive sets the emission limit

Z/2014/1473/F and Z/2012/1387/F, Ltd "Energy from Waste" (EfW) plant, 2010/75/EU on Industrial Emissions. values to be applied.

The European Commission publishes available techniques". These authorities when setting operating

specific sector guidance on the "best serve as references to the regulatory conditions for permits.

My Department has used the EU directive and EC reference guidance to determine the basis for the emission limits values to be applied for these planning proposals.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of the Environment to list the community and voluntary groups in East Londonderry that have received funding from his Department since 2011.

(AQW 40126/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table below details the community and voluntary groups in East Londonderry which have received funding from my Department since 2011. The table also includes organisations based outside East Londonderry but have undertaken projects within East Londonderry. These include the Woodland Trust, National Trust, Conservation Volunteers and Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust.

Group Name	DOE Grant Programme
The Vale Project	Road Safety Grant Programme
Woodland Trust	Natural Heritage Grant Programme
Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust	Natural Heritage Grant Programme
Claudy Gaelic Athletic Club	Listed Building Grant Programme
Trustees of Star Masonic Hall	Listed Building Grant Programme
National Trust	Listed Building Grant Programme
Samaritans	Listed Building Grant Programme
Annaghagh Game Conservation Club	Challenge Fund
Ballymaconnelly Renewal Group	Challenge Fund

Group Name	DOE Grant Programme
Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust	Challenge Fund
Carntoger Community Association	Challenge Fund
Conservation Volunteers	Challenge Fund
Gortnaghey Community Association	Challenge Fund
Learmount Community Development Group Ltd	Challenge Fund
National Trust	Challenge Fund
Riding for Disabled Association (Coleraine and District Group)	Challenge Fund
Roe Angling Ltd	Challenge Fund
Roe Valley Community Property Ltd	Challenge Fund
Rural Area Partnership in Derry Ltd	Challenge Fund

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of MOT tests for lorries, in each of the last three years. (AQW 40131/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The number of lorry MOT tests completed in each of the last three financial years is set out in the table below:

HGV Tests Conducted 2011-14

Tests Conducted	Full Tests	ReTests	Total
2013/14	23,638 *	7,021 *	30,659
2012/13	23,955	7,657	31,612
2011/12	25,476	8,823	34,299

1 These figures are part of DOE Official Statistics reporting and exclude vehicles which failed to attend a scheduled test appointment. Figures with a "*" have been revised since first published to reflect updated system recording.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the additional environmental impacts should 240,000 tonnes of waste be processed annually at the proposed Bombardier incineration plant, compared to his Department's accepted limit of 120,000 tonnes.

(AQW 40155/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department does not have an application before it to process 240,000 tonnes of waste. Therefore, it is not possible for me to speculate on what the environmental impacts may be of processing this or any other amounts of waste, as it would be prejudicial to the statutory planning process

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 38208/11-15, why it was necessary to cease works; and whether his Department has sanctioned the resumption of works on site.

(AQW 40209/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department did not seek the cessation of works on this site. As such, the company was under no restriction to recommence works in accordance with their planning approval.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail efficiencies that have been realised across the Executive since the creation of the Public Sector Reform Division.

(AQW 36284/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Public sector reform is about renewing, redesigning, rethinking, restructuring and reforming to enhance the citizen's experience of public services. Some of the measures of success will be financial; others will be in the shape of better services – some more immediate and others in the future as a result of preventative measures which we put in place now.

Public Sector Reform Division has a "toolkit" which includes methodologies such as Innovation Laboratories; Task and Finish groups; process improvement techniques; organisational review and change management consultancy; benchmarking, research and analysis; and alternative funding models.

Examples of DFP reform initiatives savings include: collaborative procurement - £1.88 million; consolidation and standardisation of ICT infrastructure – over £40 million; rationalisation of Government estate – over £15 million; centralisation of Government financial transactions - £7.5 million; centralisation of HR services - £2 million; centralisation of training – over £5 million; reduction in administration costs resulting from rationalisation of shared services - £3.5 million; and provision of Genealogical data to the public – some financial savings but the main benefit is improvement of public services for example around 145,000 hits to the service (as of 3rd June 2014).

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact that rebalancing business rates will have on businesses investing in Coleraine, given that business properties on streets leading to the town centre are facing increases.

(AQW 39177/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The impact of the revaluation cannot be fully understood until new District and Regional rate poundages are known in February next year. However, the results are very much as expected, so as a revaluation seeks to follow the market, some Net Annual Values (NAV) have fallen and others have risen, based on the analysed market rental evidence. The outcome shows central prime retail values in Coleraine reducing and the secondary streets showing growth from much lower 2001 levels of value, thereby narrowing the differential between primary and secondary areas. The realignment of NAV to current values, results in increases for some parts of Coleraine leading to the town centre, although still at a lower level; this rebalancing represents a fairer share of business rates.

I would share the hope of local trade bodies that a reduction of rates in prime areas of the town will regenerate the whole town centre bringing increased trade for the benefit of everyone, including those areas that will see an increased rate liability.

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the contractors excluded from tender opportunities across all Departments due to a failure to comply with prompt payment of sub-contractors.

(AQW 39182/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: No contractors have been excluded from tender opportunities for construction contracts managed by my Department due to a failure to comply with prompt payment of subcontractors.

My Department continues to monitor fair payment practices in construction contracts across the Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) on a quarterly basis. From 1 November 2013 to 30 September 2014, 196 random checks were carried out by the CoPEs on specific construction contracts. This was to verify that payment was made to subcontractors. These checks have uncovered one instance where there

has been a delay in payment to a subcontractor which is currently being investigated.

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the contractors excluded from construction tender opportunities for payment related issues regarding sub-contractors.

(AQW 39183/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: This question has been transferred from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety as the procurement and delivery of health construction projects is now the responsibility of my Department.

No contractors have been excluded from tender opportunities for construction projects in the health sector due to a failure to comply with prompt payment of subcontractors.

From 1 January 2014 to 30 September 2014, CPD Construction Division – Health Projects has recorded 937 payments made to subcontractors on construction projects in the health sector. A total of 70 random checks were carried out to verify that payment was made to subcontractors on these projects. These checks uncovered one instance where there has been a delay in payment to a subcontractor. Officials within my Department are investigating this matter to ensure that the main contractor has fulfilled its contractual obligations regarding prompt payment.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 37644/11-15, for a breakdown by constituency of the total number of people who are employed in (i) accommodation and food service activities; and (ii) convention and trade show organisers.

(AQW 39387/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Due to the disclosive nature of the data in the “convention and trade show organisers” sector, it is not possible to provide a breakdown of the number of employee jobs in the requested sectors separately.

The combined total number of employee jobs in “accommodation and food service activities” and “convention and trade show organisers”, by constituency, is provided in Table 1 for the year 2013 (the latest available).

Table 1 Total number of employee jobs in the “accommodation and food service activities” and “convention and trade show organisers” sectors

Parliamentary Constituency	Total number of employee jobs
Belfast East	2,357
Belfast North	2,461
Belfast South	7,923
Belfast West	1,345
East Antrim	1,635
East Londonderry	2,853
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	2,407
Foyle	2,663
Lagan Valley	1,705
Mid Ulster	1,643
Newry And Armagh	2,121
North Antrim	2,303
North Down	2,212
South Antrim	1,999
South Down	2,249
Strangford	1,767
Upper Bann	2,078
West Tyrone	1,416
Total	43,137

Source: NI Census of Employment 2013

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the business case for the relocation of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development’s Headquarters was approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel’s Permanent Secretary or approved by Ministerial Direction.[R]

(AQW 39471/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development’s decision to direct her Accounting Officer to relocate the departmental headquarters was agreed, on behalf of the Executive, by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 38995/11-15, whether tenants have an entitlement to seek reimbursement of upfront fees from letting agents, given that the provisions of the Commission on Disposals of Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 make such payments void.

(AQW 39971/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Generally Article 3(6) of the Commission on Disposals of Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 confirms that any money paid under a stipulation to which paragraph (1) or (4) of Article 3 of the Order applies is recoverable by the person by whom it was paid.

There are, however, a number of caveats to this. For example, Article 3(1) and (4) of the Order only apply to agreements or contracts made after the commencement date of the Order. Furthermore, an action pursuant to Article 3(6) of the Order to recover money paid generally cannot be brought after the expiration of six years from the date on which the cause of action accrued.

I am unable to comment further, as a fact specific assessment of any case or cases you might have in mind would be required, as well as targeted legal advice, to determine whether the upfront fees were paid under a stipulation to which Article 3(1) or (4) of the Order applies and if so, whether such fees are recoverable pursuant to Article 3(6) of the Order.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the main aims and objectives of the Special EU Peace Programme IV.

(AQW 39995/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The PEACE IV Programme remains in draft form following submission to the European Commission on 22 September 2014. PEACE IV will promote peace and reconciliation and cohesion between communities within Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland, and thereby contribute to social and economic stability. The key areas proposed for support within the draft programme are Shared Education, Children and Young People, Shared Spaces and Services, and Building Positive Relations at a Local Level.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the findings of the review into the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme.

(AQW 40020/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: A copy of the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy (NICEP) report has been laid in the Assembly under the papers presented process and on 4 December it was published on the DFP website: <http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/rating-review>. NICEP provided evidence to the Finance Committee on 10 December 2014.

The main short term recommendation is to continue the scheme in its current form for 2015/16 until the wider revaluation and district rate convergence effects are known. The draft Budget proposals already make provision of £20m for continuing small business rate relief until 31 March 2016. There are 6 other recommendations in the report and I will be considering them when the 2015/16 Budget is settled.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has considered implementing the proposals contained within the Committee for Finance and Personnel's Report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector that are applicable for his Department and its agencies.

(AQW 40043/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working is a very comprehensive document that contains many useful observations and proposals.

In my Department, we have recognized for some time the benefits that flexible working can bring and have been proactive in implementing a range of alternative working patterns to assist staff in achieving a good work-life balance. This was noted by the Committee when it deemed the NICS an exemplar organisation in this respect.

My Department has also been extremely proactive in exploiting new technology to support flexible and agile working. Examples include Secure Remote Access; NetworkNI (which is now available at all NICS sites); access to the BlackBerry Service; and Unified Communications (which is a key enabler for flexible and agile working).

I believe it is imperative that we continue to explore new ideas and technologies that could help us deliver high quality services in the most efficient way. While the NICS already has an excellent range of flexible working policies and technologies available for departments to utilise as their business needs require, we will continue to keep pace with developments in this area and will introduce new policies and technologies, as the need arises.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the community and voluntary groups in East Londonderry that have received funding from his Department since 2011.

(AQW 40128/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department has not provided funding to any community and voluntary groups in East Londonderry since 2011.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his departmental assessment of how much Corporation Tax was raised in Northern Ireland in 2013/14; and how this compares with the assessment of HM Revenue and Customs.

(AQW 40195/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department has not produced an estimate of the revenue raised in Northern Ireland from Corporation Tax receipts in 2013/14.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what opportunities exist to clear Private Finance Initiative debt with the capital budget and/or Financial Transactions Capital budget to free up resource expenditure.

(AQW 40207/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There is limited opportunity to buy out PFI contracts as PFI consortiums are under no obligation to sell the relevant capital assets.

Where the opportunity does exist to buy out the debt in PFI contracts, the relevant department should assess the opportunity and produce a business case. If it is deemed value for money then the department may proceed, subject to available funding.

The Asset Management Unit has been undertaking work, at the request of departments to review the potential to deliver value for money from operational PFIs.

Financial Transactions Capital can only be used for loans to or equity investment in the private sector and as such it is not suitable for buying out the debt in PFI contracts.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department has produced an analysis and detailed breakdown of the UK Government Financial Package to Northern Ireland as outlined in the Stormont House Agreement.
(AQW 40334/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Stormont House Agreement has an associated Financial Annex which sets out in detail the implications for the Executive's finances. In addition, the 2015-16 final Budget will reflect the outworking of the Stormont House Agreement.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of whether the proposals outlined in the UK Government Financial Package to Northern Ireland creates a net increase or decrease in available capital spend for infrastructure.

(AQW 40336/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: As budgets have not been set beyond 2015-16 it is not possible to comment on the overall impact of the Agreement in future years.

However, it is important to note that before the Stormont House Agreement no Executive borrowing limits had been agreed by HM Treasury for the period beyond 2015-16.

The Executive now has agreement on £750 million of borrowing in the three year period beyond 2015-16 as well as an increase of £100 million in the borrowing limit for 2015-16.

The Stormont House Agreement also provides an additional £500 million of Capital DEL over ten years for shared and integrated education. Of this, £50 million will be available in 2015-16.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a detailed breakdown of the projected costs of relocating Multiple Sclerosis respite services from Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle from December 2014.
(AQW 38293/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has stated that it will comply fully with the Court's ruling granting Interim Relief regarding the decision to temporarily close units in Dalriada Hospital. The Trust has done so on a daily basis by increasing the staffing complement and admitting additional patients in order to return the services at Dalriada to the status quo.

In view of this, at this time, there are no costs relocating Multiple Sclerosis respite services from Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle from December 2014.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total revenue generated by prescription charges, for each of the three years preceding the abolition of prescription charges.

(AQW 39315/11-15)

Mr Wells: The total revenue generated by prescription charges, for each of the three years preceding the abolition of prescription charges is set out as follows:

Year	£'000
2009/2010	10,251
2008/2009	12,739
2007/2008	14,913

*Source: Final Outturn as reported to DFP.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the annual cost of operating each facility used for respite care in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust; and what proportion of this cost relates to respite care.

(AQW 39581/11-15)

Mr Wells: As respite care is provided across a number of Programmes of Care, information on the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust's annual cost of operating each facility used for respite care in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of children receiving; and (ii) the cost of respite services in (a) Omagh; and (b) Derry City.

(AQW 39681/11-15)

Mr Wells: 51 children are availing of residential respite services in Avalon House, Omagh (8 bedded unit). In 2013/14, the total annual running cost of statutory residential respite services at Avalon House, Omagh was £647,606.

34 children are availing of residential respite services in The Cottages, Londonderry, (6 bedded unit). In 2013/14, the total annual running cost of statutory residential respite services at The Cottages, Londonderry, was £531,935.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current provision of services by clinical pharmacologists and therapeutics.

(AQW 39761/11-15)

Mr Wells: The British Pharmacological Society's report "A prescription for the NHS: Recognising the value of clinical pharmacology and therapeutics" shows a wide variation in the number of clinical pharmacology and therapeutics (CPT) consultants across the United Kingdom. The services provided by CPT consultants include clinical specialist services which can be provided by a range of specialist physicians. In respect of medicines policy and management, advice can be provided by pharmacy professionals in collaboration with their medical colleagues.

The appointment of CPT consultants in Northern Ireland is a matter for Belfast Health and Social Care Trust jointly with Queen's University Belfast. I am not aware of any plans to increase the number of practising clinical pharmacology and therapeutic consultants.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, considering the findings in the British Pharmacological Society's report "A prescription for the NHS: Recognising the value of clinical pharmacology and therapeutics", whether he has any plans to increase the number of practising clinical pharmacologists and therapeutics.

(AQW 39762/11-15)

Mr Wells: The British Pharmacological Society's report "A prescription for the NHS: Recognising the value of clinical pharmacology and therapeutics" shows a wide variation in the number of clinical pharmacology and therapeutics (CPT) consultants across the United Kingdom. The services provided by CPT consultants include clinical specialist services which can be provided by a range of specialist physicians. In respect of medicines policy and management, advice can be provided by pharmacy professionals in collaboration with their medical colleagues.

The appointment of CPT consultants in Northern Ireland is a matter for Belfast Health and Social Care Trust jointly with Queen's University Belfast. I am not aware of any plans to increase the number of practising clinical pharmacology and therapeutic consultants.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total expenditure on agency/bank staff including (a) nurses; (b) health care assistants; and (c) other agency health care professionals sourced since January 2014 through (i) the Health and Social Care e-locum regional service; (ii) approved framework locum agencies; and (iii) non-approved locum agencies.

(AQW 39936/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information in the table below was provided by Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) and provides the total expenditure on agency staff only including the requested categories.

The figures do not include bank staff as these staff are employed by the Trusts and are therefore not procured through the three mechanisms referred to.

The figures also do not include locum doctors as these figures were provided in response to AQW 37685/11-15 on 4 November 2014, which the member tabled, and I would refer you to that response.

The figures therefore refer to non-medical staff only.

HSCT	HSC E-Locum Regional Service	Approved Framework Locum Agencies	Non Approved Locum Agencies
BHSCT	Nil	£5,213,547	£856,460
SEHSCT	Nil	£2,173,200 Trust has advised that within the timeframe given it would not be possible to breakdown these two categories. They have further advised that they do not routinely use unapproved agencies for nursing and that the figure is negligible. In the total below we have therefore included the full SEHSCT expenditure under the 'Approved' heading.	
SHSCT	Nil	£420,055	Nil
NHSCT	Nil	£4,700,000	£1,149,000
WHSCT	Nil	£2,843,980	£632,051

HSCT	HSC E-Locum Regional Service	Approved Framework Locum Agencies	Non Approved Locum Agencies
Total	Nil	£15,350,782	£2,637,511

Staff procured through Agencies are particularly vital to provide services across a range of professions and/or locations where staff vacancies have been difficult to fill on a substantive basis.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current dialogue between his Department and each Health and Social Trust regarding the projected cuts to achieve £113m in savings for the next financial year.

(AQW 39938/11-15)

Mr Wells: The preliminary assessment by my Department has identified a plan to deliver financial balance for 2015/16 and address all unavoidable cost pressures. However, this can only be achieved if there are no new service developments and if a significant savings delivery target is achieved.

The Trusts are developing their savings plans for 2015/16 and they will be subject to rigorous scrutiny and challenge by the HSCB, in liaison with the Public Health Agency, before submission to the Department. In presenting the proposed savings plans my Department has sought the following assurances

- that patient and client care will continue to be provided safely and that the quality of such care will be maintained;
- that best practice is being shared across Northern Ireland and that proposals are being treated consistently across organisations, as appropriate, through a “comply or explain” approach;
- that any necessary community or primary care capacity will be available to pick up the proposed downturn in acute activity;
- that discretionary expenditure, management costs and procurement efficiencies have been targeted, with a consistent approach to various initiatives across N Ireland; and
- that savings proposals will be subject to public consultation and equality screening /impacts, as appropriate, in line with Departmental and organisational legislation and guidance.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide breakdown of the costs in relation to litigation proceedings against the Health Service in each of the last three years.

(AQW 40038/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information requested is set out in the table below:

Year	2011/12 (£m)	2012/13 (£m)	2013/14 (£m)
Plaintiff Cost	8	5	12
Defence Cost	3	3	4
*DLS Cost	1	2	1
Total	12	10	17

*DLS – Directorate of Legal Services

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the Northern Ireland Cancer Services Framework (2009) states that all cancer patients should be assessed by a cancer nurse specialist, what action he has taken over the last three years to facilitate this.

(AQW 40040/11-15)

Mr Wells: There has been ongoing investment and development in cancer services. The Cancer Service Framework will undergo a fundamental review this year to consider the standards and associated performance levels for cancer services, and to ensure progress continues to be made.

The HSCB and PHA are working to develop a prioritised, phased plan by which the availability of cancer nurse specialists (CNSs) can be increased to meet increasing clinical demand for this service. This plan should be available by March 2015.

In addition, a chemotherapy review is currently underway and is expected to identify the potential to optimise the input of all clinical staff, particularly skilled nursing staff, including CNSs.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for an update on the status of the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS); (ii) the total funds available from the PPRS; and (iii) whether funds can be used to address unequal access to cancer and other specialist drugs.

(AQW 40119/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i) The Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS) is a UK wide scheme and the quarterly payments made under the provisions of the scheme are received by the Department of Health (London). The PPRS does not specify how the payments are to be allocated to or how they should be used by the devolved administrations.
- (ii) A PPRS payment of £2.98m was received by the HSC Board in June 2014 in respect of the period January to March 2014. The PPRS payment estimate for the UK in 2014-15 is £454m.
- (iii) In September 2014, I launched an evaluation of the Individual Funding Request (IFR) process to consider the existing process and a range of other factors influencing access to cancer and other specialist medicines including the Early Access to Medicines Scheme, PPRS and the potential to finance a specialist drugs fund through the reintroduction of prescription charges. The evaluation is due to be completed by the end of the year and I will update the Assembly on the outcome of the evaluation once I have considered its conclusions.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust spent on taxi services in (i) 2012; (ii) 2013; and (iii) 2014.

(AQW 40146/11-15)

Mr Wells: Expenditure by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust on client taxis in each of the last three financial years is set out in the table below; this expenditure includes costs for private taxis and bus hire companies.

Taxis are used for the transport of patients and clients, e.g. the safe transportation of children in care; adult mental health outpatients, facilitating transport of patients to renal dialysis treatment; transporting clients to day centres etc. In addition taxis are required for the transportation of blood, medical records, equipment and staff escorting patients.

The use of taxis by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is planned and monitored.

2013/14 £	2012/13 £	2011/12 £
1,007,027	934,412	1,014,604

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust have spent on St. John's Ambulance transfers to and from Downe Hospital in (i) 2012; (ii) 2013; and (iii) 2014.

(AQW 40149/11-15)

Mr Wells: Expenditure by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust on St John's Ambulance transfers to and from Downe Hospital in each of the last three financial years is set out in the table below.

2013/14 £	2012/13 £	2011/12 £
6,656	7,876	9,539

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what alternative contingency plans South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust officials have presented to his Department in recent months in order to make the financial savings asked of them.

(AQW 40150/11-15)

Mr Wells: All Trusts were advised during the summer that it would be necessary to implement a range of contingency proposals given the outcome of June Monitoring and the first draft of their proposals were produced in August. Since then, the HSCB (in liaison with the PHA) has liaised closely with all Trusts and has critically reviewed, analysed and revised the proposals as appropriate to safeguard the safety and integrity of services and to reflect the subsequent outcome of October Monitoring.

Below is a list of contingency plan proposals for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. This list excludes measures to contain goods and services expenditure and administration costs, which are being managed locally within Trusts in order to help achieve break even. They also exclude the original savings proposals from the start of 2014/15, which were part of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust's contributions to the overall Departmental savings target of £170m.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust's contingency plans have necessarily changed throughout this process to reflect the changing financial context. The additional funding that was made available through the October Monitoring round meant that the level of unfunded pressures to be resolved through contingency plans was significantly reduced.

A range of proposals were therefore not utilised such as closure of statutory care home and family centres, more significant cuts to elective care, agency and locum spend and domiciliary care.

All Trusts (and other Arms Length Bodies) are expected to achieve financial balance by the year end.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Contingency Plans 2014/15

Description	Proposal	£'m
Workforce - Ward Closure	Stabilisation of agency nursing workforce resulting in 6 bed closures in LVH and 20 in Bangor	0.410
Overtime	Reduce 50% of all non admin overtime	0.599
Agency	30% reduction in non-acute agency spend	0.495
Bed Reduction - Downe	Closure of 9 Beds Downe Hospital	0.333
Domiciliary Care	Review of Domiciliary Care	0.200
Community Services –Taxis	Reduction in use of client taxis within community settings	0.132
Clinical Excellence Awards	Withdraw circular on clinical excellence awards for 2012/13, 2013/14 & 2014/15	0.115
	Totals	2.284

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38999/11-15, to detail the average length of stay for families travelling outside of Northern Ireland for their child's heart surgery or treatment. **(AQW 40196/11-15)**

Mr Wells: The average length of stay for families travelling outside of Northern Ireland for their child's heart surgery or treatment is 16 days (17 days if travel time is included). The length of stay depends on the treatment needs of the patient, and varies between 1 and 116 days.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38997/11-15, whether the Board is producing a new policy or adapting an existing one on the subsistence and travel needs for families travelling outside of Northern Ireland for their child's medical treatment; and whether the Health and Social Care Board consulted with relevant organisations on this policy.

(AQW 40197/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Health and Social Care Board's (HSCB) current approach to reimbursement for patient travel and subsistence costs is based on the policies used by legacy Health and Social Services Boards prior to their amalgamation into one regional Board. The Board now proposes to formalise these into one formal policy which will be publicly available on its website. This policy, which will apply to all patients and not just paediatric patients, will be the subject of a formal engagement exercise with relevant stakeholder groups and with a representative sample of patients who have previously sought reimbursement for costs associated with treatment outside Northern Ireland.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the administration costs of the Western Health and Social Care Trust, to detail (i) the annual cost; and (ii) the reduction in these costs in each of the last five years.

(AQW 40213/11-15)

Mr Wells: Administration costs for the Western Health and Social Services Trust in each of the last five years are set out in the table below.

Costs include total administrative and clerical costs, including staff supporting the delivery of front line services to patients and clients.

2013/14 £'000	2012/13 £'000	2011/12 £'000	2010/11 £'000	2009/10 £'000
43,666	43,544	41,157	39,489	38,786

*Source: WHSCT

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to review other non-admissions policies within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust following the High Court decision on the Northern Health and Social Care Trust's non-admission policy to Dalriada Hospital, to ensure they are legally enforceable.

(AQW 40215/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has never had a non-admissions policy in relation to any of its Community Hospitals including Dalriada Hospital. The proposed temporary closure of the MS Respite Unit and Intermediate Care beds at Dalriada Hospital was part of the Trust's contingency savings plan for 2014/15. The Health and Social Care Board, in liaison with the Public Health Agency, has worked closely with the Trust since August 2014 to critically review, analyse and revise its savings proposals as appropriate in order to safeguard the safety and integrity of services.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy.

(AQW 40279/11-15)

Mr Wells: A public consultation exercise on the Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy launched on 15 January 2014 and officially closed on 11 April 2014. The consultation received 69 responses.

All 69 consultation responses, as well as a summary Consultation Response Report, were published on the Department's website on 26 November 2014.

The Strategy is on course for publication in March 2015.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the rationale behind the decision to cease the self-referral physiotherapist pilot scheme by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 40292/11-15)

Mr Wells: As set out in my responses to AQW 38836/11-15 and AGY 928 2014, the self-referral physiotherapist pilot scheme has been delayed due to the current waiting time challenge in respect of physiotherapy services. The Health and Social Care Board is continuing to work with providers to address these increasing waiting times and, once addressed, the HSCB intends to introduce the proposed self-referral arrangements for physiotherapy.

Department of Justice

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what steps can be taken to prevent people convicted of animal cruelty from owning pets.

(AQW 40271/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The relevant legislation in respect of those convicted of animal cruelty offences is the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 which is the responsibility of DARD.

The legislation provides courts with the power to make a deprivation and/ or a disqualification order against an individual found guilty of committing an offence.

Enforcement of the legislation sits with the appropriate enforcement body, which is, in the case of:

- Farmed animals – DARD
- Non Farmed animals – Councils and
- Welfare cases involving Animal fighting, wild animals and where other criminal activities are involved – PSNI.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to a register of people convicted of animal cruelty which could be accessed by organisations that re-home pets.

(AQW 40328/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials from my Department are currently working closely with their colleagues from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in relation to the review of the implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which was established by the DARD Minister in 2014.

One of the proposals being considered is the feasibility of establishing a central register of those convicted of animal welfare offences.

The review's steering group is due to provide an interim report to me and to the DARD Minister in January which will include emerging recommendations based on the analysis of the evidence to date. The interim report will also be brought to the attention of MLAs and posted on the DARD and DOJ websites. It is expected that the Review team will produce its final report in Spring 2015.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice, given the recent levels of major crime, for an update on the National Crime Agency in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 7248/11-15)

Mr Ford: The National Crime Agency is still prohibited from operating in the devolved arena in Northern Ireland, and as I have stated many times, there is clearly a major gap in our ability to tackle serious and organised crime groups as a result.

This is why I, along with the PSNI, the NCA, the NIO and the Home Office, am making every attempt to resolve the situation.

On 8 September, I circulated an updated proposal paper to, among others, the main political parties, the Justice Committee and Northern Ireland Policing Board setting out proposals on the accountability of the National Crime Agency which should, in my view, enable us to achieve the full operation of the Agency here. It is a comprehensive proposal which would create clear, transparent and significant local accountability and it is the result of extensive work between my Department, the NCA, the PSNI and the Home Office and has the full commitment of all these bodies to make it work.

Since then I have met with all the main parties, and I will continue to engage. However, as I have said previously, we cannot operate in this situation of limbo indefinitely – if there is no resolution soon we may have to find a way to work within the present limitations.

What are these limitations? Well, there is currently a complete absence of civil recovery here in the devolved arena – making Northern Ireland a potentially attractive place for criminals to operate or keep their assets. There is also an inability to source financial investigation expertise from the NCA where the offences being investigated are devolved, which in turn has hindered a number of investigations – eg waste crime.

The NCA cannot assist the PSNI with, amongst many other things, child exploitation and human trafficking operations, again leaving Northern Ireland at a disadvantage.

I would continue to urge all members to work constructively to reach agreement on the current proposals so that our law enforcement agencies and our people can benefit from the skill, expertise and resources of the National Crime Agency.

Department for Regional Development

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the plans for a cycleway, as part of the A2 Shore Road upgrade at Greenisland, have been altered during construction.
(AQW 37464/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The published plans for the A2 Shore Road Greenisland include a continuous combined footway/cycleway on the shore side of the road, between Jordanstown Road and Station Road Greenisland. These plans have not changed during construction.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the consultation on the Craigtantlet crossroads scheme.
(AQW 38168/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As you will be aware, three options were put forward for public consultation, which took place between 21 January and 7 February 2014. This process has generated much discussion and a healthy debate on which scheme should be taken forward.

Having considered all of the relevant information available to me, I am minded to approve Option 3A; that is, a single roundabout with a new link road, as the preferred option.

I am aware this scheme could have an impact on properties and the local environment. Before confirming the preferred scheme for improving the road network in Craigtantlet, I have asked my officials to hold pre-application discussions with counterparts from DOE Planning regarding the acceptability of this layout.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Craigtantlet roundabout scheme.
(AQW 39074/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Three options were put forward for public consultation, which took place between 21 January and 7 February 2014. This process has generated much discussion and a healthy debate on which option should be taken forward.

Having considered all of the relevant information available to me, I am minded to approve Option 3A, that is, a single roundabout with a new link road, as the preferred option.

I am aware this scheme could have an impact on the local environment. Before confirming the preferred scheme for improving the road network in Craigtantlet, I have asked my officials to carry out pre-application enquiries with their counterparts in the Department of the Environment's Planning regarding the acceptability of this layout.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has considered implementing the proposals contained within the Committee for Finance and Personnel's Report on the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector that are applicable for his Department and its agencies.
(AQW 40006/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Committee's comprehensive report contains a number of useful observations and proposals. In line with its recommendations, and in conjunction with the Department of Finance and Personnel, my Department will continue to explore new ideas and technologies which have the potential to improve service delivery and which build on the flexible working practices already in place. Existing arrangements include flexible working time, alternative working patterns, teleworking, videoconferencing and the utilisation of NetworkNI.

Similarly, my Department's Arm's Length Bodies recognise the business and staff benefits of flexible working which are set out in the report. I understand that Northern Ireland Water has already done much to modernise working arrangements, including the introduction of hot-desking, the rationalisation of office accommodation locations and the improved use of technology to support a flexible and mobile workforce. Translink operates a flexible working policy which is reviewed annually

and which is facilitated through the provision of emerging technologies including Secure Remote Access, hot-desk facilities and access to the BlackBerry service.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has plans to curtail the flood alleviation budget for Sicily Park or has this expenditure been ring-fenced.

(AQW 40037/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have no plans to curtail the budget for the Sicily Park flood alleviation scheme. Development of the scheme is progressing and NI Water has advised that it should reach tender stage by May 2015, subject to agreement of third party land issues and the conclusion of statutory approvals.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 38902/11-15, why NI Water is not planning to upgrade Waste Water Treatment Works in (i) Blaney; (ii) Churchill; (iii) Drumgay; (iv) Ederney; and (v) Garrison in the next price control period, despite these works operating at over capacity.

(AQW 40065/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Although there is significant capital spend allocated to meet wastewater treatment works quality compliance standards and address capacity issues, there is a need to prioritise the work within a defined budget. The upgrades to Blaney, Churchill, Drumgay, Ederney and Garrison fall outside the present priority.

NI Water in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) reviews the need for upgrade based on quality compliance, development constraints and operational factors, the assessment of which produces a prioritised list of works requiring upgrade which can be matched against the availability of funding.

The operational and compliance reviews are carried out annually on small wastewater treatment works with a population equivalent (PE) of less than 250PE (Blaney, Churchill and Drumgay) and for the larger works greater than 250 PE (Ederney and Garrison) in preparation for the Price Control period programme. The PE is the summation of the population and the trade served.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 38902/11-15, to list the Waste Water Treatment Works that are currently not accepting additional connections and resulting in further housing development in the area being held back.

(AQW 40068/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The wastewater treatment works in Fermanagh that have constraints on connection to the sewer system are as set out below.

Wastewater Treatment Works in Fermanagh

- | | |
|-----------|-----------------|
| ■ Belleek | ■ Garrison |
| ■ Clabby | ■ Newtownbutler |
| ■ Ederney | ■ Rosslea |

Tamlaght It should be noted that while NI Water is consulted by Planning Service as part of the planning process, the decision on whether or not to approve or refuse planning permission rests with Planning Service. Where a development application is received by NI Water it is assessed against both the network and treatment capacities of the sewerage system. Like-for-like development is not curtailed, nor is any development that reduces the load on the system or where there is a confirmed start to upgrade with a defined completion within two years of the start.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development what are the potential environmental impacts of a Waste Water Treatment Works operating above capacity or design capacity.

(AQW 40071/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Northern Ireland Water (NI Water) submits an annual return to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) detailing the actual and design population equivalent for each Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW). A list of overloaded WWTWs is agreed using the capacity at each site. This capacity is based on the available numeric and/or operational headroom and ensures alignment between NIEA and NI Water to planning responses.

In this assessment, a WWTW could be numerically overloaded but operating well and meeting its discharge standards as set by NIEA. In such circumstances no constraint on headroom would be imposed. NIEA is responsible for the monitoring of WWTW discharges against the consented standard and if concerns are identified that adversely impact the environment they will impose an enforcement notice on NI Water requesting details of actions to address the problem identified. NI Water will manage the situation through an increased level of site maintenance or investment from the prioritised programme of capital work.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 39044/11-15, (i) what level of incentive exists for NI Water to improve upon the accuracy of their billing process when it is allowed to backdate 100 per cent of a bill that it

initially got wrong; (ii) whether NI Water can claim back over 6 years in all inaccuracy cases; and (iii) what changes will be made to ensure that NI Water are producing more accurate bills for non-domestic customers.

(AQW 40074/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

- (i) NI Water has an ongoing programme to improve data quality and thereby ensure that customers are billed accurately and fairly. NI Water's performance in this regard is incentivised by oversight from the Utility Regulator; formal reporting billing performance to the Regulator through the Annual Information Return process; oversight by the Consumer Council and my Department; and the impact on reputation.
- (ii) In circumstances where a customer has been charged incorrectly, NI Water is permitted to bill for any undercharge during the previous 6 years in accordance with The Limitations (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.
- (iii) NI Water has taken proactive steps to ensure more accurate bills for non domestic customers. This includes close scrutiny of customer account configurations in the billing system as well as fieldwork to verify physical data elements such as meter serial numbers. It is important and necessary that any errors, once identified, are corrected even if this has the unwelcome consequence of affecting customer bills. Further account corrections are to be expected as this programme continues.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development how much putting cycle markings alongside bus lane markings, to raise awareness of the permitted use of bicycles in bus lanes, would cost his Department; and whether he has considered such a policy.

(AQW 40076/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The types of vehicles (including bicycles) permitted to use bus lanes are indicated by the use of upright signs erected at intervals along the length of the lanes. Generally current UK guidance does not consider additional signs or markings are necessary and there is no readily available estimate of the cost of provision.

As indicated in the Bicycle Strategy, some of the developing bicycle network will initially make use of bus lanes which permit bicycles. Therefore additional markings which highlight a cycle route in a bus lane will be given consideration following finalisation of the Bicycle Strategy.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the proposed Park and Ride Facilities at Stangmore, Dungannon is designed to be a general 200 space car park or for the exclusive use of people using the Translink Passenger Pick Up.

(AQW 40112/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The proposed Park & Ride facilities at Stangmore Dungannon will be designed to cater for both Park & Ride and Park & Share customers.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the community and voluntary groups in East Londonderry that have received funding from his Department since 2011.

(AQW 40169/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Please see below the list of community and voluntary groups and the relevant funding programme who have received funding from my Department since 2011.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ 1st Garvagh Church | ■ Garvagh & District Diamond Club |
| ■ 1st Macosquin Boys Brigade | ■ Garvagh Pipe Band |
| ■ 2nd Kilrea Presbyterian Women | ■ Garvagh Womens Institute |
| ■ Aghadowey WI | ■ Garvagh Women's Network |
| ■ Aghanloo Womens Institute | ■ Glenullin Childcare Trust |
| ■ Alzheimers Society Causeway Service | ■ Health & Social Care Retirement Fellowship NI - Causeway Branch |
| ■ Articlave Young at Heart | ■ Health and Social Care Retirement Fellowship |
| ■ Ballybogey Over 50's Club | ■ Killyvalley Residents Association |
| ■ Boveedy Springwell Club | ■ Kilrea Ageing Well Club |
| ■ Bovevagh Sunday School | ■ Kilrea Wednesday Walkers |
| ■ Castlerock Senior Citizens Club | ■ Lower Bann Area Group of WI |
| ■ Causeway N.H.S. Retirement Fellowship | ■ Macosquin Pres. Church |
| ■ Coleraine Borough 50+ Forum | ■ Macosquin Pres. Church Youth Org. 'Blast' |
| ■ Compass Advocacy Network | ■ Macosquin Presbyterian Church Youth Fellowship |
| ■ Crafts With Love | ■ Macosquin Presbyterian Friendship Group |
| ■ First Limavady Girls Brigade | ■ Macosquin Women's Institute |
| ■ Garvagh & District Development Ass. | |

- Moneydig Rural Network Group
- Movenis Area Community Ass.
- North Coast Community Transport (NCCT)
- Regimental Association of UDR Coleraine Branch
- Texas Kickers Linedance Group
- Windyhall 50+ Club

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development how many street lights are not operational.
(AQW 40202/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As of 19 December 2014, I am aware of approximately 17,800 street lights that are not operational.

My Department's Operations and Maintenance staff are striving to deal with as many street lighting defects as possible, giving priority to electrical and structural safety defects, followed by large groups of lights out, smaller groups and then individual street lights.

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the average time taken to repair a street light from the instance the fault is reported.

(AQW 40203/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In the current circumstances, where my Department does not have sufficient budget to employ the external contractors who normally repair 75% of street lights that fail, it is not possible to give a meaningful average time for street lighting repairs. However, I can confirm that between 8 August and 19 December 2014 approximately 26,500 lights have been reported out. In this period, over 8,700 lights have been repaired, leaving some 17,800 lights out as of 19 December 2014.

My Department has not stopped repairing faulty street lights. All reported defects are being recorded and prioritised for repair as soon as possible by my Department's Operations and Maintenance staff.

Department for Social Development

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development, given the proposal to set aside £70m to fund a package of measures designed to mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform on the most vulnerable, to detail (i) what the proposal means with regards to Welfare Reform, including what has been agreed to date; (ii) what has not been agreed; (iii) when he anticipates the Executive coming to an agreement on this issue; (iv) how the "most vulnerable" will be defined; and (v) the rationale for the £70m figure.

(AQW 40104/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): Following the Stormont House Agreement, the Minister for Social Development will bring legislation before the Assembly in January to give effect to welfare changes alongside further work to develop and implement flexibilities and financial support from the block grant as part of a package of measures to support the most vulnerable.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what financial provision is in place to ensure that a person with a severe disability receives sufficient benefits when Employment Support Allowance is suspended or refused; and to detail the benefits available.

(AQW 40177/11-15)

Mr Storey: here are a variety of reasons why payments of Employment and Support Allowance may be suspended including investigation of capital, fraud and household income. Claimants whose Employment and Support Allowance claim has been suspended can make an application for a Crisis Loan and eligibility will be considered.

Claimants whose payment of Employment and Support Allowance ceases due to a limited capability for work disallowance and who appeal, may have their benefit reinstated pending the outcome of their appeal provided they continue to provide medical evidence from their GP.

Alternatively, claimants who have been disallowed can claim another benefit for e.g., Jobseekers Allowance, Carers Allowance, Income Support or take steps to find work.

Claimants can also contact their local Jobs and Benefits Offices for information on benefits and how they can be claimed. They can also avail of a free and confidential benefit check through the 'Make the Call' Benefits Advice Line, 0800 232 1271. This will ensure they are not missing out on any potential benefit entitlement.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what provision is in place to ensure that every person with a disability receives a minimum level of income.

(AQW 40180/11-15)

Mr Storey: A minimum income level for disabled people is not available from the benefit system. Each person may make a claim to any benefit and entitlement will be decided based on the criteria set out in legislation

In relation to benefits, the Agency provides help and advice to people through its network of Social Security Offices/Jobs and Benefits Offices and through the wide range of literature available which provides information on benefits and how to claim. Information on benefit entitlement is also available for the public to access in the "Money, tax and benefits" section of nidirect, the official Government website for all Northern Ireland citizens.

In addition, the Social Security Agency, through its benefit uptake work, encourages people of all ages and in all circumstances to have a benefit entitlement check, either through its work with the voluntary and community sector or through the 'Make the Call' Benefits Advice Line, 0800 232 1271. Those with a disability or likely to be entitled to disability benefits have been targeted as part of this work.

People can avail of a free and confidential benefit entitlement check, to ensure that they are not missing out on potential entitlement to the wide range of Government services and supports available. Help can be given with making a claim and a home visit by a Community Outreach Officer can be made to help with the filling in of benefit claim forms, if applicable. Last year, £14.2million in additional annual benefits and arrears was generated by benefit uptake activities; over £8million of this was in benefits for those with an illness or a disability.

There are a number of social security benefits that people with disabilities can claim.

Attendance Allowance is a tax-free social security benefit for people aged over 65 with an illness or disability to help with personal care. Attendance Allowance provides a contribution towards some of the extra costs faced by severely disabled people as a result of their disabilities. Entitlement to Attendance Allowance depends on the extent to which the person needs help with personal care or needs supervision from another person. Entitlement depends on the effects of disability on a person's life, not on a particular disability or diagnosis. This reliance on effects rather than the disability itself ensures that all severely-disabled people have equal access to the benefit, whatever the causes of their disabilities.

Disability Living Allowance is a tax-free social security benefit for people aged under 65 with an illness or disability who need help with getting around, or help with personal care, or help with both of these. Disability Living Allowance provides a contribution towards some of the extra costs faced by severely disabled people as a result of their disabilities. Entitlement to Disability Living Allowance depends on the extent to which the person needs help with personal care, needs supervision or has difficulties with walking. Entitlement depends on the effects of disability on a person's life, not on a particular disability or diagnosis. This reliance on effects rather than the disability itself ensures that all severely disabled people have equal access to the benefit, whatever the causes of their disabilities.

Employment and Support Allowance is a benefit paid to persons of working age who fulfil the benefit entitlement conditions and who have an illness or disability and who have limited capability for work.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 39128/11-15, to detail the (i) names; (ii) job titles; and (iii) organisations represented of the members of the Independent Review Panel that approved the funding for the application from Lurgan Golf Club.

(AQW 40192/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Panel that approved the funding comprised Grade 7's (or Deputy Principals where a Grade 7 was unavailable) from the Regional Development Office's senior management team.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development whether the individual has ever declared any interest whilst being involved in the approval process for assistance to GAA clubs under the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme.

(AQW 40193/11-15)

Mr Storey: (It is assumed that the question relates to the individual referred to in AQW 38301/11-15, AQW 38300/11-15 and AQW39128/11-15.)

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the recent amendments to the current Disability Living Allowance application form, including when they became active.

(AQW 40198/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Disability Living Allowance Adult and Child claim forms were updated and available from 27 October 2014. Whilst some amendments were textual, a number of other changes were made.

In the Child claim form a new question asking for the Child Benefit number and a new section "About Income Support" have been added.

In the Adult claim form a new question "Have you been referred to a Falls Clinic?" has been added to the section "Help with your care needs during the day (continued)", and "Armed Forces Independence Payment" has been added to the section "About other benefits".

These updates are in line with those included in the claim forms issued by the Department of Work and Pensions.

In addition, a new editable version of the Disability Living Allowance claim forms is now available for download, editing and printing from the government website www.nidirect.gov.uk.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 16 January 2015

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the North South Ministerial Council has recently acquired, or is in the process of acquiring, the use of further property in Armagh; and in whose name the lease is held, or will be held.
(AQW 20563/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The North South Ministerial Council has not recently acquired or is not in the process of acquiring further property in Armagh City.

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps are being taken by their Department to provide input on, and to co-ordinate, a cross departmental action plan to tackle Female Genital Mutilation.
(AQW 38186/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our Department is not co-ordinating a cross departmental action plan but will provide input to any action plan that is developed.

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many court cases the Equality Commission has initiated in each of the last five years.
(AQW 39967/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. It is independent from Government and Ministers in respect of its operation. As such, the issue you have raised is a matter for the Equality Commission.

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much of the Equality Commission's budget has been spent on legal action and court cases in each of the last five years.
(AQW 39968/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. It is independent from Government and Ministers in respect of its operation. As such, the issue you have raised is a matter for the Equality Commission.

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the total budget of the Equality Commission in each of the last five years.
(AQW 39969/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Commission's total budget for the period is outlined in the following table –

Year	Total Budget *
2009/10	£7,040,791
2010/11	£6,984,845
2011/12	£6,682,716
2012/13	£6,558,622
2013/14	£6,502,707

*In addition to the grant-in-aid provided by our Department each year, the Equality Commission also generates income.

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the projected budget of the Equality Commission for 2015/16.

(AQW 39970/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The budget allocation for the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has not yet been confirmed as part of 2015/16 draft Budget. Officials are currently working on the outcome of the 2015/16 Budget.

Mr McElduff asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what assistance their Department provides victims giving evidence at the Historical Institutional Abuse inquiry.

(AQO 7226/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In establishing the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse, the well being, both emotionally and physically, of victims and survivors was at the heart of all decision-making.

Since January 2012, Lifeline has provided ongoing face to face and telephone crisis counselling by arrangement, facilitating clients with face to face counselling that could be arranged in the Lifeline premises in Belfast or Derry/Londonderry, or in another convenient location.

From 1 August 2013, Contact NI, providers of the Lifeline Service, have been contracted to provide a bespoke support service for HIA victims and survivors, including non crisis counselling; caseworker support to assist individuals with benefits entitlement, housing, debt, tracing personal records, education matters; additional bridging counselling for any victims and survivors waiting for referral appointments with a specialist service. A co-ordinator oversees the provision of the service.

Since October 2012, the Department has funded the WAVE Trauma Centre to provide a drop-in and counselling facility for victims and survivors in Derry/Londonderry. A qualified Trauma counsellor provided by WAVE Trauma Centre is on hand to support victims and survivors.

Since 27 September 2013 a Belfast drop-in centre has been re-established and the service is provided by RELATE.

The Inquiry Team include Witness Support Officers who offered support during the Acknowledgement Forum phase and continue to provide support before, during and after attendance at the inquiry.

The Inquiry Witness Support Officers have been in place since before the start of the Acknowledgement Forum in October 2012, providing victims and survivors with support and clear information on the format of the Inquiry and what to expect.

Support for witnesses attending the formal hearings in Banbridge is provided by the Inquiry's Witness Support Officers.

We have also made arrangements to have professionally trained counsellors on-site in Banbridge should they be required at any point during the hearings.

We will continue to listen, to meet with victims groups and to do all we can to ensure victims and survivors are supported throughout the Inquiry process.

Mrs Dobson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what impact the comments made by the Sinn Féin President, that equality was a Trojan horse of the republican strategy, will have on their ability to deliver on their equality priorities.

(AQO 7227/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM, along with other public authorities, has a statutory obligation to implement Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. OFMDFM is also bound by equality legislation generally. We will continue to develop our equality policies and priorities in accordance with our statutory obligations and in line with equality legislation.

Mr Clarke asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on Together: Building a United Community.

(AQO 7228/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Work is progressing well across all seven headline actions that were announced alongside the publication of Together: Building a United Community.

The Department of Education announced the first three Shared Education Campuses on 2 July. A second call for applications issued on 1 October.

In respect of the United Youth Programme, the design team has produced a draft Outcomes and Principles Framework. A call for concept proposals was issued in September. Following a development phase during October and November, pilot applications were submitted in early December, with a view to commencing the pilot phase in early 2015.

With regard to summer schools/camps, a number of summer interventions/pilot schemes took place during summer 2014 and the Halloween mid-term break with more to follow later in the year. An evaluation of these interventions/pilot schemes, along with a series of co-design workshops, will be used to design and develop a programme of 100 summer schools/camps for summer 2015.

In relation to urban villages, stakeholder engagement is ongoing regarding the development of the first two locations, announced as the Lower Newtownards Road and Colin Town Centre.

Work on the removal of interface barriers continues, work to date has reduced this number from 59 to 53 and engagement is currently ongoing with 40 of the 53 remaining areas.

A pilot project for the cross community sports programme will be delivered in 2014/15 in areas which have experienced interface tensions and significant deprivation. The pilot project will be aimed at 11-16 year olds and will have a proactive focus on females, ethnic minority and disabled participation.

Work to deliver the 10 shared neighbourhoods is progressing well. The first social housing development at Ravenhill Road is near completion. Construction works have also commenced on 3 other sites (Ravenhill Road Phase 2; Felden Mill, Newtownabbey and Crossgar, Saintfield).

In relation to the Review of Good Relations funding delivery the review was carried out by the Strategic Investment Board and was completed in September 2014. The recommendations contained within the review and their impact are currently being considered.

The strategy commits to establishing a number of thematic subgroups under the auspices of the Ministerial Panel to reflect the strategic priorities arising from the strategy. These include:

- Children & young people
- Housing
- Community tensions/summer interventions
- Flags
- Interfaces

To date the Housing subgroup has been established and the Community Tensions subgroup will meet for the first time in the New Year. Work is progressing well in respect of the establishment of the Children and Young People subgroup.

In addition to the above, Together: Building a United Community outlines a number of commitments in addition to the seven headline actions and work is progressing across departments to take forward work in line with the strategic priorities of the strategy.

Mr G Robinson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which sectors are covered by the Expressions of Interest in the former Ministry of Defence base at Ballykelly.

(AQO 7230/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The soft market testing exercise for the former Shackleton Barracks site at Ballykelly concluded on 24 January 2014. Over 40 expressions of interest were received from a range of sectors including public, commercial, industrial, agricultural, leisure and the community sectors.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much departmental grant funding has been awarded to farmers in Upper Bann, in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 40320/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): My Department has awarded grants of £1,178,782 in the 2012/13 financial year and £904,843 in the 2013/14 financial year.

Subsidy schemes (such as Single Farm Payment and Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowances) are not included. These figures are based on actual payments.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many incidents of stolen livestock have been reported in the Upper Bann area, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 40321/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

	2012 - 2013	2013 - 2014
Number of Incidents	142	215

The above table only records the number of incidents involving missing or stolen cattle in the Armagh Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO) area.

APHIS does not keep information by constituency. The majority of the Upper Bann area is within the boundaries of the Armagh Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO) area.

APHIS does not differentiate between missing or stolen cattle. Information involving any other missing or stolen livestock is not recorded on APHIS at present.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list the community voluntary groups in Upper Bann that have received funding from her Department since 2011.

(AQW 40322/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Please see below list of community voluntary groups in Upper Bann constituency that have received funding from my Department since 2011.

Axis 3 Rural Development Programme

- South Lough Neagh Regeneration Association (2 Projects)
- Lylo Schoolhouse
- Bleary Farmers Hall Management Committee
- Maghera District Hall Committee
- Aghagallon Community Centre
- Derrytrasna Playgroup
- Lagan Canal Restoration Trust
- Rathfriland Football Club
- Milltown Rural Development Association
- Moneyslane Rural Community Hub
- SOAR Local Action Group (2 Projects)
- Lough Neagh Rescue Ltd
- Ardmore Rural Community Association
- Tanvally & Anaghlonge Project
- Milltown Rural development association
- High Moss Sarsfields Football Club

Rural Challenge Programme

- Down Armagh Rural Transport Partnership
- TADA Rural Network
- Loughshore Care Partnership Community Association

Rural Community Development Support Service

- Tyrone, Armagh, Down & Antrim community network

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much funding has been supplied by her Department to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups since May 2007.

(AQW 40344/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: £5k was provided to The Rainbow Project to carry out research into the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people living in rural areas in the north of Ireland.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, having encouraged farmers to plant non-commercial species of trees under the Countryside Management Scheme and given the greening benefit, why her Department is now insisting that farmers who followed this course cannot include this land in area based support measures under the Common Agriculture Policy.

(AQW 40369/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The eligibility of land for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) is set out in Regulation (EU) 1307/2013. As a general principle, woodland is not eligible for BPS support. However, the following specific exceptions to this principle are detailed in the Regulation.

1. Land that was eligible and on which Single Farm Payment (SFP) was paid in respect of the 2008 Scheme year and which was subsequently (i.e. after 31 December 2008) converted to forestry under an EU Rural Development scheme, remains eligible for BPS for the duration of the forestry scheme payments on that land;
2. Land that was eligible and on which SFP was paid in respect of the 2008 Scheme year and which was subsequently (i.e. after 31 December 2008) planted with trees under an EU agri-environment scheme, remains eligible for BPS for the duration of the EU agri-environment scheme payments on that land; and
3. Land in an EU forestry scheme or an EU agri-environment scheme on which SFP was paid in 2008 in respect of set-aside entitlements will remain eligible for BPS for the duration of the relevant scheme payments on that land.

Therefore, the EU legislation is absolutely clear - trees planted in land under an EU supported scheme will remain eligible for BPS only for the duration of the commitment by the farmer under those various schemes. My Department has absolutely no discretion to continue to pay BPS on wooded land beyond the duration of that commitment.

It should be noted that these EU rules have not been changed by the latest CAP reform agreement. The same rules applied to the Single Farm Payment Scheme and have been outlined in Departmental guidance every year.

It is also worth noting that as entitlements under the Basic Payment Scheme will be established afresh in 2015, the total value of SFP entitlements held by the farmer on 15 May 2014 (after various adjustments) will be divided across the eligible area declared for BPS by the farmer in 2015. Therefore, in effect, the value of SFP entitlements held on 15 May 2014, including those claimed on woodland, will be redistributed over the land that remains eligible for BPS in 2015, provided the minimum claim size of 3 ha is met.

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the processing of Single Farm Payments.

(AQO 7300/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has delivered another record payment performance for the 2014 Single Farm Payment year. In December 2014, 95% of claims were finalised for payment, exceeding a target of 93%. On 1 December, the Department issued over 27,000 payments, more than treble the volume paid on day one in 2013. More farmers were paid in one day in 2014 than were paid in one month in 2013. A total of £234.6 million was paid to local farmers in December and is a welcome boost to the rural economy.

The Department also exceeded its target to process inspection cases carried out using Control with Remote Sensing. In December, 623 such cases were processed, exceeding the target of 500. In overall terms, almost 1,000 inspection cases were processed for payment in December. For the first time ever, the majority of inspected claims were paid in December.

To date, 96% of claims have been finalised for payment and £237.2 million has been paid out. My Department is continuing to finalise the remaining claims as quickly as possible. It is anticipated that all remaining inspection cases will be processed for payment by the end of March 2015. This is earlier than ever before.

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the number of Single Farm Payments still to be issued.

(AQO 7301/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has delivered another record payment performance for the 2014 Single Farm Payment year. In December 2014, 95% of claims were finalised for payment, exceeding a target of 93%. A total of £234.6 million was paid to local farmers in December.

To date, 96% of claims have been finalised for payment and £237.2 million has been paid out. 1,184 claims remain to be finalised. This is the lowest number ever at this stage in the year. Last year, 2,914 claims remained outstanding at this stage.

My Department is continuing to finalise the remaining claims as quickly as possible. It is anticipated that all remaining inspection cases will be processed for payment by the end of March 2015. This is earlier than ever before. A number of claims are outstanding due to factors outside my Department's control such as probate proceedings, disputes between farmers and information, such as bank account details, not being provided by farm businesses.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline any progress made on flood alleviation in East Belfast.

(AQO 7302/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am very pleased to advise that significant progress is being made with the East Belfast Flood Alleviation Scheme. Large elements of the flood alleviation scheme have been integrated with the Connswater Community Greenway Project, the first phase of which has been completed and construction of the second phase has commenced. Rivers Agency's own "stand alone" works are also progressing well. The overall project is expected to be completed in late 2016, providing enhanced flood protection to some 1,700 properties.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the flood threat in Newry.

(AQO 7303/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: During the flood event of 13/14 November 2014, drainage systems and watercourses throughout Newry were overwhelmed due to prolonged and intense rainfall. As a consequence of the impact on people and property, Rivers Agency has been liaising closely with counterparts in Transport NI and NI Water to identify where infrastructure was overwhelmed and what practical measures can be taken to reduce the risk of flooding in the future. In addition to these more specific investigations, Rivers Agency is about to commence a larger scale study of Newry which will look at the sources of flooding and consider what can be done to best manage flood risk in the city.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her future plans for Líofoa 2015.

(AQW 40253/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Líofoa campaign was launched in September 2011 to encourage 1000 people from all walks of life to become fluent in Irish by 2015.

The success of the Líofoa campaign clearly demonstrates the need for this support for learners of Irish, and the upward revision of the target, on 4 occasions, of the number of people signing up to the challenge reinforces the motivational value of the campaign.

Currently over 9,000 people have signed up to the challenge and, if recent trends continue, the 10,000 target will be achieved shortly. Given this proven success, I am minded to continue with the Líofo campaign post 2015 taking account of the findings from the recent survey of Líofo participants.

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why Líofo content cannot be accommodated on the Foras na Gaeilge website.

(AQW 40254/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Foras na Gaeilge is on record as stating that it does not have the resources to manage the Líofo initiative, and this would include the capacity to manage the website content.

Foras na Gaeilge does, however, support the Líofo initiative by encouraging all groups funded by them to signpost participants to register with Líofo and avail of the e-learning resources.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the reasons for her Department's investigation into the circumstances surrounding the recent resignation of the Director of National Museums Northern Ireland, including (i) an update on the investigation; (ii) an estimated timescale for the completion of the investigation; and (iii) whether the PSNI are investigating the same matter.

(AQW 40258/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Chief Executive of National Museums Northern Ireland resigned on the 25th November 2014. My Department commenced an investigation into the issues understood to be behind his resignation and this is ongoing. The investigation is estimated to be completed by the end of February 2015. I can confirm that the PSNI is not investigating this matter.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when National Museums Northern Ireland will appoint a new Director.

(AQW 40259/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: National Museums has informed me that following the resignation of Tim Cooke, the former Director and Chief Executive of National Museums on 25th November 2014, Dr Jim McGreevy, a senior member of the National Museums management team has been temporarily appointed by the Chair as interim Chief Executive and Accounting Officer. This is to ensure business continuity for the organisation in the short term.

National Museums is also running an internal process to appoint an Acting Chief Executive and Accounting Officer until a permanent appointment is made. Dr McGreevy will retain the interim position until the outcome of the internal process is known.

In parallel with these processes National Museums is currently planning a full external recruitment competition to appoint a new, permanent Chief Executive. It is envisaged that this external recruitment competition for a permanent Chief Executive will conclude later this year.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 38716/11-15 and AQW 38717/11-15, (i) whether she is aware of such an invitation being extended to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; (ii) if so, did the First Minister and deputy First Minister invite her to represent the Assembly; and (iii) why did she not accept this invitation.

(AQW 40260/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not aware of an invitation being extended to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Furthermore, I was not asked by the First Minister or deputy First Minister to represent the Assembly at the event.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the community voluntary groups in Upper Bann that have received funding from her Department since 2011; and the amount received.

(AQW 40330/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The information you requested is provided in the attached table. It is based on expenditure since 1 April 2011 except for North South Bodies where the basis is the calendar year 2011.

Funding provided to voluntary/ community groups in the Upper Bann constituency since 2011

Year	Provided By	Amount	Organisation
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£8,594	Banbridge Orange hall Committee
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£2,355	Dollingstown Ulster-Scots Society
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,366	Aughlish Ulster-Scots Group
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£500	Corcrair Cultural & Development Association
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Battlehill Pipe Band

Year	Provided By	Amount	Organisation
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Clonmacash Pipe Band
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Kilmore Community Development Association
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£360	Kingshill Community Development Association
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£525	Sterritt Memorial Ulster Scots & Drumming Society
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,575	Upper Bann Fusiliers
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Waringsford Pipe Band
2011	Ulster-Scots Agency	£15,749	A B Cultural Society
2011	Sport NI	£6,982	Annagh United FC
2011	Sport NI	£7,560	Craigavon Intercultural Programme
2011	Sport NI	£12,500	Southern Sports Partnership
2011/12	Arts Council	£25,000	All Set Cross Cultural Project
2011/12	Arts Council	£40,000	Millennium Court Arts Centre (Portadown 2000)
2011/12	Arts Council	£20,100	Ulster Youth Choir
2011/12	Arts Council	£67,000	The Armagh Rhymers Educational & Cultural Organisation
2011/12	Arts Council	£5,000	North Armagh Artists Collective
2011/12	Department	£1,115	Banbridge Driving Society
2011/12	Department	£1,500	RSPBA (Banbridge)
2011/12	Department	£1,000	Iveagh Pony Club
2011/12	Department	£745	Doing It For Dromore
2011/12	Department	£686	Clann Na Banna Community Festival
2011/12	Department	£1,500	Banbridge Speech & Drama
2011/12	Department	£1,500	Banbridge Musical Society
2011/12	Department	£288	Gilford Boxing Club
2011/12	Department	£1,500	Mullahead & District Ploughing Society
2011/12	Department	£6,000	North Armagh Motor Club Lurgan Park Rally
2011/12	Department	£6,000	Country Comes to Town
2011/12	Department	£4,500	Lurgan & District Horse & Cattle Show Society
2011/12	Department	£1,500	Portadown Festival Association
2011/12	Department	£625	Taghnevan Festival
2011/12	Department	£135	St Mary's GAC
2012	Foras na Gaeilge	£3,500	Gaelphobal na Lorgan
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,693	Banbridge Orange hall Committee
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£514	Kingshill Community Development Association
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£2,522	Dollingstown Ulster-Scots Society
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,035	Closkelt Pipe Band
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,642	Battlehill Pipe Band
2012	Ulster-Scots Agency	£4,657	A B Cultural Society
2012	Sport NI	£750	Segway NI
2012	Sport NI	£10,000	Banbridge Amateur Boxing Club
2012	Sport NI	£18,000	Southern Sports Partnership
2012/13	Department	£1,000	RSPBA (Banbridge)

Year	Provided By	Amount	Organisation
2012/13	Department	£250	Banbridge Old Vehicle Club
2012/13	Department	£1,375	Banbridge Chamber of Commerce
2012/13	Department	£775	Dromore in Action
2012/13	Department	£1,250	Banbridge Speech & Drama
2012/13	Department	£1,200	Banbridge Motor Club
2012/13	Department	£1,250	Liatroim Fontenoy's
2012/13	Department	£166	Rathfriland Vintage Club
2012/13	Department	£1,245	Banbridge Musical Society Junior Section
2012/13	Department	£235	Glascar Ploughing Society
2012/13	Department	£1,500	Mullahead & District Ploughing Society
2012/13	Department	£1,092	Port-e Up (Junk Yard Festival)
2012/13	Department	£1,500	Portadown Festival Association
2012/13	Department	£2,163	South Lough Neagh Regeneration Association (The Viking Return)
2012/13	Department	£6,000	Country Comes to Town
2012/13	Department	£4,500	Lurgan & District Horse & Cattle Show Society
2012/13	Department	£6,000	North Armagh Motor Club Lurgan Park Rally
2012/13	Department	£1,800	CBC – Milk Cup
2012/13	Department	£2,000	Mullahead & District Ploughing Society
2012-13	Arts Council NI	£5,000	Downshire Guiding Star Flute Band
2012-13	Arts Council NI	£13,375	Ulster Youth Choir
2013/14	Department	£1,125	Liatroim Fontenoy's
2013/14	Department	£350	Banbridge Old Vehicle Club
2013/14	Department	£690	NI Carriage Driving Association
2013/14	Department	£1,025	Dromore in Action
2013/14	Department	£800	Loughbrickland & District Cultural Association
2013/14	Department	£875	Moneyslane Football Club
2013/14	Department	£1,135	Banbridge Motor Club
2013/14	Department	£1,200	Banbridge Musical Society Junior Section
2013/14	Department	£200	Rathfriland Vintage Club
2013/14	Department	£100	Banbridge Cage Birds Society
2013/14	Department	£1,250	Banbridge District Speech & Drama
2013/14	Department	£200	Glascar Ploughing Society
2013/14	Department	£750	Mullaghead & District Ploughing Society
2013/14	Department	£125	Banbridge Amateur Boxing Club
2013/14	Department	£175	Closkelt Rural & Cultural Association
2013/14	Department	£1,500	Portadown Festival Association
2013/14	Department	£4,500	Lurgan & District Horse & Cattle Show Society
2013/14	Department	£6,000	Lurgan Park Rally
2013/14	Department	£2,291	The Gathering – SLNRA
2013/14	Department	£6,000	Country Comes to Town

Year	Provided By	Amount	Organisation
2013/14	Department	£1,500	Mullahead & District Ploughing Society
2013/14	Department	£218	St Mary's GAC
2013/14	Arts Council NI	£3,354	Millennium Court Arts Centre (Portadown 2000)
2013/14	Arts Council NI	£5,000	Joseph Forde Memorial Pipe Band
2013/14	Arts Council NI	£5,000	Blackskull Orange and Blue Flute Band
2013/14	Arts Council NI	£4,946	Kilmore Flute Band
2013/14	Arts Council NI	£2,500	Lagan Canal Trust
2013/14	Arts Council NI	£11,469	Millennium Court Arts Centre (Portadown 2000)
2013/14	Arts Council NI	£4,789	The Armagh Rhymers Educational & Cultural Organisation
2013	Foras na Gaeilge	£1,750	Gaelphobal na Lorgan
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£2,530	Dollingstown Ulster-Scots Society
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Bleary & District Pipe Band
2013	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,650	Joseph Forde Memorial Pipe Band
2013	Sport NI	£1,986	Maralin Village Primary School (Magheralin)
2013	Sport NI	£18,000	Southern Sports Partnership
2013	Sport NI	£245,000	St Peter's GAA Club (Lurgan)
2013	Sport NI	£245,000	4th Portadown Scouts
2013	Sport NI	£245,000	Annagh United FC
2013	Sport NI	£294,000	Banbridge Amateur Boxing Club
2014/15	Department	£350	Banbridge Old Vehicle Club
2014/15	Department	£210	Rathfriland Vintage Club
2014/15	Department	£1,250	Liatroim Fontenoys
2014/15	Department	£1,250	Moneyslane Rural Community Hub
2014/15	Department	£790	Banbridge Motor Club
2014/15	Department	£250	Rathfriland Football Club
2014/15	Department	£750	Loughbrickland & District Rural Development Association
2014/15	Department	£546	NI Carriage Driving Association
2014/15	Department	£200	Rathfriland clay Pigeon Club
2014/15	Department	£1,250	Banbridge Musical Society Junior Section
2014/15	Department	£260	Glascar Ploughing Society
2014/15	Department	£1,250	Banbridge Performing Arts Festival Speech & Drama
2014/15	Department	£125	Banbridge Cage Birds Society
2014/15	Department	£1,250	Mullahead & District Ploughing Society
2014/15	Department	£250	Cloughskelt Rural & Cultural Association
2014/15	Department	£1,500	Portadown Festival Association
2014/15	Department	£2,500	Mullahead & District Ploughing Society
2014/15	Department	£2,500	The Craigavon Cup (CIC)
2014/15	Department	£1,780	St Peters GAC
2014/15	Department	£4,500	Lurgan & District Horse & Cattle Show Society
2014/15	Department	£6,000	Lurgan Park Rally
2014/15	Department	£3,875	Sportadown (CIP)

Year	Provided By	Amount	Organisation
2014/15	Department	£6,000	Country Comes to Town
2014/15	Department	£218	St Mary's GAC
2014/15	Arts Council NI	£5,000	Poyntzpass Silver Band
2014	Foras na Gaeilge	£1,750	Gaelphobal na Lorgan
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,950	Battlehill Pipe Band
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,783	Closkelt Pipe Band
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,950	Joseph Forde Memorial Pipe Band
2014	Ulster-Scots Agency	£1,950	Waringsford Pipe Band
2014	Sport NI	£2,549	Wolfe Tone GAC (Derrymacash)
2014	Sport NI	£5,460	Seagoe FC
2014	Sport NI	£5,658	The Ted Clarke Memorial Trust

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the funding for the redevelopment of Casement Park is protected.

(AQO 7317/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL has been allocated One Hundred and Ten million pounds (£110m) by the Executive to deliver the Stadia projects which include the redevelopment of Casement Park. The Stadia Programme is part of the Programme for Government and is a priority for the NI Executive. The funding remains ring-fenced and cannot be used by the Department for other capital projects. It is part of a decision that was made by the Executive going back as far as March 2011 and I am committed to ensuring that this project becomes a reality.

There is a strong resolve within the Ulster GAA to submit a new planning application in 2015 to develop a regional stadium in Ulster at Casement Park.

Any new planning application will take account of the learning points raised in the judgment and I and my department will fully support them during the new planning process.

My Department and I remain committed to the re-development of Casement Park and we will work with all parties to facilitate this becoming a reality.

The spend profile against the Stadium Programme for 2014/15 was Twenty Eight Million, Two Hundred Thousand pounds (£28.2 million), which includes a figure of Seven Million, Nine Hundred Thousand pounds (£7.9 million) for the Casement Park project.

The assessment of this remaining spend of Seven Million, Nine Hundred Thousand (£7.9 million) on the Casement Park project assumed a successful outcome of the Judicial Review.

As a result of the quashing of the planning approval on the Casement Park project an easement of Six Million, Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand pounds (£6.25 million) has now been declared through January monitoring for 2014/15.

The impact of this on 2015/16 is that it will create a corresponding pressure across the remainder of the programme. Officials have and continue to liaise with DFP with regards to spend profile allocations.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why officials from her Department were unable to provide the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure with a briefing on January Monitoring 2015 at its meeting on Thursday 11 December.
(AQO 7306/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The primary cause of the delays in providing the Committee with briefing material was the uncertainty around some of the elements within the budget. Key among these was the ring-fenced allocation on stadia and whether there would be a further surrender of budget allocations to the centre. The judgement from the Judicial Review clarified the position and briefing was provided to the Committee on 19th December 2014.

I very much regret this delay in providing briefing to the Committee on the January Monitoring Round and I do, of course, acknowledge it has a very important scrutiny role on behalf of the Assembly and the wider public. It was not my intention to undermine this role in any way or indeed to be discourteous to the Committee.

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what departmental financial support and encouragement is provided to develop snooker in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 7311/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for the development of snooker in the north of Ireland rests in the first instance with the Governing Body of the sport, the NI Billiards and Snooker Association. The aims of the Association are to develop and promote the sport at grass roots level through events and competitions.

Sport NI, an arm's-length body of my Department, has responsibility for the distribution of funding for sport.

Within the past five years, up to March 2014, Sport NI provided exchequer funding of twenty five thousand, eight hundred and thirty two pounds to develop snooker in the north of Ireland. This funding was awarded to Stadium Youth and Community Centre in Belfast and was used to buy eight full size snooker tables.

Sport NI's Active Awards for Sport funding programme is a Lottery funded small grants programme offering grants between one thousand and ten thousand pounds. It is primarily aimed at grassroots community based sport. Sports Governing Bodies, clubs and community groups can apply for assistance with costs for sports projects that support increased participation in sport, especially among under represented groups. The funding can be awarded for example to support the provision of training, cover coaching costs, deliver coaching courses, as well as help with the purchase or hire of equipment.

Snooker Clubs may be eligible to apply for this funding when the next round of the Active Awards for Sport programme opens in March 2015.

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the process for the publication of the Irish Language and Ulster Scots Language, Heritage and Culture strategies.

(AQO 7315/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is my intention to publish both Strategies on Friday the 30th of January 2015.

On that date the Strategy documents will be available on the DCAL website. The Strategy documents will be bilingual – the Irish Language Strategy will be in English and Irish, the Ulster-Scots Strategy will be in English and Ulster Scots.

There will be a Press Release to announce publication.

Prior to the publication date, I will notify my Ministerial colleagues and Assembly members.

In addition, we will notify those organisations and individuals who responded to the consultations on the two Strategies. Their contributions to the final versions of the Strategies have been of immense value.

Following publication, my officials will set about establishing the structures for implementing the Strategies. They will work closely with the other Departments, all of whom will have a role to play in delivering the Strategies.

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the funding allocated to Armagh County Museum since 2012.

(AQO 7316/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Armagh County Museum boasts both rich and varied collections and has a team of experienced and dedicated staff. It is funded by National Museums out of its overall budget allocation.

National Museums has informed me that the costs incurred to run the Armagh County Museum over the last 3 years are as follows:

In both 2012/13 and 2013/14, the Museum's salary and operational costs amounted to approximately £234,000. The capital expenditure relating to these years amounted to £10,000 and £5,000 respectively.

The projected salary and operational costs for 2014/15 amount to approximately £217,000. There is no planned capital expenditure in the current financial year.

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department and its arm's-length bodies, encourage greater use of shared leisure facilities between local authorities, community organisations and schools.

(AQO 7318/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department and its arm's-length bodies recognise the importance of encouraging greater use of shared leisure facilities between local authorities, community organisations and schools. There are benefits for everyone involved, in both practical and financial terms. This is more important now than ever given the challenging financial period we find ourselves in.

Sport Matters, my Department's Strategy for sport, brings together Government Departments, local authorities and other key stakeholders to deliver a number of high level targets relating to sporting facilities and participation in sport. The associated Sport Matters Implementation Groups and Monitoring Group, which include senior representatives of these organisations, have demonstrated their commitment to working together, especially to encourage greater sharing of sporting facilities.

As an example of this, Sport NI and the Department of Education are working together to promote greater use of school facilities. Sport NI published 'Your School, Your Club', a practical guide which aims to help sports and leisure clubs access school sports facilities. This document complements the Department of Education's 'Community Use of Schools Toolkit'. Together both documents play a vital role, especially in today's financial climate, by offering guidance that aims to encourage greater use of sports facilities. This approach provides the opportunity to maximise usage of existing facilities by sports clubs,

community groups and schools and at the same time increase participation in sport amongst all members of our communities including those who are currently under-represented.

Looking ahead, Sport NI is currently working with the existing District Councils and the Shadow Councils to develop a Sports Facilities Strategy and 11 District Council Area Reports. To date, work has included the appointment of consultancy firm, Strategic Leisure, which has commenced engagement with the 11 District Councils. The regional Facilities Strategy is due to be completed by April 2015, with the 11 District Council Area Reports completed by autumn 2015. These reports will identify existing facilities, gaps in provision and will provide a framework for the strategic delivery of sports facilities, by all partners, across the north of Ireland.

Department of Education

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how much funding his Department provided to Trade Unions in the last financial year.

(AQW 40243/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): My Department provided no funding to Trade Unions in the last financial year. However, the Department paid staff costs of £67,025 in respect of staff seconded to Trade Unions in the 2013-14 financial year.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail the average salary in (i) each Education and Library Board; (ii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; (iii) the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education; (iv) the Youth Council for Northern Ireland; (v) his Department; (vi) the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland; (vii) the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; and (viii) Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

(AQW 40273/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The average salary of staff employed in (i) each Education and Library Board; (ii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; (iii) the Council for Integrated Education (NICIE); (iv) the Youth Council (YCNI); (v) his Department; (vi) the General Teaching Council (GTCNI); (vii) the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; and (viii) Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is as follows:

	As at 31/3/14
BELB	£28,857
WELB	£26,870
NEELB	£27,776
SEELB	£28,816
SELB	£27,713
CCMS	£31,630
NICIE	£30,796
YCNI	£34,362
DE	£31,666
GTCNI	£29,592
CCEA	£29,299
CnaG	£29,888

These figures exclude employers National Insurance and Pension Contribution costs.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of the last three years of oversubscribed first preference places in (i) Catholic post-primary secondary schools; and (ii) controlled post-primary secondary schools.

(AQW 40275/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The tables below detail the post-primary schools which were oversubscribed at first preference stage in the admissions process, in each of the last three school years. This list includes post-primary schools of all management types for completeness, including voluntary grammar, grant-maintained integrated and other maintained, schools.

2012/13 School Year

Name of School	Board Area	Management type	Approved Admissions Number	Total 1st pref Applications	Number Over-subscribed
Little Flower Girls' School	BELB	Maintained	107	109	2
De La Salle College	BELB	Maintained	163	202	39
Grosvenor Grammar School	BELB	Controlled	155	219	64
Methodist College	BELB	Voluntary	240	251	11
Belfast Royal Academy	BELB	Voluntary	200	220	20
St Dominic's High School	BELB	Voluntary	141	177	36
St Malachy's College	BELB	Voluntary	150	170	20
Dominican College	BELB	Voluntary	150	155	5
Strathearn School	BELB	Voluntary	110	136	26
Rathmore Grammar School	BELB	Voluntary	180	248	68
Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School	BELB	Voluntary	110	124	14
Drumragh College	WELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	96	114	18
Collegiate Grammar School, Enniskillen	WELB	Controlled	70	79	9
Limavady Grammar School	WELB	Controlled	130	153	23
Omagh Academy	WELB	Controlled	95	99	4
Mount Lourdes Grammar	WELB	Voluntary	96	145	49
St Michael's College, Enniskillen	WELB	Voluntary	100	131	31
Christian Brothers' Grammar School, Omagh	WELB	Voluntary	135	153	18
Loreto Grammar School, Omagh	WELB	Voluntary	125	154	29
Foyle and Londonderry College	WELB	Voluntary	125	144	19
Lumen Christi College	WELB	Voluntary	120	226	106
Dunclug College	NEELB	Controlled	110	124	14
Slemish College, Ballymena	NEELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	120	180	60
Ulidia Integrated College	NEELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	80	105	25
Ballyclare High School	NEELB	Controlled	186	202	16
Carrickfergus Grammar School	NEELB	Controlled	116	140	24
Antrim Grammar School	NEELB	Controlled	105	124	19
St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena	NEELB	Voluntary	139	194	55
Ballymena Academy	NEELB	Voluntary	176	231	55
Dalriada School	NEELB	Voluntary	125	174	49
Loreto College	NEELB	Voluntary	120	148	28
Rainey Endowed School	NEELB	Voluntary	100	112	12
Dominican College	NEELB	Voluntary	69	72	3

Name of School	Board Area	Management type	Approved Admissions Number	Total 1st pref Applications	Number Over-subscribed
Belfast High School	NEELB	Voluntary	136	149	13
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	NEELB	Voluntary	153	155	2
St Columbanus' College, Bangor	SEELB	Maintained	90	93	3
Lagan College	SEELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	200	234	34
Shimna Integrated College	SEELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	80	84	4
Regent House School	SEELB	Controlled	210	228	18
Down High School	SEELB	Controlled	128	162	34
Glenlola Collegiate School	SEELB	Controlled	157	159	2
Bangor Grammar School	SEELB	Voluntary	125	145	20
Sullivan Upper School	SEELB	Voluntary	150	182	32
Friends' School	SEELB	Voluntary	140	247	107
Wallace High School	SEELB	Voluntary	170	195	25
Assumption Grammar School	SEELB	Voluntary	120	151	31
Our Lady & St Patrick's College	SEELB	Voluntary	180	236	56
St Paul's High School, Bessbrook	SELB	Maintained	207	225	18
St Catherine's College	SELB	Maintained	155	172	17
New-Bridge Integrated College	SELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	80	83	3
Banbridge Academy	SELB	Controlled	184	246	62
Abbey Grammar School, Newry	SELB	Voluntary	125	180	55
Our Lady's Grammar School Newry	SELB	Voluntary	120	134	14
St Colman's College	SELB	Voluntary	125	150	25
St Joseph's Convent Grammar School	SELB	Voluntary	95	121	26
Sacred Heart Grammar School, Newry	SELB	Voluntary	120	153	33
St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh	SELB	Voluntary	110	123	13
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	SELB	Voluntary	195	224	29

2013/14 School Year

Name of School	Board Area	Management type	Approved Admissions Number	Total 1st pref Applications	Number Over-subscribed
De La Salle College	BELB	Maintained	163	176	13
Methodist College	BELB	Voluntary	240	287	47
Belfast Royal Academy	BELB	Voluntary	200	262	62
St Dominic's High School	BELB	Voluntary	141	227	86

Name of School	Board Area	Management type	Approved Admissions Number	Total 1st pref Applications	Number Over-subscribed
St Malachy's College	BELB	Voluntary	150	175	25
Dominican College	BELB	Voluntary	150	158	8
Rathmore Grammar School	BELB	Voluntary	180	211	31
Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School	BELB	Voluntary	110	142	32
Drumragh College	WELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	96	117	21
Collegiate Grammar School, Enniskillen	WELB	Controlled	70	99	29
Limavady Grammar School	WELB	Controlled	130	133	3
Omagh Academy	WELB	Controlled	95	99	4
Mount Lourdes Grammar	WELB	Voluntary	96	98	2
Portora Royal School	WELB	Voluntary	70	91	21
St Michael's College, Enniskillen	WELB	Voluntary	100	122	22
Thornhill College, Londonderry	WELB	Voluntary	200	256	56
St Columb's College	WELB	Voluntary	220	244	24
Christian Brothers' Grammar School, Omagh	WELB	Voluntary	135	137	2
Loreto Grammar School, Omagh	WELB	Voluntary	125	138	13
Foyle and Londonderry College	WELB	Voluntary	121	144	23
Lumen Christi College	WELB	Voluntary	120	190	70
Ballyclare Secondary School	NEELB	Controlled	180	182	2
Dunclug College	NEELB	Controlled	110	117	7
St Colm's High School	NEELB	Maintained	68	70	2
St Patrick's College, Maghera	NEELB	Maintained	190	193	3
Slemish College, Ballymena	NEELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	120	162	42
Ulidia Integrated College	NEELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	80	98	18
Ballyclare High School	NEELB	Controlled	186	194	8
Carrickfergus Grammar School	NEELB	Controlled	116	123	7
St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena	NEELB	Voluntary	139	154	15
Ballymena Academy	NEELB	Voluntary	176	206	30
Dalriada School	NEELB	Voluntary	125	172	47
Loreto College	NEELB	Voluntary	120	175	55
Larne Grammar School	NEELB	Voluntary	110	121	11
Rainey Endowed School	NEELB	Voluntary	100	133	33
Belfast High School	NEELB	Voluntary	136	172	36
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	NEELB	Voluntary	153	184	31

Name of School	Board Area	Management type	Approved Admissions Number	Total 1st pref Applications	Number Over-subscribed
Nendrum College, Comber	SEELB	Controlled	80	90	10
Lagan College	SEELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	200	234	34
Shimna Integrated College	SEELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	80	92	12
Regent House School	SEELB	Controlled	210	251	41
Down High School	SEELB	Controlled	128	148	20
Glenlola Collegiate School	SEELB	Controlled	157	169	12
Bangor Grammar School	SEELB	Voluntary	125	164	39
Sullivan Upper School	SEELB	Voluntary	150	193	43
Friends' School	SEELB	Voluntary	140	212	72
Wallace High School	SEELB	Voluntary	170	196	26
Assumption Grammar School	SEELB	Voluntary	120	147	27
St Patrick's Grammar School	SEELB	Voluntary	96	110	14
Our Lady & St Patrick's College	SEELB	Voluntary	180	202	22
Newtownhamilton High School	SELB	Controlled	35	37	2
St Ciaran's High School	SELB	Maintained	125	127	2
St Paul's High School, Bessbrook	SELB	Maintained	215	251	36
St Catherine's College	SELB	Maintained	155	190	35
Banbridge Academy	SELB	Controlled	184	228	44
St Louis Grammar School, Killeel	SELB	Voluntary	80	104	24
Abbey Grammar School, Newry	SELB	Voluntary	125	149	24
Our Lady's Grammar School Newry	SELB	Voluntary	120	131	11
St Colman's College	SELB	Voluntary	125	138	13
St Joseph's Convent Grammar School	SELB	Voluntary	95	151	56
Sacred Heart Grammar School, Newry	SELB	Voluntary	120	145	25
The Royal School, Dungannon	SELB	Voluntary	93	116	23
The Royal School, Armagh	SELB	Voluntary	100	107	7
St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh	SELB	Voluntary	110	125	15
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	SELB	Voluntary	195	229	34

2014/15 School Year

Name of School	Board Area	Management type	Approved Admissions Number	Total 1st pref Applications	Number Over-subscribed
De La Salle College	BELB	Maintained	163	174	11
Colaiste Feirste	BELB	Other Maintained	100	103	3
Grosvenor Grammar School	BELB	Controlled	155	208	53

Name of School	Board Area	Management type	Approved Admissions Number	Total 1st pref Applications	Number Over-subscribed
Wellington College	BELB	Controlled	110	127	17
Methodist College	BELB	Voluntary	240	249	9
Belfast Royal Academy	BELB	Voluntary	200	246	46
St Dominic's High School	BELB	Voluntary	141	180	39
St Malachy's College	BELB	Voluntary	150	205	55
Dominican College	BELB	Voluntary	150	157	7
Strathearn School	BELB	Voluntary	110	144	34
Rathmore Grammar School	BELB	Voluntary	180	192	12
Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School	BELB	Voluntary	110	129	19
Collegiate Grammar School, Enniskillen	WELB	Controlled	70	95	25
Limavady Grammar School	WELB	Controlled	130	162	32
Omagh Academy	WELB	Controlled	95	113	18
Mount Lourdes Grammar	WELB	Voluntary	96	118	22
Portora Royal School	WELB	Voluntary	70	77	7
St Michael's College, Enniskillen	WELB	Voluntary	100	139	39
Thornhill College, Londonderry	WELB	Voluntary	200	230	30
St Columb's College	WELB	Voluntary	220	254	34
Christian Brothers' Grammar School, Omagh	WELB	Voluntary	135	152	17
Loreto Grammar School, Omagh	WELB	Voluntary	125	134	9
Foyle and Londonderry College	WELB	Voluntary	121	132	11
Lumen Christi College	WELB	Voluntary	120	219	99
St Colm's High School	NEELB	Maintained	68	69	1
St Mary's College	NEELB	Maintained	70	71	1
St Pius X High School	NEELB	Maintained	140	145	5
Slemish College, Ballymena	NEELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	120	176	56
Ulidia Integrated College	NEELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	80	104	24
Carrickfergus Grammar School	NEELB	Controlled	116	128	12
Antrim Grammar School	NEELB	Controlled	105	109	4
Cambridge House Grammar	NEELB	Controlled	140	177	37
St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena	NEELB	Voluntary	139	168	29
Dalriada School	NEELB	Voluntary	125	210	85
Loreto College	NEELB	Voluntary	120	152	32
Larne Grammar School	NEELB	Voluntary	110	118	8
Rainey Endowed School	NEELB	Voluntary	100	130	30
Dominican College	NEELB	Voluntary	69	82	13

Name of School	Board Area	Management type	Approved Admissions Number	Total 1st pref Applications	Number Over-subscribed
Belfast High School	NEELB	Voluntary	136	160	24
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	NEELB	Voluntary	153	169	16
Nendrum College, Comber	SEELB	Controlled	80	84	4
Lagan College	SEELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	200	356	156
Strangford Integrated College	SEELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	80	120	40
Regent House School	SEELB	Controlled	210	232	22
Down High School	SEELB	Controlled	128	171	43
Bangor Grammar School	SEELB	Voluntary	125	178	53
Sullivan Upper School	SEELB	Voluntary	150	178	28
Friends' School	SEELB	Voluntary	140	221	81
Wallace High School	SEELB	Voluntary	170	208	38
Assumption Grammar School	SEELB	Voluntary	120	125	5
St Patrick's Grammar School	SEELB	Voluntary	96	104	8
Our Lady & St Patrick's College	SEELB	Voluntary	180	232	52
Dromore High School	SELB	Controlled	148	153	5
Markethill High School	SELB	Controlled	93	102	9
St Paul's High School, Bessbrook	SELB	Maintained	215	228	13
St Catherine's College	SELB	Maintained	155	160	5
New-Bridge Integrated College	SELB	Grant Maintained Integrated	100	111	11
Banbridge Academy	SELB	Controlled	184	209	25
St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel	SELB	Voluntary	80	88	8
Abbey Grammar School, Newry	SELB	Voluntary	125	159	34
Our Lady's Grammar School Newry	SELB	Voluntary	120	139	19
St Colman's College	SELB	Voluntary	125	152	27
St Joseph's Convent Grammar School	SELB	Voluntary	95	140	45
Sacred Heart Grammar School, Newry	SELB	Voluntary	120	155	35
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	SELB	Voluntary	195	201	6

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40078/11-15, to provide an assurance that the relevant Education and Library Boards are meeting children's rights and disability rights criteria as well as full compliance with child protection policies and procedures in respect of all children in receipt of a Notice in Lieu, particularly those in cases which are currently under challenge for full statementing.

(AQW 40310/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Chief Executives of each Education and Library Board have confirmed that children's rights, including disability rights, and child protection policies and procedures are fully complied with regarding children in receipt of a Notice in Lieu, including those in cases which are currently under challenge for full statementing.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) percentage; and (ii) number of children that achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A* - C in each of the last twelve years, broken down by (a) gender; (b) religious background; and (c) socio-economic background.

(AQW 40312/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information contained in the following tables refers to the achievement of pupils leaving mainstream grant aided post-primary schools during the academic years 2000/01 to 2012/13. A pupil's socio-economic background has been derived using free school meal entitlement.

Data covering the academic year 2012/13 are the most recent available. Equivalent figures for 2013/14 school leavers are scheduled for release in May 2015.

Number and percentage of school leavers achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C, by gender, 2000/01 to 2012/13 (1,2)

	Boys		Girls	
	Number	%	Number	%
2000/01	6470	50.5	8121	65.8
2001/02	6473	50.5	8208	67.3
2003/04	7044	53.9	8522	67.8
2004/05	7157	55.4	8779	70.9
2005/06	7495	57.5	8899	71.2
2006/07	7323	58.2	8726	71.5
2007/08	7283	60.0	8836	73.9
2008/09	7470	64.4	8859	75.9
2009/10	7444	65.4	8970	78.4
2010/11	8026	67.7	8923	78.9
2011/12	8103	71.0	9160	82.1
2012/13	8750	74.5	9314	82.8

Source: School Leavers Survey

Notes:

- 1 Please note that in 2002/03 the School Leavers Survey was not undertaken due to software issues in schools.
- 2 Includes equivalent qualifications.

Number and percentage of school leavers achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C, by religion of pupil, 2000/01 to 2012/13 (1,2)

	Protestant		Catholic		Other ⁽³⁾	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2000/01	6185	57.3	7465	57.4	941	69.2
2001/02	6376	58.0	7353	58.4	952	66.9
2003/04	6521	60.3	7976	60.4	1069	65.5
2004/05	6540	60.7	8139	64.1	1257	69.0
2005/06	6692	62.1	8418	65.4	1284	68.1
2006/07	6558	62.8	8316	66.6	1175	63.0
2007/08	6492	65.0	8195	68.6	1432	66.2
2008/09	6614	68.5	8276	71.6	1439	70.0
2009/10	6530	70.6	8377	73.4	1507	69.7
2010/11	6547	70.4	8883	76.1	1519	69.5
2011/12	6703	73.8	8982	78.8	1578	75.3

	Protestant		Catholic		Other ⁽³⁾	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2012/13	7066	77.4	9232	80.4	1766	73.6

Source: School Leavers Survey

Notes:

- 1 Please note that in 2002/03 the School Leavers Survey was not undertaken due to software issues in schools.
- 2 Includes equivalent qualifications.
- 3 Other religion category includes Other Christian, No Religion and Non-Christian.

Number and percentage of school leavers achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C, by free school meal entitlement, 2000/01 to 2012/13 (1,2)

	Not entitled to free school meals		Entitled to free school meals	
	Number	%	Number	%
2000/01	13030	64.5	1561	31.5
2001/02	13217	64.8	1464	31.7
2003/04	13791	68.0	1775	33.0
2004/05	14055	70.3	1881	35.6
2005/06	14622	70.2	1772	37.6
2006/07	14391	70.4	1658	37.9
2007/08	14634	71.9	1485	39.8
2008/09	14802	75.1	1527	42.9
2009/10	14709	76.6	1705	47.1
2010/11	15071	78.0	1878	48.8
2011/12	15149	81.4	2114	53.4
2012/13	15564	83.1	2500	58.5

Source: School Leavers Survey

Notes:

- 1 Please note that in 2002/03 the School Leavers Survey was not undertaken due to software issues in schools.
- 2 Includes equivalent qualifications.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether his Department provides funding to the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education; and if so, how much.

(AQW 40341/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not provide funding as a matter of course to the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education. However payments have been made to the organisation for services rendered.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40078/11-15, to detail the collective cost, or estimated collective cost, of each Education and Library Board to provide additional support for these children for a school year.

(AQW 40351/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that there were no additional costs, over and above those already being provided, to support the children referred to in my response to previous AQW 40078/11-15.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education for an update on discussions with teacher representatives on the implementation of Key Stage 3 assessments.

(AQW 40370/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Following lengthy discussions with Teacher Unions I wrote to schools in October 2014 outlining how we will move forward in 2014/15 and setting out the way ahead, including the opportunities for further policy development.

Given the progress made, particularly in discussions over the summer months and my commitment to further engagement, I am disappointed that the teaching unions continue to direct members not to participate in the assessment arrangements, including the use of the Levels of Progression to inform teaching and learning.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the proposed fifteen per cent reduction to pre-school funding, whether this will be completed by reducing (i) the number of places; or (ii) the funding allocated per child.
(AQW 40376/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's 2015-16 Draft Budget was published on 25 November 2014. This document, which set out the draft budget allocations and reduction proposals, was open for public consultation until 29 December 2014, running concurrently with the public consultation on the Executive's Draft Budget.

The Draft Budget proposes a reduction of £2.5m in the funding available for pre-school education provided in voluntary and private settings.

There has been an overwhelming response to the consultation (in excess of 21,000 responses) and work is ongoing by departmental officials to collate, analyse and evaluate the consultation responses.

I will continue to press for an improved final budget outcome for Education as part of the Executive deliberations to agree the 2015-16 Final Budget, which, it is planned, will be published towards the end of January 2015.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland to ensure that sufficient recognition and value is attached to Northern Ireland school qualifications when deciding on admissions to further and higher education courses in the Republic.
(AQW 40383/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Policy on entry to universities in the south of Ireland is agreed by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) through the Irish Universities Association (IUA). A range of issues have arisen in relation to students from here applying to universities in the south due to the differences in the nature and scope of the Leaving Certificate and A/AS Levels.

I have raised these issues at North South Ministerial Council meetings and my officials have been actively engaged in seeking a solution with their Dublin counterparts. CCEA, as the regulator of general qualifications here, meets regularly with IUA. These meetings allow for discussion about entry requirements and the Central Applications Office (CAO) policy on tariff points.

There have been a number of positive developments by Trinity College Dublin, Dublin City University and most recently, by the National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway, to address the issues that have arisen in relation to students from here applying to universities in the south of Ireland. I welcome these initiatives and I hope that this will encourage other universities in the south to follow suit.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Westminster to ensure that vocational school courses in Northern Ireland continue to be valued for university admissions across the UK.
(AQW 40384/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The implementation of the Entitlement Framework, with a balance of general and applied courses, has ensured a broad and relevant curriculum is available in post-primary schools here in order that the needs, interests and aspirations of all learners can be met. Our young people here continue to have access to a range of qualifications which have integrity, are offered by recognised awarding organisations, are properly regulated, and have clear progression pathways in line with the requirements for further study, training and/or employment.

CCEA, as the regulator of general qualifications here, meets regularly with colleagues in the Universities and Colleges Admissions System (UCAS) in order to maintain on-going dialogue about matters relating to university admissions. UCAS bases its tariff on the level and size of the qualification and does not differentiate between academic and vocational. While, it remains the case that individual universities determine their entry requirements and admissions policies, it is encouraging to note from UCAS statistics that increasingly vocational qualifications are being used for university entrance.

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education, given the increasing demand for places at St. Ita's Primary School, and similar schools, in the Carryduff area, what action his Department has taken to improve access to places for children in this area entering Primary 1.
(AQW 40410/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As the planning authority for maintained schools, it is the responsibility of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools to plan for catholic primary school provision in the Carryduff area and to bring forward proposals for my consideration. In April 2013, I approved a development proposal to increase the enrolment and admissions numbers at St Ita's Primary School, Carryduff.

In May 2014, I also approved a development proposal to increase the enrolment and admissions numbers of Millennium Integrated Primary School, Carryduff to become a two stream entry school.

I expect the planning authorities to review demand for places on a regular basis as part of the area planning process. If the indications are that additional places are needed then Development proposals should be brought forward for my consideration.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, in light of the recent media report on the trebling of drugs seizures in schools in the last year, what action he is taking for pupils and teachers in respect of noting signs of potential drug abuse; and what input he is seeking, or has received, from other agencies and Departments.

(AQW 40420/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All schools are required by law to have in a place a drugs education policy and the statutory curriculum which is taught in all our grant-aided schools provides opportunities for children and young people to develop the knowledge and skills to deal with issues such as drug abuse. As with all aspects of the curriculum the specifics of what is taught and how it is taught is a matter for each teacher/school.

While the decision on resources to be used for delivery of the curriculum is a matter for each teacher/school, the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in partnership with the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) have made available curriculum resources for primary and post primary schools to support the delivery of the Personal Development Curriculum through a life skills based approach. The current resource for primary schools "Living Learning Together" and post primary schools "Insync" allow for the delivery of universal drug prevention education.

The Department also provides schools with guidance in relation to drugs and CCEA has been commissioned to review and update current guidance – the guidance will include advice about recognising the signs of substance abuse. In developing the guidance CCEA established an advisory group which consisted of representatives from the Public Health Agency, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools. It is intended that this work will be completed during 2015.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how much funding has been supplied by his Department to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups since May 2007.

(AQW 40422/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has not provided any funding to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups since May 2007.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education what advice he is offering to schools that had been working to improve relations between communities through the school environment with support from Community Relations Equality and Diversity funding, which is no longer available.

(AQW 40441/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Addressing community relations and citizenship issues is a minimum curriculum requirement across all Key Stages in the revised curriculum. As well as the funding delegated to schools, earmarked funding for Community Relations Equality and Diversity (CRED) and a supporting policy have been in place since 2011 to build capacity across the education workforce, disseminate good practice and provide relevant CRED material, and significant progress has been made across all these areas. My advice to schools is that it is important that they continue to embed the good work that has already been done in this area.

As regards funding, the DE budget proposal consultation ended 29th December 2014. I am currently considering responses including views received on my proposal to end the earmarked Community Relations Equality and Diversity (CRED) funding. At the same time, substantial additional funding is being made available to encourage greater sharing in education and this work too will help improve relations between communities through the school environment.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education what steps he will take to ensure that teachers and classroom assistants involved in improving literacy and numeracy continue to be available to those children with individual learning needs.

(AQW 40442/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Legislation requires the support for children with special educational needs (SEN), specified within a statement of SEN, for example the provision of a classroom assistant supporting those with literacy and numeracy needs, to be provided from the date on which the statement is made.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education how he will minimise the detrimental impact a reduction on Child Protection and Behaviour Support funding will have on vulnerable children.

(AQW 40443/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's 2015-16 draft budget was published on 25 November 2014. This document which set out the draft budget allocations and reduction proposals was open for public consultation until 29 December 2014, running concurrently with the public consultation on the Executive's draft budget.

There has been an overwhelming response to the consultation (in excess of 21,000 responses).

Work is ongoing by departmental officials to collate, analyse and evaluate the consultation responses.

I have said that I am determined to protect frontline services as far as possible and I will continue to press for an improved final budget outcome for Education as part of the Executive deliberations to agree the 2015/16 final Budget. This is expected to be published toward the end of this month.

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education how the reduction in Entitlement Framework funding will avoid less choice for pupils, larger class sizes and less opportunity for pupils to study in areas in which they are likely to achieve positive results.
(AQW 40444/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Entitlement Framework is about putting pupils first and that is what I expect schools to do – in their planning and in the courses they offer. Courses that should be economically relevant and individually engaging.

The additional funding support that I have provided for the Entitlement Framework was never intended to be a permanent funding stream, but has been provided as a contribution to the costs associated with developing a broad and balanced curricular offer at Key Stage 4 and post-16. It remains a fact that schools receive a core budget to pay for a range of matters including the curriculum, of which the Entitlement Framework is part.

I have listened to schools about the challenges they face in delivering the Entitlement Framework and as a result I extended the additional funding to support this work through to the end of the 2014/15 financial year. Despite the pressures on my education budget I have also set aside a sizeable element of funding – £4.9m - in the 2015/16 financial year to continue to support schools in delivering the Entitlement Framework requirements.

It remains important for schools to continue their good work and focus on meeting the full statutory requirements from September 2015 for the benefit of our young people.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what changes he intends to make to policy, guidance and statutory requirements for schools on the statutory curriculum and entitlement framework in light of budget cuts.
(AQW 40456/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans at present to change current policies or statutory requirements.

My Department, in developing its draft budget within the overall resource context, has been mindful to protect the delivery of the curriculum in schools under the Aggregated Schools Budget. There is considerable flexibility for schools in how they deliver the statutory curriculum and I would expect all schools to make use of this flexibility in making sure that their curricular provision not only meets the requirements set out in the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007 but also meets the needs of their pupils.

The additional funding support that I have provided for the Entitlement Framework was never intended to be a permanent funding stream, but has been provided as a contribution to the costs associated with developing a broad and balanced curricular offer at Key Stage 4 and post-16.

Despite the pressures on my education budget, I have set aside a sizeable element of funding – £4.9m - in the 2015/16 financial year to continue to support schools in delivering the Entitlement Framework requirements. The Entitlement Framework and the curriculum are about putting pupils first and that is what I expect schools to do.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education, when assessing the future of free school transport, what consideration will be given to families who cannot obtain a place at their nearest school because it is oversubscribed.
(AQW 40457/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The final report on the Independent Review of Home to School Transport was released on 12 December. No decision has been taken on the future of the home to school transport policy. Any new policy arising from the review will be the subject of a public consultation.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to outline the timetable for the creation and implementation of the new Education Authority.
(AQW 40495/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education Act 2014 received Royal Assent on 11 December 2014 and the Education Authority came into being as a body corporate the following day. It is intended that the functions, assets, liabilities and staff of the Education and Library Boards and Staff Commission should transfer to the Authority on 1st April 2015. A programme of work is now being undertaken to ensure that the Authority is operational from that date or as soon as possible thereafter. This programme includes the appointment of an interim Chief Executive, the recruitment of a Chair and Board members and other Day 1 critical projects relating to Finance, Human Resources and Governance.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the names of all ministerial appointees to each Board of Governors in post-primary schools in North Down.
(AQW 40498/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The names of those I have appointed to the Boards of Governors of post primary schools in North Down are as follows:

Bangor Grammar School	Sullivan Upper, Holywood
Mrs Elizabeth Ann Adams	Mr Peter Greene
Mrs Rosemary Bailie	Mr Stuart John Alex Hamilton
Mrs Margaret Isobel Mae Burke	Ms Jacqueline Anne McIlroy
Miss Paula Kane	Mrs Jacqueline Anne Simpson
Mr Derek George Patterson	
Mr Alan James Preston	

A list of all appointments I have made to school Boards' of Governors is also available on my Department's website at:

- www.deni.gov.uk/79-administration-of-education-voluntary-grammar-governor-appointments.htm and
- www.deni.gov.uk/79-administration-of-education-grant-maintained-integrated-governor-appointments-newpage.htm

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education for an update on the progress of the implementation of the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project.

(AQW 40504/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The first call for applications to the pilot phase of the project was launched in November 2014. Forty-six applications involving over 100 schools were received. Applications were considered by the Project Board on 6th January and applications will be advised of their decision shortly. Following refinement of the process drawing on lessons learnt from the pilot phase, a second call for applications is planned for Spring 2015.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether he has had any discussions with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools to remove the Certificate in Religious Education for Catholic Maintained primary schools.

(AQW 40509/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have had no discussions with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) to remove the Certificate in Religious Education for Catholic Maintained primary schools. CCMS is the Employing Authority for all teachers in the Catholic Maintained Sector; the Department of Education does not employ teachers.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what role the new single Education Authority will have in the selection and appointment of school governors.

(AQW 40516/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The new single Education Authority will have the same role in relation to the selection and appointment of school governors as the current five Education and Library Boards.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education whether he will provide the legal document and/or policy for each Education and Library Board which states a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome; Autism; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; and Dyslexia is not accepted if obtained privately.

(AQW 40541/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Account is taken of private psychologists' assessments as outlined in paragraphs 3.55 and 3.57 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs which state:

3.55 - "The Educational Psychologist from whom psychological advice is sought must be employed by the Board, or engaged by it for the purpose."

3.57 - "He or she should also be asked by the Board to consider any advice which parents may submit independently from a fully qualified educational psychologist."

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Education to detail the rationale behind the proposed removal of the remaining Community Relations, Equality and Diversity funding for education by his Department.

(AQW 40574/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The proposal to end earmarked Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) funding is a direct consequence of the challenging budget reduction faced by my Department, in which I have sought to protect front line services.

Amongst the mitigating factors which I have taken into account as to the impact of the ending of CRED funding is the introduction of a £25m Shared Education Signature Project which seeks to improve educational (including reconciliation) outcomes.

I am currently considering responses to the budget proposal consultation which ended on 29th December 2014 prior to finalising the 2015/16 budget.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the latest examination results for Year 12 and Year 14 students which show a significant increase in the number of young people achieving qualifications.

(AQO 7322/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I welcome these latest statistics which again show significant improvement in the exam performance of Year 12 and 14 pupils.

Overall these statistics paint an impressive and positive picture and are a result of hard work and effort on the part of the pupils and their teachers.

They are also evidence that the school improvement policies and programmes I have put in place are working for our young people.

My focus on raising standards for all, on performance and on the key skills of literacy and numeracy is paying off.

My focus on improving equity, on our most disadvantaged pupils and on those schools serving the most disadvantaged is paying off.

The education system is to be congratulated on meeting the challenges of raising standards. A focused and collaborative approach has so far yielded impressive results.

However, while there is much to celebrate in these statistics we cannot afford to become complacent.

Our young people have demonstrated clear capacity to do well across many subjects but we need together to continue to support more of them to achieve in English and maths.

We all recognise the value of a high quality education and must ensure that this remains a priority for us all.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education whether he has made the Executive aware that his proposed cuts to education will result in his Department's failure to meet its Programme for Government 2011/15 targets.

(AQO 7329/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Executive has still to agree a Programme for Government beyond 31 March 2015 and it is therefore not yet possible to ascertain the full impact next year of any proposed cuts on the delivery of education services.

The proposed cuts form part of my Department's consultation on the draft Budget which closed on 29 December 2014. Officials are currently collating and analysing responses and until this is complete and the Executive agree a revised Budget, I will not be making any final decisions on the allocation of the education budget next year. However, as I have made clear on numerous occasions, I will continue to lobby my Executive colleagues for additional resources for education so that I can protect frontline services as far as possible and continue to deliver on my key priorities of raising standards and closing the performance gap.

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Education to what extent Health and Safety issues are taken into consideration when reversing the decision on previously agreed Minor Works schemes.

(AQO 7330/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There have been no Capital Minor Works schemes, in this financial year, which have previously been approved and then the decision has been withdrawn or reversed.

All Minor Works applications are assessed in line with my agreed priorities, which include works that meet inescapable statutory requirement such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Where a Capital Minor Works scheme has been approved and work commenced, and as a result unforeseen urgent Health and Safety work is identified, consideration will be given to address those Health and Safety issues as part of the approved scheme.

Approval to any Capital Minor Works project progressing will be dependent on the available budget and other competing priorities for investment across the schools' estate.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the adequacy and equity of both statutory and voluntary youth provision.

(AQO 7331/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under Article 37 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 each Board has statutory responsibility for the securing of adequate facilities for youth service activities. During the current financial year, I have provided resource funding totalling £33m for the youth sector to deliver those services assessed as needed in line with Departmental priorities within the resources available.

The Education and Training Inspectorate's Chief Inspector's Report for 2012 – 2014 found that the overall effectiveness of 92% of youth provision was evaluated as good or better. This was based on an assessment of both statutory and voluntary sector provision.

Future funding of youth services by the Education Authority and the Youth Council will be in line with the Regional Youth Development Plan and Priorities for Youth, and, within the resources available.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Education why, against official advice, he approved Development Proposal number 264 to establish a new grant aided, independent Irish medium post primary at Owenbeg, Dungiven.

(AQO 7332/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the provision of Irish-medium education and I take that duty seriously. While I note officials' advice, I recognise the demand for post-primary education through the medium of Irish and believe that Coláiste Dhoire is capable of delivering a high quality education for the benefit of all young people in Dungiven and the surrounding areas.

Department for Employment and Learning

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to his Department's European Social Fund guidelines (i) why his Department is proposing to only support level one qualifications; (ii) why a training qualification from the University of Ulster is required; (iii) why only employment outcomes above 16 hours are applicable; (iv) how this differs from other departmental programmes; and (v) whether the stipulation that only outcomes above 16 hours are applicable is suitable for the disability sector.

(AQW 40121/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

- (i) In the current financial context, it is important that we minimise duplication between programmes funded by my Department, and that is why we are seeking to focus the ESF programme on level 1 provision and other support required by learners with barriers to employability, in which voluntary and community providers have particular expertise. At the same time, Further Education colleges and other Departmental programmes will have to reduce their level 1 provision and concentrate on higher level courses.

The focus on level 1 in the ESF guidelines has been informed by a range of connected policy initiatives, including the review of youth training. You may recall that I announced the review of apprenticeships and youth training in February 2013. Securing our Success, the Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships, was published June 2014, and the interim report of the review of youth training was published for public consultation in November 2014.

The youth training review's interim report and consultation, which is currently on-going, proposes the establishment of a new youth training system in Northern Ireland, available to all young people aged 16 – 24, that facilitates progression into an apprenticeship, further education or sustained employment. The system will be accessible to those commencing employment, those in existing roles, and those currently not in employment, and will deliver structured work-based learning for all participants.

To ensure progression for all participants, it is proposed that youth training will deliver a new, baccalaureate-style professional and technical award at level 2, equating to a minimum of 5 GCSEs at grades A* - C, including English and mathematics. This new system will seek to address the needs of the 34.8% of young people who leave school without this breadth of achievement at level 2. Young people will be supported in their training through impartial careers advice and guidance, pastoral support, mentoring, and financial support. Additional flexibilities for those with additional requirements will be built into the system.

The interim report proposes that full support will be provided for those young people that require a full level 1 (equivalent to four GCSEs at grades D-G, including English and mathematics at grades D-F), before commencing in the new youth training system. Given the wider issues (e.g. personal issues, caring commitments, disabilities) that may affect individuals in this cohort, there is a need to provide a holistic package of support at entry level and level 1 to ensure achievement and progression into education and training at higher levels.

- (ii) While developing the new European Social Fund (ESF) Programme for 2014 – 2020, my Department has worked to align the Programme with the tutor qualification requirements for those delivering training in other Departmental programmes.

The Guidance Notes that accompanied the application form for the European Social Fund stated the criteria for engaging relevant qualified training staff for the delivery of the programme. However, the Department aims to issue further guidance to clarify this position which will outline all the qualifications levels that are permitted. It will continue to advise that those organisations, not meeting the requirements, will potentially have a period of up to three years to implement a plan for bringing their staff up to the required qualifications levels.

Requiring staff delivering training to be suitably qualified is intended to ensure that participants on the programme are assured of high quality provision.

- (iii) The 16 hour rule is a requirement of the Social Security Agency and unemployment benefits regulations. This is the 'hours of work' threshold, recognised by the government as economic 'employment', as the person must come off benefit, and thus contribute as a reduction to the social security bill. Those people would then come off the unemployment register. Below this hourly threshold, a person on Job Seekers Allowance can work but their benefit would be reduced in proportion to earnings.
- (iv) The above rule applies to government programmes that impact on a person's benefit entitlement.
- (v) My Department is aware that the above rule can impact on people's employment considerations and prospects, particularly those people with disability related barriers to work. Through the proposed Disability Employment and Skills Strategy, officials from my Department, in partnership with representatives from the local disability sector, wish to consider flexibilities around the 16 hour rule.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 39981/11-15, how the pre-2012 model used by the Higher Education Funding Council for England for his Department works in relation to local universities.

(AQW 40247/11-15)

Dr Farry: The pre-2012 model used by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) works by calculating the distribution of the teaching and research funding which my Department has available between the local universities. The calculations take account of a range of factors including the number and type of students at each institution, the subjects taught, the form of delivery and the amount, and quality, of research undertaken. In particular, the model recognises that different subjects require different levels of resource and may therefore be more expensive to deliver.

The model also provides additional 'targeted allocations' of grant in recognition of extra costs incurred by the universities in carrying out certain functions such as supporting part-time students, those from disadvantaged backgrounds or who have a disability.

Data on student numbers, subjects etc, used to inform the distribution of grant, are gathered from the universities through an annual Higher Education Early Statistics (HESES) survey and verified against the later UK-wide Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) survey.

Up to 2014/15, research funding was calculated on information gathered through the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), a system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions. This has now been replaced by the Research Excellence Framework (REF) which will inform funding from 2015/16 onwards.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for the cumulative total of grant assistance received by all Seagate plants, including those which are now closed, since the 1992/93 financial year.

(AQW 39740/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Since 1992/93 Seagate in Northern Ireland has been offered a total of c£175 million in grant assistance of which c£158 million has been paid to the company to date.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has met the Together: Building a United Community Strategy commitment to introduce an impact assessment that assesses the extent to which her departmental policies and interventions contribute to the objective of building a united, rather than divided, community.

(AQW 40189/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity and carrying out good relations proofing under Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. DETI uses the tools of screening and equality impact assessments to assess the likely impact of its policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. The Department also applies the guidelines for effective policy making set out in the NICS Policy Toolkit published by OFMDFM. This includes the 'Practical Guide to Impact Assessment'.

DETI's Equality Scheme outlines how the Department proposes to fulfil these duties in relation to its relevant functions and my Department will continue to honour and implement the obligations set out in this Scheme.

My Department has a key role in delivering the Executive's Economic Strategy which supports the rebalancing of the Northern Ireland economy through a focus on export-led economic growth as the means to deliver higher levels of prosperity and employment for all. I believe that increasing economic growth, creating jobs and prosperity will help contribute to the Executive's commitment to building a united community.

Department of the Environment

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has met the Together: Building a United Community Strategy commitment to introduce an impact assessment that assesses the extent to which his departmental policies and interventions contribute to the objective of building a united, rather than divided, community.

(AQW 40222/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Two of the key commitments in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy are to establish an Equality and Good Relations Commission that will act as an independent, statutorily-based organisation to provide policy advice and a challenge to Government; and develop an augmented impact assessment that assesses the extent to which policies and other interventions contribute to meeting the objectives of this overarching Strategy. OFMDFM is the lead department for implementing these commitments. They have not yet been implemented.

In the meantime, my Department continues to carry out equality screening on all new or revised policies under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which includes the requirement to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to list the reference numbers of the PPS21 CTY2a applications to date which have been approved, broken down by Planning Local Government District.

(AQW 40228/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department does not maintain a record of planning approvals by planning policy and I am unable to provide any statistics on the number of applications approved under CTY 2a of PPS 21, broken down by Planning Local Government District.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 40175/11-15, what measures will be put in place to prevent taxi firms, or persons connected to taxi firms, fitting their own taxi meters.

(AQW 40266/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The delivery model for the introduction of mandatory taximeters (including fitment, sealing and testing) is being finalised. I will provide detailed information on the arrangements when this process has been completed; this will include information relating to the issues you have raised.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 40175/11-15, what measures will be put in place to prevent fraud or deception in taxi meter fitting.

(AQW 40267/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The delivery model for the introduction of mandatory taximeters (including fitment, sealing and testing) is being finalised. I will provide detailed information on the arrangements when this process has been completed; this will include information relating to the issues you have raised.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 40175/11-15, what restrictions his Department will put in place on who will be permitted to fit taxi meters.

(AQW 40268/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The delivery model for the introduction of mandatory taximeters (including fitment, sealing and testing) is being finalised. I will provide detailed information on the arrangements when this process has been completed; this will include information relating to the issues you have raised.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 40175/11-15, whether it is his Department's intention to restrict the fitting of taxi meters to companies or persons who are official dealers or installers.

(AQW 40269/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The delivery model for the introduction of mandatory taximeters (including fitment, sealing and testing) is being finalised. I will provide detailed information on the arrangements when this process has been completed; this will include information relating to the issues you have raised.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 40175/11-15, what provision is being made to ensure that the calibration of taxi meters is included in regulations relating to the meters.

(AQW 40270/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The delivery model for the introduction of mandatory taximeters (including fitment, sealing and testing) is being finalised. I will provide detailed information on the arrangements when this process has been completed; this will include information relating to the issues you have raised.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, following the High Court ruling on Casement Park in which Mr Justice Horner stated that permission had been granted unlawfully without all concerns being raised with him, and so not to repeat this failing, he will seek all concerns in respect of the proposed single tier tax scheme, including the email and video footage of taxi operations at Kingspan Stadium as previously mentioned and which he refused to view and that may prove beneficial in the decision making process.

(AQW 40301/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As indicated in my answer to AQO 7197/11-15, the relevant tax legislation for single tier was made by my Department on 9 December 2014 and I am content with the decision making process undertaken to arrive at this position.

Pursuant to AQW 36652/11-15, I have no plans to revisit the email and video footage relating to taxi operations at Kingspan Stadium.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment what percentage of each council's annual budget the (i) Rates Support Grant; and (ii) De-rating Grant has accounted for in the last five years.

(AQW 40333/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The certified accounts of the 26 councils for the last 5 years contain details on the Rates Support Grant and De-rating Grant allocated to each council. In addition the certified accounts also contain the gross income available to each council.

The percentage of each council's gross income that the Rates Support Grant and De-rating Grant has accounted for in each of the last five years are summarised in the attached table.

Percentage of Council Gross Income Derived from Derating Grant and Rates Support Grant

Council	2009/2010 % of Total Budget		2010/2011 % of Total Budget		2011/2012 % of Total Budget		2012/2013 % of Total Budget		2013/2014 % of Total Budget	
	DRG	RSG								
Antrim	5%	0%	4%	0%	4%	0%	5%	0%	5%	0%
Ards	2%	4%	2%	3%	2%	4%	2%	4%	2%	3%
Armagh	3%	7%	3%	6%	3%	7%	3%	6%	3%	6%
Ballymena	5%	0%	5%	0%	5%	0%	5%	0%	6%	0%
Ballymoney	3%	11%	2%	8%	2%	10%	3%	10%	3%	10%
Banbridge	3%	7%	2%	6%	3%	6%	3%	6%	3%	6%
Belfast	3%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%
Carrickfergus	4%	5%	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%	4%	2%
Castlereagh	3%	0%	2%	0%	3%	0%	3%	0%	3%	0%
Coleraine	2%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%
Cookstown	6%	5%	5%	4%	6%	4%	6%	4%	6%	4%
Craigavon	6%	3%	5%	2%	6%	3%	6%	3%	6%	2%
Derry	3%	3%	2%	2%	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%
Down	2%	6%	2%	4%	2%	6%	2%	5%	2%	5%
Dungannon	10%	6%	8%	5%	9%	5%	10%	5%	9%	4%
Fermanagh	4%	6%	3%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%
Larne	4%	2%	4%	1%	4%	1%	4%	1%	4%	1%
Limavady	1%	12%	1%	9%	2%	11%	2%	11%	2%	11%
Lisburn	5%	0%	5%	0%	5%	0%	5%	0%	5%	0%
Magherafelt	6%	15%	5%	7%	6%	9%	6%	8%	6%	8%
Moyle	2%	7%	2%	5%	2%	6%	2%	7%	2%	6%
Newry & Mourne	4%	5%	4%	5%	4%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%
Newtownabbey	4%	0%	4%	0%	4%	0%	5%	0%	4%	0%
North Down	2%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%

	2009/2010 % of Total Budget		2010/2011 % of Total Budget		2011/2012 % of Total Budget		2012/2013 % of Total Budget		2013/2014 % of Total Budget	
	DRG	RSG								
Omagh	2%	7%	2%	5%	3%	6%	3%	1%	3%	5%
Strabane	2%	15%	2%	11%	2%	13%	2%	14%	2%	13%

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to Policy CTY10 - Farm Dwellings from Planning Policy Statement 21, with regards to establishing if a farm business is active and established, whether it is necessary that a Farm Business Identification Number has been in existence for more than six years.

(AQW 40337/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Policy CTY 10 requires that the farm business is currently active and has been established for at least 6 years. In interpreting Policy CTY10, it is necessary to look carefully at the justification and amplification accompanying the policy. This states that the applicant 'will therefore be required to provide the farm's DARD business ID number along with other evidence to prove active farming over the required period'. Therefore the requirement of a farm business ID to prove the farm business is currently active is a key aspect of this test as is the operation of the active farm business for the 6 year period.

Although an applicant for a dwelling on a farm need not personally be involved in active farming, they are required to provide the farm's DARD business ID in order to establish that the farm where the dwelling is proposed is both active and established.

I would however advise that planning policy and guidance cannot always anticipate all possible scenarios that may occur, therefore, it is possible that the Department may accept suitable alternative evidence of active farming. However, this will be the exception as the general position will be that applicants will be required to provide the farm's DARD business ID as evidence that the farm is both active and established.

Furthermore I would advise that the draft Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) provides a comprehensive consolidation and, where appropriate, improvement of planning policy setting out the Purpose of Planning and Core Principles for the new two-tier reformed planning system. It contains a consolidation of existing subject policies including Sustainable Development in the Countryside contained within PPS 21. I have given a commitment to consider further the comments and views which I have received and to look again at the issue of rural dwellers as part of the process of bringing forward the final version of the SPPS.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 39951/11-15, who is responsible for the erection and maintenance of conservation signage in Cushendall.

(AQW 40375/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Responsibility for the erection and maintenance of conservation signage in Cushendall would normally be the responsibility of Moyle District Council, or the new Causeway Coast & Glens District Council post 1 April 2015. The Council would, in turn, liaise with DRD TransportNI and the local planning authority for respective advice and approvals.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why have AQW 28359/11-15, AQW 28360/11-15, AQW 29576/11-15, AQW 29159//11-15 and AQW 29153/11-15 not been answered and when they will be answered.

(AQW 31798/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): These questions have been answered.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will answer AQW 37099/11-15 and AQW 36284/11-15 or provide a reason for not doing so to date.

(AQW 38930/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: These questions have now been answered.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will ensure that Land and Property Service investigate urgently the rates liability of Sinn Féin offices in Gulladuff, Cookstown and Dunloy, in light of the facts exposed in the BBC Spotlight programme broadcast on 18 November 2014.

(AQW 39009/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The premises referred to are already entered in the Valuation List and attract rate liability. Unit 1 at 79 Quarry Road, Maghera; 26 Burn Road, Cookstown; 162 Tullaghans Road, Dunloy; 12A Main Street, Dunloy, are all valued as offices and liable for business rates.

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of staff employed (i) directly by his Department; and (ii) by its agencies, who currently earn less than the living wage.

(AQW 39064/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The National Living Wage is an hourly rate promoted by the Living Wage Foundation which campaigns for a rate of pay calculated according to the cost of living in the UK. It is not a statutory obligation. Employers choose to pay the living wage on a voluntary basis. The Department of Finance and Personnel has 4 employees who currently earn less than the living wage.

DFP agencies do not employ any staff who currently earn less than the living wage.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the extent of the peace dividend promised by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown following the St Andrews Agreement negotiations; (ii) how much has been received; and (iii) what remains unspent.

(AQW 39066/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: As part of the St Andrews agreement and subsequent restoration of devolution the then Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a £51.5 billion financial package which primarily related to overall Northern Ireland budgets in the course of the period 2007-08 to 2010-11.

The specifics of the package included:

- £35 billion based on existing spending for 2007-08 together with up-rating by at least inflation over the subsequent three years;
- an £18 billion long term investment strategy from 2005 to 2017;
- retention of value for money savings to be made over the period 2008-09 to 2010-2011;
- retention of asset sales to fund capital investment;
- additional spending over 2007-08 and 2008-09 under the End Year Flexibility scheme;
- additional spending financed by EU receipts;
- the provision of £400 million, additional to the £35 billion above; and
- confirmation of £200 million borrowing under the Reinvestment and Reform initiative from 2007-08.

The only financial commitment that currently remains to be fulfilled is the agreement for an £18 billion long term investment strategy from 2005 to 2017 and the Executive confirmed as part of the Economic Pact that the UK Government is on course to deliver the commitment to £18 billion of capital funding over the period 2005-2017.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of public sector productivity; and to detail how it is (i) measured; and (ii) monitored.

(AQW 39129/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for the production of estimates of productivity. The ONS produces overall UK and regional productivity estimates and has also developed UK public sector productivity estimates. However, the ONS does not produce public sector productivity statistics for Northern Ireland.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures are in place to support occupants of non-domestic properties in Coleraine that are facing rate increases of more than 100 per cent, due to Rate Revaluation from April 2015.

(AQW 39175/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It is unclear of the specific case(s) that you are referring to and it is too early to know what rates bills will be, until the rate poundage is agreed early next year. Furthermore, Coleraine ratepayers are amongst those who stand to benefit from the £30m District Rates Convergence scheme. So, percentage increases in value are unlikely to translate into the same percentage increase in rates.

During a consultation undertaken by my Department and the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy earlier this year, support was expressed for extending SBRR next year instead of having a special transitional relief scheme for the revaluation. It is also worth noting in this context that the transitional relief schemes that applied at the last two non domestic revaluations were directed at very small properties and since then the Assembly introduced the Small Business Rate Relief scheme. I have proposed in the Budget proposals that we retain this support next year at a cost of £20 million.

There are no plans to provide further support to those facing substantial increases due to the revaluation. It is not a priority, it is unaffordable and it could be argued that they have benefited from the absence of revaluation for many years.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the reasoning for the allocation of £50.5m of the Financial Transactions Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit to the Department of the Environment in the draft 2015/16 budget.

(AQW 39272/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: £50 million of the Financial Transactions Capital allocation for the Department of the Environment in the Draft Budget is intended to allow the proposed arc21 Waste Treatment and Incineration Plant to commence if it is approved. This allocation was included after work by DOE and the Strategic Investment Board.

The remaining £0.5 million of Financial Transactions Capital allocated to the Department of the Environment is intended to allow the Department to take forward heritage led development projects.

Should the DOE Minister decide that this funding is not required it can be surrendered for reallocation as part of the Final Budget.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether HM Treasury has confirmed that the £100m loan may be repaid with Capital Receipts.

(AQW 39328/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The repayment of the £100m loan from Capital receipts was confirmed as part of the Stormont House Agreement.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail each Department's expenditure on professional consultancy services in last three years.

(AQW 39329/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: This information is published on the Department of Finance and Personnel's website in the Annual Compliance Report on the use of External Consultants across the NICS. Expenditure for the last three years for which this is available is detailed in the table overleaf.

The Department of Finance and Personnel co-ordinates this information from returns provided by individual departments and information for future years will be published on an annual basis.

NI Department	£m		
	2012-13	2011-12	2010-11
DARD	0.22	*0.00	0.33
DCAL	0.15	0.13	0.19
DE	0.21	0.52	1.03
DEL	0.16	0.11	0.16
DETI	0.73	1.79	3.34
DFP	0.30	0.29	0.15
DHSSPS	0.81	0.56	1.21
DOE	0.65	0.41	0.78
DOJ	0.30	0.53	1.69
DRD	0.40	0.93	1.22
DSD	1.11	1.07	1.34
OFMDFM	1.59	1.73	2.86
AOCC	*0.00	*0.00	0.01
FSA	0.00	0.05	0.01
NIAC	0.05	0.09	0.19
NIAUR	0.96	1.12	1.25
PPS	0.00	*0.00	0.01
Total	**7.65	9.33	15.77

* Expenditure less than £5,000 which is not shown due to roundings.

** Total may not agree due to roundings.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking to encourage Departments to submit proposals for Financial Transaction Capital funding.

(AQW 39330/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I have actively encouraged Executive colleagues to come forward with proposals that can utilise Financial Transactions Capital. This engagement has resulted in the development of a range of schemes across departments and meant no funding was surrendered to HM Treasury in 2013-14.

In the context of the June and October Monitoring rounds this year, I have specifically highlighted to Executive colleagues the need for more proposals to ensure the Executive makes full use of the Financial Transactions Capital available in this year. On the back of this request, my officials continue to engage with their counterparts in other departments to identify suitable schemes than can benefit from this funding.

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the Assembly Commission's budget in each of the last three years; and why the Assembly Commission is not facing reductions in the 2015/16 Budget.
(AQW 39331/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: In my Draft Budget statement on 3rd November 2014, I advised that in recognition of the independent role exercised by the Assembly, no reductions would be placed on the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (NIAC) at draft Budget stage. I also advised that NIAC should seek to manage internal pressures from within its resource allocation and deliver savings on a similar level to Executive departments.

I have now written to NIAC requesting details of the level of savings that can be delivered in 2015-16. Once I receive this information, NIAC savings will be factored into the Final Budget. As requested the details of the NIAC opening budget position for each of the last three years has been provided in the table below.

Table 1: Northern Ireland Assembly Commission(NIAC) Opening Budget 2012-1015 £'000

Resource DEL	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Ring-fenced	3,415	3,405	3,395
Non Ring-fenced	41,595	41,295	40,685
Total	45,010	44,700	44,080
Capital DEL	3,670	2,390	5,147

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 38713/11-15, to explain the increase in the full time equivalent number of staff in his Department in each of the five years.
(AQW 39472/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There has been an increase in staff numbers in DFP over the last 5 years due to the transfer of functions into DFP from other departments, such as:

- Increase in Departmental Solicitors Office following Devolution of Justice – 2010/11;
- NISRA Economic Labour Market Statistics Branch Admin staff transferred from DETI to DFP – 2011/12;
- Increase in Land & Property Services re DARD Land Parcel Information System and Non Domestic Revaluation - 2011/12;
- Finance function from Dept of Justice brought into Account NI (ESS) – 2012/13;
- Transfer of IT Assist Confidential from Dept of Justice to DFP Enterprise Shared Service (ESS) – 2013/14;
- ICT Apprentice Programme – 2013/14;
- Set up of the Strategic Policy and Reform Division – 2013/14.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the Peace IV funding programme.
(AQW 39478/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The draft PEACE IV Cross Border Cooperation Programme was submitted to the European Commission on 22 September 2014, in line with the EU regulatory deadline.

The draft programme focuses on Shared Education, Children and Young People, Shared Spaces and Services, and Building Positive Relations at a Local Level, and has a total budget of €269 million.

A launch date for PEACE IV cannot be set until the draft programme has been agreed with the Commission, which is not expected before May 2015.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether any exemptions in regard to rates exist in respect of non-domestic properties at 148-152 Springfield Road, Belfast; and, if so, to detail the properties and reasons for exemption.
(AQW 39507/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The block of properties at 148-152 Springfield Road consists of four ground floor shops and three first floor offices. Two of the seven units are entered in the Valuation List as Exempt, namely first floor offices with addresses of 152 and 152A Springfield Road.

The separate occupation of these two units is deemed to meet the requirements of Article 41 of The Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the PEACE funding awarded in respect of the first floor of 148-152 Springfield Road, Belfast, including (i) the recipient of the funding; (ii) the purpose of the funding; and (iii) when the funding was provided.

(AQW 39509/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) has advised that one project funded under the PEACE II Programme had a Lead Partner whose address was recorded as 148-152 Springfield Road. The relevant project was the Clonard Neighbourhood Action Plan and the total funding awarded to the project was £148,471 for area-based regeneration activities.

The Lead Partner was Clonard Neighbourhood Development Partnership. Funding for this project was approved in 2004.

The project involved the implementation of Clonard Neighbourhood Action Plan. This aimed to:

- build a collaborative partnership between key stakeholders;
- develop and improve the facilities and services to support economic and social development;
- promote the integration and inclusion of marginalised communities;
- prepare local organisations for Neighbourhood Renewal;
- develop a neighbourhood wide lobbying and fundraising strategy;
- provide information on the services, resources and support which are available to implement the Neighbourhood Action Plan.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, given the concerns expressed during a debate in the European Parliament on 24 November 2014 regarding delays adopting Operational Programmes for European Structural and Investment Programmes (2014-2020), for an update on how the process of adopting the PEACE IV draft Operational Programme is progressing.

(AQW 39517/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The draft PEACE IV Programme was submitted to the European Commission on 22 September 2014, in line with the EU regulatory timeframe. The draft programme is undergoing Commission inter-service consultation. My Department is working closely with the SEUPB, the Irish Government and other NICS departments to consider informal comments received from the Commission on 15 December. Formal comments from the Commission are anticipated in the coming weeks.

It is expected that PEACE IV will be adopted in the first half of 2015, following the necessary revision to the EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, given the concerns expressed during a debate in the European Parliament on 24 November 2014 regarding delays adopting Operational Programmes for European Structural and Investment Programmes (2014-2020), to detail (i) when he anticipates that Northern Ireland's Operational Programmes for European Structural and Investment Programmes (2014-2020) will be adopted; (ii) what delays are anticipated in terms of implementing EU Programmes (2014-2020); (iii) what steps are being taken to co-ordinate with other accountable Departments on this issue and the outcome of this engagement; (iv) what engagement he has had with the (a) European Commission; and (b) other stakeholders on this issue and the outcome; and (v) what steps are being taken to mitigate against any possible delays in the adoption of Operational Programmes for EU Programmes (2014-2020) and slippage in implementation of the Programmes.

(AQW 39518/11-15)

Mr Hamilton:

- (i) Northern Ireland has submitted five European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) Co-operation Programmes for the 2014-2020 programming period to the European Commission for agreement:
 - a. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programme under the Investment for Growth and Jobs objective, submitted on 17 July 2014;
 - b. The European Social Fund (ESF) programme under the Investment for Growth and Jobs objective, submitted on 17 July 2014;
 - c. The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) Programme under the Common Agricultural Policy, submitted on 14 October 2014;
 - d. The ERDF Programme for Peace and Reconciliation under the European Territorial Co-operation objective, submitted on 22 September 2014 (the PEACE IV programme); and

- e. The ERDF Programme for Cross-Border co-operation with Ireland and Scotland under the European Territorial Co-operation objective, submitted on 22 September 2014 (the INTERREG VA programme).
- The ERDF and ESF programmes, under the Investment for Growth and Jobs objective, were adopted by the European Commission on 12 December 2014.
- The Rural Development Programme is expected to be adopted in 2015, following the adoption by the EU of the proposed revision to its Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020.
- The PEACE IV programme is expected to be adopted in 2015, following the adoption by the EU of the proposed revision to its Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020.
- The INTERREG VA programme was cleared for adoption within the existing budget commitments in December 2014. Discussions are continuing to secure its formal adoption by the European Commission hopefully in the coming few weeks.
- (ii) No delays in implementation are foreseen for the ERDF and ESF Programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs objective, or the INTERREG VA programme.
- Programmes not adopted in 2014 will have decisions delayed until after a technical adjustment to the EU budget has been agreed.
- No significant issues in implementing the Rural Development Programme or the PEACE IV programme are foreseen from this delay.
- (iii) Officials maintain regular dialogue with all departments preparing the Co-operation Programmes. To date no need for intervention has been identified.
- (iv) a I have not had engagement with the European Commission on this issue.
- b My officials have been in regular dialogue with the Irish Government and SEUPB in relation to the development of the PEACE IV programme and with the Irish and Scottish Governments and SEUPB in relation to the INTERREG VA programme.
- (v) Arrangements for the successful implementation of the Rural Development Programme are the responsibility of DARD.
- In relation to the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes, my officials are working closely with the Irish Government, Scottish Government (in the case of INTERREG), accountable departments and SEUPB, the Managing Authority, in order to militate against any delays in the adoption and implementation of the programmes.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 38620/11-15, given that the study has been commissioned, to provide the Terms of Reference?

(AQW 39527/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The key elements of the terms of reference for the Welfare Reform Costs Validation Study are attached at Annex A.

Welfare Reform Costs – Validation Study

Key elements of Terms of Reference

The Welfare Reform Costs Validation Study was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the economic impact on NI of failure to progress the welfare reform agenda in line with the rest of the UK.

The purpose of the study was to provide additional clarity to the Executive on the costs of Welfare Reform in NI.

Requirements:

The study is a short and focussed undertaking aimed at producing a concise report that addresses the following key issues:

- What are the policy implications for the NI Executive of not maintaining welfare parity with the UK Government;
- An assessment of DWP and SSA modelling assumptions that currently exist for welfare reform (and non delivery within NI);
- The likely direct cost implications – both to the UK Government and the NI Executive in terms of social security payments;
- An assessment of the regional economic impact that the proposed national welfare reform agenda may have (including opportunity cost of foregone public expenditure on penalties, promoting employability etc);
- An assessment of the robustness of the financial penalties to the Northern Ireland Block set out by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury;
- The additional consequences that might flow from continuing to deviate from national welfare reform policy – including implications for IT systems, delivery of social security payments, processing DWP centres located within NI, fraud and error mechanisms etc.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 38673/11-15, what provision exists for owners of properties that are not located in areas where district rates are relatively low and therefore do not automatically qualify for the rate subsidy scheme, yet who's rates increase disparately to others in the area.

(AQW 39605/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The £30m Scheme agreed by the Executive provides transitional support for ratepayers to protect them from the immediate effects of the formation of the new larger councils. It is necessary because of the differences that have grown up over many years in the level of District Rates between the existing councils. The Executive is not intervening beyond that and each of the 11 new councils will independently set their own single District Rate. As always this will depend on their spending decisions, as is the case with the current 26 councils.

Regarding the effects of the non domestic Revaluation: some ratepayers will face increases, some will decrease and many will change little; it depends how sectors and locations have fared since 2001, the valuation date for the current Valuation List. This revaluation exercise is long overdue and has resulted in a redistribution of the rating burden. There are no plans to provide further support to those facing substantial increases due to the Revaluation. It is not a priority, it is unaffordable and it could be argued that such ratepayers have benefitted from the absence of Revaluation for many years.

The transitional relief schemes that applied at the last two non domestic Revaluations were directed at very small properties and since then the Assembly introduced the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme. During a consultation undertaken by the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy and my Department this year support was expressed for extending small business rate relief next year instead of having a special transitional relief scheme for the Revaluation.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the optimum number of grades in the Civil Service.

(AQW 39736/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The optimum number of grades is that determined by departments collectively to be useful to them. In 2011, as part of the Comprehensive Pay and Grading Review, departments were asked whether the grading structure was effective for their business purposes and they confirmed this was the case. Departments do not have to use every grade but can use those most useful to them.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the number of properties benefiting from the current rates cap of £400,000.

(AQW 39737/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There are currently 6,563 properties benefiting from the current maximum capital value of £400,000.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions his Department has had with the Ulster Bank on the recent announcement of further branch closures.

(AQW 39768/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I have met with Ulster Bank and RBS senior management on several occasions over the last year to discuss a range of issues including the bank's restructuring process. Clearly, it is disappointing that Ulster Bank sees a need to close a further ten branches in Northern Ireland as part of that process. I will be meeting with Ulster Bank again in the near future as part of my series of ongoing meetings with the local banks.

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement, what are financial implications for the Executive.

(AQW 39769/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The key headline for Northern Ireland was the Chancellor's announcement on the devolution of Corporation Tax to the Assembly. This has now progressed as part of the Stormont House Agreement.

In terms of the remainder of the Chancellor's Statement, one of the key issues was the announcement of an additional £1.3 billion for the NHS from 2015-16. The implications for Northern Ireland are assessed through the Barnett formula and will result in an additional £41.4 million for redistribution in 2015-16.

In addition, the Chancellor's announcements on business rates means that a further £21.3 million is available for reallocation in 2015-16.

There were also small Barnett additions for the Executive resulting from increases in GB to education, culture, media and sport, transport, environment and energy and welfare.

The Executive has also received a further £1.3 million Financial Transactions Capital DEL. The table below shows the total Resource DEL and Capital DEL Barnett consequentials resulting from the Autumn Statement.

Table: 2014 Autumn Statement Barnett Consequentials

	2014-15	2015-16
Non Ring-fenced Resource DEL	0.8	67.0
Capital DEL	0.8	5.7
Financial Transactions Capital	-	1.3
Total	1.6	*74.1

*Figures may not sum due to roundings.

Impact on 2015-16

The Barnett changes will of course impact on the funding envelope available in the 2015-16 financial year with a further £67 million of non ring-fenced Resource DEL available to the Executive.

Office of Budget Responsibility Projections

The Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) provided updated projections for the immediate period beyond the current Spending Review period. The latest OBR projections suggest that overall UK growth was 3.0% in 2014, and will be 2.4% this year and 2.2% in 2016.

Despite the promising growth within the UK economy as a whole, the outlook for 2015-16 and beyond will continue to be challenging for public sector finances as evidenced by the continuing restrictions to public expenditure in Whitehall and, as I have stated before, the Executive will undoubtedly face tough decisions going forward.

It is important to emphasise that the OBR forecasts relate to the headline UK position. The Northern Ireland outcome for the years beyond 2015-16 will ultimately depend on what areas the UK Government decide to prioritise. However, as I have consistently set out, there should be no doubt that the public expenditure position for Northern Ireland will continue to be constrained up to 2018-19.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to your correspondence in relation to AQT 1606/11-15, to provide a breakdown of the employers of the 476 full time equivalents.

(AQW 39827/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The employers of the 476 full time equivalents in Ballymena County Hall are detailed below:

DOE Core	4
DOE Planning Service	41
DRD TransportNI	147
DSD Regional Development Office	16
North Eastern Education and Library Board	207
Health and Social Care Board, Northern Local Commissioning Group	61

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of deaths that occurred in a (i) home; and (ii) acute setting during 2013, of people who already had a terminal diagnosis; and to provide a breakdown of these figures by constituency.

(AQW 39830/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Information regarding those who already had a terminal diagnosis is not recorded during the death registration process. Accordingly, and as agreed, the requested information has been collated for the main causes of death within each parliamentary constituency.

By way of context, a total of 14,968 deaths were registered during 2013. Tables 1a and 1b detail the 3,015 deaths (20.1 % of all deaths) that occurred in a nursing home during 2013, whereas tables 2a and 2b detail the 7,194 deaths (48.1 % of all deaths) that occurred in a hospital during 2013.

Table 1a: Number of deaths registered in Northern Ireland that occurred in a nursing home by cause of death and parliamentary constituency, 2013

ICD10 Code	ICD10 Description	Parliamentary Constituency									
		Belfast East	Belfast North	Belfast South	Belfast West	East Antrim	East Londonderry	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Foyle	Lagan Valley	Mid Ulster
A00-B99	Certain infection & parasitic diseases	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	3	0
C00-D48	Neoplasms	47	45	64	22	31	17	22	27	35	18
D50-D89	Diseases of the blood / blood-forming organs	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
E00-E90	Endocrine, nutritional & metabolic diseases	5	2	2	3	4	1	4	3	4	4
F00-F99	Mental & behavioural disorders	31	33	39	29	23	25	29	20	33	13
G00-G99	Diseases of the nervous system	27	21	31	32	29	20	20	8	30	16
I00-I99	Diseases of the circulatory system	49	26	46	32	33	55	30	25	40	40
J00-J99	Diseases of the respiratory system	29	27	15	12	17	30	28	15	20	19
K00-K93	Diseases of the digestive system	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1
L00-L99	Diseases of the skin & subcutaneous tissue	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
M00-M99	Diseases of the musculoskeletal system & connective tissue	1	3	0	2	1	1	0	1	1	5
N00-N99	Diseases of the genitourinary system	7	2	7	1	1	5	2	4	1	3
Q00-Q99	Congenital malformations, deformations & chromosomal abnormalities	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
R00-R99	Symptoms, signs & abnormal clinical & laboratory findings	10	4	18	3	1	5	4	1	8	4
V01-Y98	External causes of morbidity & mortality	0	1	3	2	0	0	1	2	2	0
All Causes		207	166	228	141	144	161	145	108	178	123

Table 1b: Number of deaths registered in Northern Ireland that occurred in a nursing home by cause of death and parliamentary constituency, 2013

ICD10 Code	ICD10 Description	Parliamentary Constituency									
		Newry & Armagh	North Antrim	North Down	South Antrim	South Down	Strangford	Upper Bann	West Tyrone	Unknown	NI
A00-B99	Certain infection & parasitic diseases	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	12
C00-D48	Neoplasms	45	27	52	25	45	46	25	15	0	608

ICD10 Code	ICD10 Description	Parliamentary Constituency									
		Newry & Armagh	North Antrim	North Down	South Antrim	South Down	Strangford	Upper Bann	West Tyrone	Unknown	NI
D50-D89	Diseases of the blood / blood-forming organs	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4
E00-E90	Endocrine, nutritional & metabolic diseases	2	4	4	3	6	2	4	3	0	60
F00-F99	Mental & behavioural disorders	46	44	52	31	34	32	48	24	0	586
G00-G99	Diseases of the nervous system	11	26	42	19	25	18	17	14	0	406
I00-I99	Diseases of the circulatory system	40	59	60	35	37	34	37	30	0	708
J00-J99	Diseases of the respiratory system	21	30	43	20	20	16	10	21	0	393
K00-K93	Diseases of the digestive system	3	4	2	0	4	0	0	0	0	29
L00-L99	Diseases of the skin & subcutaneous tissue	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	4
M00-M99	Diseases of the musculoskeletal system & connective tissue	0	1	1	0	2	2	2	0	0	23
N00-N99	Diseases of the genitourinary system	4	7	7	2	4	2	3	2	1	65
Q00-Q99	Congenital malformations, deformations & chromosomal abnormalities	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
R00-R99	Symptoms, signs & abnormal clinical & laboratory findings	2	10	12	2	4	4	4	0	0	96
V01-Y98	External causes of morbidity & mortality	1	2	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	19
All Causes		176	216	279	139	184	156	151	112	1	3015

Table 2a: Number of deaths registered in Northern Ireland that occurred in a hospital by cause of death and parliamentary constituency, 2013

ICD10 Code	ICD10 Description	Parliamentary Constituency									
		Belfast East	Belfast North	Belfast South	Belfast West	East Antrim	East Londonderry	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Foyle	Lagan Valley	Mid Ulster
A00-B99	Certain infection & parasitic diseases	12	14	11	15	5	13	8	7	17	9
C00-D48	Neoplasms	128	148	99	98	105	108	85	59	76	77
D50-D89	Diseases of the blood / blood-forming organs	1	5	5	1	1	1	1	2	3	0

ICD10 Code	ICD10 Description	Parliamentary Constituency									
		Belfast East	Belfast North	Belfast South	Belfast West	East Antrim	East Londonderry	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Foyle	Lagan Valley	Mid Ulster
E00-E90	Endocrine, nutritional & metabolic diseases	6	2	8	7	2	8	7	3	5	5
F00-F99	Mental & behavioural disorders	25	23	15	12	17	12	16	12	21	9
G00-G99	Diseases of the nervous system	20	23	15	16	9	14	14	14	17	15
I00-I99	Diseases of the circulatory system	123	141	106	85	92	99	93	75	113	83
J00-J99	Diseases of the respiratory system	100	103	81	86	77	67	85	71	67	47
K00-K93	Diseases of the digestive system	33	47	28	37	18	25	25	56	28	21
L00-L99	Diseases of the skin & subcutaneous tissue	3	1	2	2	3	1	2	1	3	1
M00-M99	Diseases of the musculoskeletal system & connective tissue	5	4	7	4	6	1	5	4	4	0
N00-N99	Diseases of the genitourinary system	13	17	13	17	18	5	17	9	14	4
P00-P96	Certain conditions originating in the perinatal period	5	4	1	3	0	1	1	4	3	2
Q00-Q99	Congenital malformations, deformations & chromosomal abnormalities	2	3	0	3	4	2	3	7	7	2
R00-R99	Symptoms, signs & abnormal clinical & laboratory findings	2	2	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	1
V01-Y98	External causes of morbidity & mortality	17	21	12	15	16	15	14	23	11	15
All Causes		495	558	403	402	376	372	376	347	389	291

Table 2b: Number of deaths registered in Northern Ireland that occurred in a hospital by cause of death and parliamentary constituency, 2013

ICD10 Code	ICD10 Description	Parliamentary Constituency									
		Newry & Armagh	North Antrim	North Down	South Antrim	South Down	Strangford	Upper Bann	West Tyrone	Unknown	NI
A00-B99	Certain infection & parasitic diseases	10	13	12	13	9	9	11	5	0	193
C00-D48	Neoplasms	81	165	94	119	76	87	98	98	0	1801
D50-D89	Diseases of the blood / blood-forming organs	0	3	2	0	1	0	3	1	0	30

ICD10 Code	ICD10 Description	Parliamentary Constituency									
		Newry & Armagh	North Antrim	North Down	South Antrim	South Down	Strangford	Upper Bann	West Tyrone	Unknown	NI
E00-E90	Endocrine, nutritional & metabolic diseases	9	11	5	5	6	6	6	6	0	107
F00-F99	Mental & behavioural disorders	19	22	23	16	15	12	35	13	0	317
G00-G99	Diseases of the nervous system	14	23	13	12	15	22	17	8	0	281
I00-I99	Diseases of the circulatory system	123	132	105	78	81	88	127	96	1	1841
J00-J99	Diseases of the respiratory system	78	70	73	64	49	71	83	68	0	1340
K00-K93	Diseases of the digestive system	17	30	38	24	21	26	32	29	0	535
L00-L99	Diseases of the skin & subcutaneous tissue	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	24
M00-M99	Diseases of the musculoskeletal system & connective tissue	8	0	2	7	2	5	2	4	0	70
N00-N99	Diseases of the genitourinary system	15	15	19	14	11	14	11	13	0	239
P00-P96	Certain conditions originating in the perinatal period	0	4	0	5	4	4	4	2	0	47
Q00-Q99	Congenital malformations, deformations & chromosomal abnormalities	5	2	4	5	2	3	5	6	1	66
R00-R99	Symptoms, signs & abnormal clinical & laboratory findings	0	1	0	3	2	3	1	0	0	19
V01-Y98	External causes of morbidity & mortality	18	16	14	10	16	18	18	14	1	284
All Causes		397	507	405	376	311	368	455	363	3	7194

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of empty residential properties, broken down by local government area, including how long each property has been empty.
(AQW 39869/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The table below shows the number of residential properties that were recorded as vacant within each district council area as at 30th November 2014. Information on the length of time each property has been vacant is not available.

Since the introduction of the Rating of Empty Homes legislation on 1st October 2011, the rate liability for vacant domestic properties has been assessed at 100%. There is currently no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land & Property Services that their property is vacant, nor is there any financial advantage to doing so. As such, current information on the number of empty domestic properties may not be complete.

District Council	Number of vacant residential properties as at 30th November 2014
Antrim	420
Ards	857

District Council	Number of vacant residential properties as at 30th November 2014
Armagh	897
Ballymena	547
Ballymoney	279
Banbridge	696
Belfast	4,019
Carrickfergus	328
Castlereagh	575
Coleraine	1,024
Cookstown	696
Craigavon	992
Derry	868
Down	1,031
Dungannon and South Tyrone	1,213
Fermanagh	1,801
Larne	404
Limavady	511
Lisburn	1,267
Magherafelt	557
Moyle	384
Newry & Mourne	1,689
Newtownabbey	510
North Down	764
Omagh	1,207
Strabane	614
Total	24,150

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the capital Departmental Expenditure Limit, net of receipt; and (ii) the Financial Transactional Capital, for each Department and non-departmental public body in 2014/15.

(AQW 39872/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Conventional Capital DEL and Financial Transactions Capital for each department separately identifying Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) is detailed in the table at Annex A.

A breakdown of capital spend across NDPBs based upon the information held by DFP is detailed in the table at Annex B. Further information on individual NDPB spend will be available from the relevant sponsor department.

The analysis is based upon the 2014-15 October Monitoring position.

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Annex A

Conventional Capital		£m	
Department	Department	NDPB	Total
Ministerial Departments			
DARD	47.7	2.4	50.0
DCAL	31.2	10.2	41.4
DE	11.5	173.8	185.3

Conventional Capital		£m	
Department	Department	NDPB	Total
DEL	36.4	19.3	55.7
DETI	4.7	20.7	25.4
DFP	48.5	0.0	48.5
DHSSPS	1.1	215.9	217.0
DOE	13.1	0.0	13.1
DOJ	36.7	29.6	66.2
DRD	244.7	153.8	398.5
DSD	-24.5	189.5	165.0
OFMDFM	4.8	0.0	4.8
Non Ministerial Departments			
AOCC	0.0	-	0.0
FSA	0.1	1.7	1.8
NIA	5.1	-	5.1
NIAO	0.0	-	0.0
NIAUR	0.0	-	0.0
PPS	0.4	-	0.4
Total	461.5	816.8	1,278.3
Financial Transactions Capital			
Ministerial Departments			
DETI	0.4	5.0	5.4
DHSSPS	5.0	-	5.0
DSD	13.0	-	13.0
OFMDFM	-	10.0	10.0
Total	18.4	15.0	33.4

Totals may not add due to roundings.

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Annex B

NDPB - Conventional Capital		£m
Department	NDPB	
DARD	Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute	2.0
	Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland	0.0
	Loughs Agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission	0.4
DARD total		2.4

NDPB - Conventional Capital		£m
Department	NDPB	
DCAL	Armagh Observatory and Planetarium	0.0
	Arts Council of Northern Ireland	0.4
	Northern Ireland Library Authority	1.9
	National Museums and Galleries Northern Ireland	2.4
	Waterways Ireland	0.3
	Sports Council for Northern Ireland	3.2
	Ringfenced funding - not identifiable to specific body	2.0
DCAL total		10.2
DE	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)	0.1
	Education and Library Boards	84.4
	Voluntary and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools	88.9
	Middletown Centre for Autism Ltd	0.1
	Ringfenced funding - not identifiable to specific body	0.4
DE total		173.8
DEL	Construction Industry Training Board	0.1
	Further Education Colleges	13.3
	Higher Education Colleges	5.1
	Labour Relations Agency	0.3
	Ulster Supported Employment Ltd	0.0
	Ringfenced funding - not identifiable to specific body	0.5
DEL total		19.3
DETI	General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland	0.0
	Health & Safety Executive (NI)	0.0
	InterTradeIreland	0.0
	Invest Northern Ireland	14.5
	NI Tourist Board	6.2
DETI total		20.7
DFP	Special EU Programmes Body	0.0
DFP total		0.0
DHSSPS	Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service	6.4
	Health and Social Care Trusts	209.5
DHSSPS total		215.9
DOJ	Police Service of Northern Ireland	29.7
	Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland	0.1
	Probation Board for Northern Ireland	-0.3
DOJ total		29.6
DRD	Northern Ireland Water Limited	153.8
DRD total		153.8

NDPB - Conventional Capital		£m
Department	NDPB	
DSD	Assistance to Voluntary Housing	183.4
	Charities Commission (NI)	0.1
	Ringfenced funding - not identifiable to specific body	6.0
DSD total		189.5
OFMDFM	Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland	0.0
	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland	0.1
	Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation	1.3
	Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission	0.0
	Strategic Investment Board	0.1
	Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland	0.0
	Victims and Survivors Service Ltd	0.1
OFMDFM total		1.7
Total		816.8
NDPB - Financial Transactions Capital		
DETI	Invest NI	5.0
OFMDFM	Strategic Investment Board	10.0
Total		15.0

Totals may not add due to roundings.

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people were economically inactive in each of the last twelve months.

(AQW 39881/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Estimates of the numbers of economically inactive are sourced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), with the most recent data available for August to October 2014.

The requested breakdown of economic inactivity over the last 12 months (based on rolling quarters) is shown in Table 1 overleaf.

Table: Number of Economically Inactive over last 12 months (age 16-64)

	Economically Inactive
September-November 2013	317,000
October-December 2013	314,000
November-January 2014	313,000
December-February 2014	308,000
January-March 2014	312,000
February-April 2014	312,000
March-May 2014	313,000
April-June 2014	312,000
May-July 2014	317,000
June-August 2014	316,000
July-September 2014	314,000
August-October 2014	315,000

Source: Labour Force Survey, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

*The LFS is published based on rolling quarters.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 35745/11-15, whether his Executive colleagues have provided any indication that this long running issue in relation to equal pay for administration staff of the PSNI and others will be resolved in this or future financial years.

(AQW 39899/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Executive colleagues have given no indication when this issue will be resolved.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the level of cuts proposed to the budget of the Special EU Programmes Body by his Department's budgetary proposals.

(AQW 39916/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Special EU Programmes Body has identified 4% cash releasing efficiency savings in its 2015 Business Plan, in addition to the 4% achieved in 2014.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has had any correspondence with the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee concerning the completion of its report on The Banking Structures in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 39918/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I provided written evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee inquiry in August 2013 and attended an oral evidence session at the House of Commons on 4th December 2013.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the recent market study carried out by the Competition and Markets Authority which concluded that barriers to entry and expansion for newer and smaller banks remain significant and the markets remain concentrated, particularly in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

(AQW 39919/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I welcome the recent market study by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) into banking services provided to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs). The study provides further credible evidence of the fact that Northern Ireland's banking sector is relatively more concentrated than that in Great Britain, where issues of competitiveness were also highlighted. I therefore welcome the Authority's decision, announced on 6th November, to conduct an in-depth, full market investigation into the UK retail banking sector.

Departmental officials have been liaising with representatives from the CMA and confirmation has been received that their investigation will cover and include a consideration of Northern Ireland specific banking issues.

The study by the CMA indicates that banks' branch network is highly valued by the SME sector, so it is clearly disappointing that further branch closures have been deemed necessary in Northern Ireland.

The Enterprise Minister and I are currently meeting with the local banks as part of our ongoing engagement process, and have been discussing the issues raised by the CMA report with them as part of that.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the recent announcement of more local bank branch closures, given that a recent joint study by the Competition and Markets Authority and the Financial Conduct Authority showed that almost 70 per cent of small and medium-sized enterprises agree that having a local branch is still important.

(AQW 39920/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I welcome the recent market study by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) into banking services provided to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs). The study provides further credible evidence of the fact that Northern Ireland's banking sector is relatively more concentrated than that in Great Britain, where issues of competitiveness were also highlighted. I therefore welcome the Authority's decision, announced on 6th November, to conduct an in-depth, full market investigation into the UK retail banking sector.

Departmental officials have been liaising with representatives from the CMA and confirmation has been received that their investigation will cover and include a consideration of Northern Ireland specific banking issues.

The study by the CMA indicates that banks' branch network is highly valued by the SME sector, so it is clearly disappointing that further branch closures have been deemed necessary in Northern Ireland.

The Enterprise Minister and I are currently meeting with the local banks as part of our ongoing engagement process, and have been discussing the issues raised by the CMA report with them as part of that.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will be raising the issue of the Competition and Market Authority's retail market investigation at his regular meeting with Northern Ireland's banks.

(AQW 39921/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I welcome the recent market study by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) into banking services provided to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs). The study provides further credible evidence of the fact that Northern Ireland's banking sector is relatively more concentrated than that in Great Britain, where issues of competitiveness were also highlighted. I therefore welcome the Authority's decision, announced on 6th November, to conduct an in-depth, full market investigation into the UK retail banking sector.

Departmental officials have been liaising with representatives from the CMA and confirmation has been received that their investigation will cover and include a consideration of Northern Ireland specific banking issues.

The study by the CMA indicates that banks' branch network is highly valued by the SME sector, so it is clearly disappointing that further branch closures have been deemed necessary in Northern Ireland.

The Enterprise Minister and I are currently meeting with the local banks as part of our ongoing engagement process, and have been discussing the issues raised by the CMA report with them as part of that.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many empty residential properties have no known owner, broken down by local council.

(AQW 39928/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The table below shows the number of residential properties that were recorded as vacant and where the ratepayer was unknown, within each district council area as at 30th November 2014.

Since the introduction of the Rating of Empty Homes legislation on 1st October 2011, the rate liability for vacant domestic properties has been assessed at 100%. There is currently no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land & Property Services that their property is vacant, nor is there any financial advantage to doing so. As such, current information on the number of empty domestic properties may not be complete.

District Council	Number of Vacant Residential Properties where the Ratepayer is Unknown as at 30th November 2014
Antrim	39
Ards	47
Armagh	58
Ballymena	37
Ballymoney	8
Banbridge	68
Belfast	353
Carrickfergus	30
Castlereagh	50
Coleraine	75
Cookstown	16
Craigavon	71
Derry	69
Down	164
Dungannon and South Tyrone	94
Fermanagh	177
Larne	20
Limavady	40
Lisburn	337
Magherafelt	45
Moyle	41
Newry & Mourne	173
Newtownabbey	27
North Down	64
Omagh	25

District Council	Number of Vacant Residential Properties where the Ratepayer is Unknown as at 30th November 2014
Strabane	45
Total	2,173

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what proportion of resource and capital budget for each Department is contractually committed.

(AQW 39929/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department does not routinely collect information on contractual commitments in NICS departments. Instead, this is for individual departments to manage.

Although underpinned by consideration of specific projects/programmes, the 2015-16 draft Budget allocated capital at a departmental level rather than at project level. This was to allow Ministers scope to refine their departmental priorities and to consider views arising from the consultation before committing to specific projects or programmes of work.

Further details should therefore be sought from individual departments.

Turning to my own Department approximately 80% of DFP's resource expenditure is contractually committed in 2015-16. Also, around 55% of the DFP capital budget is contractually committed next year.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what correspondence he has had with the Competition and Markets Authority in relation to their Retail Banking market investigation.

(AQW 39941/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I welcome the recent market study by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) into banking services provided to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs). The study provides further credible evidence of the fact that Northern Ireland's banking sector is relatively more concentrated than that in Great Britain, where issues of competitiveness were also highlighted. I therefore welcome the Authority's decision, announced on 6th November, to conduct an in-depth, full market investigation into the UK retail banking sector.

Departmental officials have been liaising with representatives from the CMA and confirmation has been received that their investigation will cover and include a consideration of Northern Ireland specific banking issues.

The study by the CMA indicates that banks' branch network is highly valued by the SME sector, so it is clearly disappointing that further branch closures have been deemed necessary in Northern Ireland.

The Enterprise Minister and I are currently meeting with the local banks as part of our ongoing engagement process, and have been discussing the issues raised by the CMA report with them as part of that.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the forward work programme for the Public Sector Reform Division.

(AQW 39963/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Public Sector Reform Division (PSRD) has been established to support and enable reform across the wider public sector, working collaboratively with business areas to promote business improvement and the introduction and implementation of recognised best practice models. In particular, PSRD is contributing to the DFP and wider programme of reform which is required to meet the budgetary settlement.

PSRD's long term work programme will be shaped by the recommendations from the ongoing OECD public governance review whilst the interim work programme involves developing the architecture to facilitate reform.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when a call for applications for new PEACE funding programmes will be made.

(AQW 39989/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The PEACE IV Programme remains in draft form following submission to the European Commission on 22 September 2014 in line with the EU regulatory timeframe. Final Commission approval cannot occur until modifications are made to the EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 and Budget 2015 to take into account programmes not approved during 2014. This process is unlikely to complete prior to May 2015.

Calls for applications will open following Commission approval of the programme.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he plans to provide support for owners of vacant properties where rates are set to increase from April 2015.

(AQW 39999/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I have no plans to provide any further support for owners of non-domestic vacant properties. The policies we have adopted in this part of the UK already reflect the higher rate of vacancies here. The standard rate for empty commercial properties is 50% liability whereas it is 90% in Scotland and 100% in England and Wales. Furthermore, we pioneered the empty retail premises relief which affords 50% relief for the first year to new occupiers of long term empty premises and which so far has helped 19 new ventures in the Coleraine area get established.

Furthermore, the £30 million scheme introduced by the Executive to help manage the convergence of district rates will be automatically applied to all domestic and non-domestic properties, occupied or vacant, via a discount to their district rate. The only exclusions from the scheme will be in respect of public sector bodies and those properties which are already converged through social sector standardisation.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) how much revenue has been raised through the Large Retail Levy; and (ii) the average amount charged, each year since the Levy was introduced.
(AQW 40154/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The table below details the revenue raised and the average amount charged each year through the Large Retail Levy since its introduction in April 2012.

	Net Revenue Raised	Average Occupancy Charge
2012/13	£4,965,826	£65,340
2013/14	£4,992,673	£63,198
2014/15	£5,225,107	£68,751

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the budgetary proposal to move capital money to resource for the purpose of paying off the £100m loan and borrowing for the Northern Ireland Civil Service exit scheme had the approval of HM Treasury.
(AQW 40191/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The repayment of the £100m loan from Capital receipts and the utilisation of RRI borrowing for a public sector voluntary exit scheme were confirmed as part of the Stormont House Agreement.

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) number of staff working in the Northern Ireland Civil Service; (ii) salary scales; and (iii) wage bill in each of the last seven years, broken down by grade.
(AQW 40211/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The information in the attached tables and web link provide the available information requested.

(i) NICS Staff Numbers bby Analogous Grade (i)

Grade	1-Jan-08	1-Apr-09 (ii) (iii)	1-Jan-10	1-Jan-11 (iv)	1-Jan-12 (v)	1-Jan-13	1-Jan-14
Administrative Assistant	3,378	2,643	2,466	2,199	2,115	2,061	1,851
Administrative Officer	8,043	7,886	7,868	8,094	7,992	7,862	7,909
Executive Officer 2	4,282	4,258	4,219	4,318	4,295	4,447	4,477
Executive Officer 1	3,765	3,530	3,664	3,715	3,530	3,537	3,499
Staff Officer	3,021	3,268	3,354	3,462	3,256	3,284	3,394
Deputy Principal	2,304	2,397	2,447	2,404	2,362	2,478	2,560
Grade 7	1,058	1,034	1,100	1,207	1,153	1,202	1,265
Grade 6	394	385	399	258	235	249	249
Senior Civil Servant	246	236	241	250	246	224	231
Industrial	1,383	1,184	1,176	1,111	1,066	1,051	1,055
Uniformed Prison Grades					1,744	1,581	1,446
Total	27,874	26,821	26,934	27,018	27,994	27,976	27,936

Footnotes

- (i) Figures are based on headcount rather than full-time equivalents
- (ii) Data from 2009 onwards was sourced from HRConnect and additional DOJ databases

- (iii) Potential data issues prevent 1-Jan-09 grade data being used
- (iv) Data for DOJ and PPS available from 2011 onwards after devolution of Justice
- (v) Information on uniformed Prison Officers only available from 2012 onwards

(ii) **The NICS salary scales are published annually and are available at <http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/pay>**

(iii) **NICS Paybill by Grade (i)(ii)(iii)**

Grade	2008/2009 (part-year) (iv)	2009/2010 (v)	2010/2011 (vi) (vii)	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014
Administrative Assistant	£16,756,186.78	£35,099,838.62	£36,274,698.83	£36,491,054.72	£33,369,165.45	£33,348,633.73
Administrative Officer	£64,636,718.03	£155,155,870.74	£166,408,033.34	£180,122,630.90	£176,641,518.27	£181,732,392.43
Executive Officer 2	£50,170,502.55	£111,317,517.49	£120,233,289.86	£121,245,270.11	£126,689,151.84	£131,086,377.40
Executive Officer 1	£45,968,994.03	£96,033,835.72	£102,969,290.85	£101,290,787.75	£104,862,959.55	£113,341,816.54
Staff Officer	£50,261,759.15	£105,010,853.88	£116,663,625.02	£116,197,537.19	£115,578,263.26	£120,618,570.74
Deputy Principal	£43,742,912.46	£92,133,247.96	£107,492,577.70	£107,897,014.60	£110,518,447.43	£116,219,542.02
Grade 7	£29,718,228.92	£63,021,278.28	£67,892,082.80	£68,059,265.79	£70,888,335.18	£78,836,527.28
Grade 6	£8,019,912.10	£17,705,090.70	£23,633,217.29	£23,857,889.61	£26,069,152.20	£24,800,048.68
Senior Civil Servant	£12,010,844.81	£23,402,318.88	£26,859,724.06	£26,445,461.50	£26,812,937.05	£27,917,555.27
Industrial		£18,447,730.04	£27,119,150.21	£27,145,184.54	£26,753,404.53	£27,588,758.28
Others			£106,301,119.33	£112,478,423.30	£109,790,024.42	£96,401,216.29
Total	£321,286,058.83	£717,327,582.31	£901,846,809.29	£921,230,520.01	£927,973,359.18	£951,891,438.66

Footnotes

- (i) Unable to provide paybill figures for 2007/08 as the information is not readily available due to the change in HR systems
- (ii) Figures include some non civil servants appearing on departmental payrolls e.g. Industrial Tribunal Members, Planning and Water Appeals Committee Members
- (iii) The 'others' category includes the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Youth Justice Agency; it is not possible to break these figures down by NICS analogous grade.
- (iv) Part year Non-Industrial paybill figures only are available in 2008/09 – HRConnect Non Industrial went live 1 November 2008
- (v) Part year Industrial paybill figures only are available in 2009/10 – HRConnect Industrial went live 1 August 2009
- (vi) DOJ figures included from 12 April 2010, the date of devolution of Justice
- (vii) Public Prosecution Service figures are included from 12 April 2010, when it became a Non-Ministerial Government Department

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he has taken to recover funds due to Departments for the energy use of all public buildings, given the recent publicity concerning over-charging by energy companies.

(AQW 40304/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department procures electricity, natural gas and biomass through open competition, conducted in accordance with the Public Procurement Regulations 2006 (as amended). Heating oil, liquid petroleum gas and other fuels are supplied through the Liquid Fuels Framework Agreement administered by the Crown Commercial Service. This process provides reassurance of value for money.

My Department is currently recovering £11.9K, in respect of a natural gas supply to one building within the Northern Ireland Civil Service office estate, Ballymena County Hall. This resulted from an incorrect entry into the supplier's system.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what economic impact assessment has been made of the proposed Civil Service voluntary exit scheme.

(AQW 40332/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: An economic impact assessment of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Voluntary Exit Scheme has not been made, since the Scheme is being designed with the objective of facilitating significant pay bill reductions forecasted by departments following their assessment of their 2015/16 draft Budget allocations. UK Government Financial Package

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, based on the proposals outlined in the UK Government Financial Package to Northern Ireland which relate to additional borrowing, what assessment has been made of the interest repayments forecasts for borrowing by the Executive by 2024/25.

(AQW 40335/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The interest costs relating to borrowing undertaken by the Executive will be influenced by a number of factors, including the term of the individual loans, the final profile of borrowing and the interest rates applied to loans at the time the borrowing is undertaken.

As this detail is not yet available, it is not possible to provide an accurate forecast of future interest costs of the borrowing facilities forming part of the Stormont House Agreement.

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if, as per paragraph 3.54 of the Executive's draft Budget 2015/16, the Executive is still in the process of considering mechanisms for capping Reinvestment and Reform Initiative borrowing to ensure that the overall level of borrowing remains within manageable limits.

(AQW 40358/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: It is clear that the Stormont House Agreement will have implications for the Executive's RRI Borrowing strategy. The agreement to an additional £350 million of borrowing power over the coming four years means that it is likely that the Executive's strategy in the short term will be to utilise the maximum borrowing power available.

Given the Executive's new ability to utilise most of this borrowing power for workforce reduction, it is clear that this will generate longer term resource savings and ultimately provide a useful and necessary vehicle for workforce planning.

However, the Executive will need to consider options for capping RRI borrowing in advance of this flexibility arrangement coming to an end in 2019.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what activities will be eligible for border and rural towns and villages under the four identified priority objectives of INTEREGG 5 programme.

(AQW 40439/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The draft INTERREG VA programme is currently under review by the EU Commission.

The draft programme has identified four themes for support: Research and Innovation; Environment; Sustainable Transport; Health.

The programme will be open to any applicant that can deliver the required outputs of the programme themes and meet the cross border criteria for the programme.

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail any financial commitment contained in the 2015/16 budget for the delivery of the Narrow Water Bridge project.

(AQW 40552/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The draft 2015-16 Budget contains no specific commitment to the Narrow Water Bridge project. Capital allocations in the draft Budget have been set at departmental level allowing individual Ministers to allocate funding to individual projects in line with their priorities.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the annual cost of electricity used by Bangor Hospital.

(AQW 38130/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The annual cost of electricity used by Bangor Hospital in each of the last three years is set out in the table below.

2013/14 £	2012/13 £	2011/12 £
37,107	35,315	32,201

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of electricity for Bangor Health Centre in each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 38131/11-15)

Mr Wells: The annual cost of electricity for Bangor Health Centre in each of the last three years is set out in the table below.

2013/14 £	2012/13 £	2011/12 £
21,185	20,159	17,075

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of the new roof at Bangor Health Centre.

(AQW 38132/11-15)

Mr Wells: The cost of the roof replacement at Bangor Health Centre was approximately £264,000.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38879/11-15, what precise commitments were made in good faith at the time, and when.

(AQW 39784/11-15)

Mr Wells: The answer refers specifically to a letter issued from my predecessor on 18 April 2014 in which he stated:

“all purchased beds and respite bookings have been honoured and will continued to be honoured within the facility.”

The Member will be aware that in light of the outcome of the judicial review hearing awarding interim relief, the Trust reinstated the services at Dalriada Hospital.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how much the Northern Health and Social Care Trust has spent to date on the consultation process on Dalriada Hospital; (ii) the projected costs of the consultation from the 2 December 2014 to 27 January 2015; (iii) the projected costs of the consultation from 27 January 2015 to the end of the consultation and publication of the final report.

(AQW 39874/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Member will be aware that the Northern Health and Social Care Trust has ended its consultation which was launched on 2 December 2014, in light of the outcome of the judicial review hearing awarding interim relief, which led to the Trust reinstating the services at Dalriada Hospital. Until that point work had been undertaken to prepare the consultation document by Trust staff, as part of their normal working business, and therefore did not incur additional costs.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has met the Together: Building a United Community Strategy commitment to introduce an impact assessment that assesses the extent to which his departmental policies and interventions contribute to the objective of building a united, rather than divided, community.

(AQW 40224/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Together: Building a United Community Strategy included a commitment to:

- Amend the remit, roles and responsibilities of the existing Equality Commission into an Equality and Good Relations Commission; and
- Develop an augmented impact assessment that assesses the extent to which policies and other interventions contribute to meeting the objectives of this overarching Strategy”.

The Equality and Good Relations Commission is not yet in place and this augmented impact assessment has not yet been designed. My Department will comply with the requirement when these are agreed and in place.

In the meantime my Department continues to Equality screen policies in line with its existing commitments and this includes the second Equality statutory duty to: “have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group”.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he or the Northern Health and Social Care Trust has any plans in the 2015/16 financial year to reconsider the proposal for the temporary closure of beds at Dalriada Hospital.

(AQW 40229/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust’s Draft Savings Plan for 2015/2016 is currently being considered by the Health and Social Care Board. My Department is not in a position to provide information on the proposals in the draft plan at present.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to promote the use of generic drugs.

(AQW 40230/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department’s policy is that medicines should be prescribed generically instead of by their branded name in all appropriate circumstances, irrespective of whether a generic medicine is currently available.

A Pharmaceutical Clinical Effectiveness (PCE) Programme began in April 2005 when the generic dispensing rate for Northern Ireland stood at 43%. Since then considerable efforts have been directed towards increasing the use of generic medicines in Northern Ireland through a range of medicines management initiatives including a "Go Generic" campaign which was launched in 2006. Since then all healthcare professionals, including GP's, are updated regularly on generic prescribing policy and the need to adhere to generics policy.

The generic dispensing rate for Northern Ireland in 2005 was 43%. This had increased to 63% in 2011 and to 70% in 2013.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the Child Protection registration process could be made more robust.

(AQW 40237/11-15)

Mr Wells: Robust processes in respect of Child Protection registration are set out in the Regional Child Protection Policy and Procedures.

Similar to all processes within Health and Social Care, the Child Protection registration process can be, and is, continuously improved and made more robust through regular monitoring and review and the continuous application of learning from the implementation of the process itself.

Recent work to strengthen the Child Protection registration process includes improved involvement of children, young people and families in Case Conferences where decisions are made in respect of Child Protection registration and training of chairpersons of Child Protection case conferences to promote the consistent and robust application of thresholds in respect of Child Protection registration decision-making.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progress of a shift of investment from hospitals to the community sector under commitment 80 of the Programme for Government 2011-15.

(AQW 40240/11-15)

Mr Wells: Programme for Government Commitment 80 (PfG80) is to "Reconfigure, Reform and Modernise the Delivery of Health and Social Care Services to Improve the Quality of Patient Care". Milestone 3 of PfG80 is to "Secure a shift from hospital based services to community based services together with an appropriate shift in the share of funding in line with the recommendations of Transforming Your Care".

As set out in my recent correspondence with the Health Committee in December (AGY 875 2014), the Health and Social Care Board, who are leading on the implementation of service changes in response to the Transforming Your Care recommendations, has provided the following information on the "Shift Left of resources" to date and proposed reallocations for 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Shift Left of resources from Hospital based services to Community based services

Year	Investment	Cumulative Total	Programmes of Care
2012/13	£11.4m	£11.4m,	Mental Health and Learning Disability – Resettlement
2013/14	£13.6m	£25m	Mental Health and Learning Disability – Resettlement
2014/15	Proposed - £2.53m	£27.53m	Mental Health and Learning Disability – Resettlement Older People – Move from inpatient dementia beds to Community Dementia Teams Acute Services (Specialist) - Home dialysis
2015/16	Proposed - £0.93m	£28.46m	Mental Health and Learning Disability – Resettlement Older People – Move from inpatient dementia beds to Community Dementia Teams Acute Services (Specialist) - Home dialysis

No changes to the proposed reallocations have been made since AGY/875/2014 issued on 9 December 2014.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39576/11-15, when he first had sight of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust's draft proposals.

(AQW 40248/11-15)

Mr Wells: As these questions relate to cost savings proposals put forward by Northern Health and Social Care Trust, a combined response has been provided.

All Trusts were advised during the summer that it would be necessary to implement a range of contingency proposals given the outcome of June Monitoring and a first draft of proposals from each of the Trusts was produced in August. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust's final contingency plan was submitted to my Department on 23 October 2014. I have been

aware about the financial challenges within Trusts since I took up office and I was advised of the final contingency plans for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, which included proposals relating to Dalriada Hospital, on 27 October.

Senior officials in my Department reviewed these proposals and liaised closely with the HSCB, the PHA and Trusts to ensure that Trusts did not compromise on the safety and integrity of services, whilst taking into account the outcome of October Monitoring. Assurances were also sought by Department officials, and provided by Trust CEOs, that they have given due consideration to all statutory responsibilities, financial breakeven, duty of quality, duty of wellbeing and duties in respect of safeguarding.

The Northern Trust's contingency plans have necessarily changed throughout this process to reflect the changing financial context and the outcome of October Monitoring.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39576/11-15 and the statement that the Health and Social Care Board, in liaison with the Public Health Agency, liaised closely with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, and has critically reviewed, analysed and revised the proposals as appropriate to safeguard the safety and integrity of services and to reflect the subsequent outcome of October Monitoring, what involvement his Department had during this process.

(AQW 40249/11-15)

Mr Wells: As these questions relate to cost savings proposals put forward by Northern Health and Social Care Trust, a combined response has been provided.

All Trusts were advised during the summer that it would be necessary to implement a range of contingency proposals given the outcome of June Monitoring and a first draft of proposals from each of the Trusts was produced in August. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust's final contingency plan was submitted to my Department on 23 October 2014. I have been aware about the financial challenges within Trusts since I took up office and I was advised of the final contingency plans for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, which included proposals relating to Dalriada Hospital, on 27 October.

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The Northern Trust's contingency plans have necessarily changed throughout this process to reflect the changing financial context and the outcome of October Monitoring.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39756/11-15, when he was first made aware of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust's plans for Dalriada Hospital.

(AQW 40250/11-15)

Mr Wells: As these questions relate to cost savings proposals put forward by Northern Health and Social Care Trust, a combined response has been provided.

All Trusts were advised during the summer that it would be necessary to implement a range of contingency proposals given the outcome of June Monitoring and a first draft of proposals from each of the Trusts was produced in August. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust's final contingency plan was submitted to my Department on 23 October 2014. I have been aware about the financial challenges within Trusts since I took up office and I was advised of the final contingency plans for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, which included proposals relating to Dalriada Hospital, on 27 October.

Senior officials in my Department reviewed these proposals and liaised closely with the HSCB, the PHA and Trusts to ensure that Trusts did not compromise on the safety and integrity of services, whilst taking into account the outcome of October Monitoring. Assurances were also sought by Department officials, and provided by Trust CEOs, that they have given due consideration to all statutory responsibilities, financial breakeven, duty of quality, duty of wellbeing and duties in respect of safeguarding.

The Northern Trust's contingency plans have necessarily changed throughout this process to reflect the changing financial context and the outcome of October Monitoring.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department has taken in relation to the implementation of the each key recommendation put forward in the report involving the transfer of paediatric cardiac surgery to Dublin.

(AQW 40294/11-15)

Mr Wells: Without prejudice to the outcome of the consultation which ends on 23 January 2015, my Department has been working closely with the Department of Health in the Republic of Ireland to agree a draft action plan for implementing each of the 14 recommendations making up the all island model for Congenital Cardiac Services proposed by the International Working Group (IWG). The implementation of that action plan would only take place after my decision on the future of the service, which I intend to announce after consideration of the consultation responses. It is envisaged that a project team

would be tasked with overseeing the implementation of each of the IWG's recommendations in an appropriately phased manner, should I decide to implement them.

As I said in my Oral Statement to the Assembly on 14 October 2014, the decision to proceed with planning during the consultation period is in keeping with the principle that precautions should be applied given the vulnerability of the sustainability of this service at the Belfast Trust. Dalriada Hospital

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the Northern Health and Social Care Trust proposed the 'temporary' closure of sections of Dalriada Hospital to realise approximately £600,000 in cost savings and this decision was reversed by Judge Tracey's ruling, where the Northern Health and Social Care Trust has found the required equivalent savings.

(AQW 40348/11-15)

Mr Wells: Alternative cost savings options to replace those associated with the temporary closure at Dalriada, continue to be developed by the HSCB and the Northern Trust. The HSCB and Trust are reviewing and analysing costs across all areas of HSC activity in order to identify alternative savings and achieve financial break even.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, considering the prevalence of prescription drug abuse within society, what actions his Department is taking, in conjunction with the Department of Justice, to tackle this issue.

(AQW 40353/11-15)

Mr Wells: My Department oversees the cross-departmental strategy for preventing and addressing the harms related to alcohol and drug misuse in Northern Ireland, known as the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2 2011-16 (NSD Phase 2). Within the NSD Phase 2, prescription drug misuse was identified by a range of key stakeholders as a key issue that needs to be addressed.

Prescription drug misuse is a societal issue. Accordingly Primary Care, Secondary Care, Pharmacy, the community and voluntary sector, service users, criminal justice agencies all need to be involved and play a role in preventing misuse and supporting recovery. A taskforce, established with representation from all key stakeholders including the criminal justice sector, has developed a prescription drug misuse position paper and action plan, which has been issued for consideration, prioritisation and delivery under the NSD Phase 2. Action is being taken forward on the majority of the actions within the plan, including:

- getting better information and research;
- raising awareness among professionals and promoting consistency and workforce development;
- raising public awareness of the dangers of the misuse of prescription drugs;
- promoting the commissioning of initiatives to support appropriate reductions in prescribing levels;
- tackling displacement, illicit markets in prescription drug misuse, and internet purchases; and
- commissioning, in line with guidelines and good practice, treatment and support services for those who misuse prescription drugs.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant of AQW 40038/11-15, for a breakdown of the (i) type; (ii) nature; and (iii) cost of claims instigated.

(AQW 40355/11-15)

Mr Wells: The information requested is set out in the tables below:

Clinical Negligence

Year	2011/12 £m	2012/13 £m	2013/14 £m
Plaintiff Cost	7.1	4.8	10.6
Defence Cost	2.2	2.3	3.3
DLS Cost	1.1	1.2	1.1
Total	10.4	8.3	15.0

Employers Liability

Year	2011/12 £m	2012/13 £m	2013/14 £m
Plaintiff Cost	0.7	0.8	1.0

Year	2011/12 £m	2012/13 £m	2013/14 £m
Defence Cost	0.2	0.2	0.3
DLS Cost	0.3	0.4	0.3
Total	1.2	1.4	1.6

Occupiers Liability

Year	2011/12 £m	2012/13 £m	2013/14 £m
Plaintiff Cost	0.1	0.2	0.2
Defence Cost	-	0.1	-
DLS Cost	0.1	0.1	0.1
Total	0.2	0.4	0.3

General Litigation

Year	2011/12 £m	2012/13 £m	2013/14 £m
Plaintiff Cost	0.3	-	-
Defence Cost	0.3	0.1	-
DLS Cost	0.1	-	0.1
Total	0.7	0.1	0.1

All Litigation

Year	2011/12 £m	2012/13 £m	2013/14 £m
Plaintiff Cost	8.2	5.8	11.8
Defence Cost	2.7	2.7	3.6
DLS Cost	1.6	1.7	1.6
Total	12.5	10.2	17.0

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the reasons for the delay in employing a replacement consultant to cover the urology department in the Causeway Hospital; and who was responsible for allowing a lack of consultant cover for this period of time.

(AQW 40373/11-15)

Mr Wells: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust, which is responsible for the management of the Causeway Hospital is currently funded for 3 consultant urologists, 2 middle grade doctors and 3 specialist urology nurses.

It is extremely unfortunate that both urology consultants at the Causeway Hospital have fallen ill at the same time. The Health and Social Care Board is working with the Western and Belfast Trusts to ensure there is support for urological emergencies and specialist urology input for patients in the Northern Trust. As part of the 'Team Northwest Urology Programme', the Western Trust has already been working in partnership with the Northern Trust for some time to create a Urology Network and this existing arrangement will be enhanced until such time as the consultants are able to return to work.

Unfortunately, despite repeated recruitment attempts, the Northern Trust has experienced great difficulty in maintaining the urology team at full complement. At present one consultant and both middle grade posts are vacant. The Northern Trust is continuing to try to recruit to these posts permanently. In the meantime the Trust is using a locum agency to meet demand and is working in partnership with the Western Trust to create further capacity for Northern Trust patients. All specialist nurses are in post.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39949/11-15, to outline the reasons for the refusal to introduce a central register for children and adults with Down Syndrome or for any other learning disability.

(AQW 40374/11-15)

Mr Wells: My current assessment is that a central register, would not add sufficient value to planning processes to be worth the expenditure of effort and resource. I do not consider that it would be the most efficient way to gather information on the health needs of this group, or to be used as a basis of allocating resources.

Additionally, I share the concerns expressed that a register might be seen to stigmatise people falling into these groups, as others with specific needs do not need to be registered to access services.

The focus must be on refining and improving existing services and sources of information, and particularly the Directed Enhanced Services for people with learning disabilities - delivered through primary care and GP practices. This, and related initiatives, should assist in general health promotion, early detection and monitoring of conditions, and improve access to health and social care services generally for people with learning disabilities.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the current average waiting times for patients with keratoconus or similar corneal dystrophies for (a) an initial consultation with a consultant ophthalmologist; and (b) corneal surgery; and (ii) the percentage of patients on these waiting lists who are at risk of visual loss prior to accessing corrective treatment.

(AQW 40388/11-15)

Mr Wells:

- (i)(a) Waiting times for a first consultant-led appointment are collected on the basis of specialty, not future diagnosis. Therefore it is not possible to identify the current average waiting time for patients with keratoconus or similar corneal dystrophies for an initial consultation with a consultant ophthalmologist. Information however has been provided for those waiting for a first outpatient appointment with a consultant in the Ophthalmology specialty. Data are collected in aggregate time bands, based on the length of time a patient is waiting for a first outpatient appointment, therefore it is not possible to calculate an average waiting time. It is, however, possible to calculate the median time band, a similar statistical measure.

The waiting time for a first outpatient appointment with a consultant in the Ophthalmology specialty at 30th September 2014, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, is outlined in the table below.

	Patients Waiting for a First Outpatient Appointment, by Weeks Waiting					Total Waiting
	0-6	>6-9	>9-12	>12-15	>15-18	
Northern Ireland	4,648	1,467	1,309	1,600	5,429	14,453

Source: Departmental Return CH3

The median waiting time band, for a first appointment with a consultant in the Ophthalmology specialty, at 30th September 2014, was between 9 to 12 weeks.

- (b) Inpatient waiting time information is collected on the basis of the type of procedure the patient is waiting for, rather than the condition that the patient is diagnosed with. As such, it is not possible to identify only those patients who are waiting for corneal surgery with the specific diagnosis of keratoconus or similar corneal dystrophies.

At the 30th September 2014, the average inpatient waiting time for corneal surgery, measured from the date the decision to admit was taken, was 25.0 weeks.

Corneal surgery procedures were identified using a selected list of procedure codes from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys tabular list of operations and procedures (OPCS – 4.7). The inpatient figures in the answer refer to the intended primary procedure only.

- (ii) Information on the percentage of patients on these waiting lists who are at risk of visual loss prior to obtaining corrective treatment is not collected centrally and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what support is currently provided through his Department to RNIB Northern Ireland.

(AQW 40390/11-15)

Mr Wells: For the financial year 2014/15 my Department provides funding support to RNIB NI through a core grant of £78,693.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 38982/11-15, for a breakdown of the financial commitment his Department will undertake to implement the recommendations in the Marshall Report.

(AQW 40404/11-15)

Mr Wells: I have established a Response Team to take forward the implementation of the recommendations in the Marshall Report. The Response Team, which is led by my Department, will consider the recommendations, provide me with a costed implementation plan by end March 2015. On receipt of the plan, I will determine how costs can be met in the context of other

pressures and priorities. I remain committed to delivering against the Marshall recommendations and to ensuring that the risk of sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland is kept to a minimum.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the financial cost of the proposed non-surgical Children's Heart Centre in Belfast.
(AQW 40406/11-15)

Mr Wells: The cost of the Specialist Children's Cardiology Centre in Belfast, as proposed by the cardiology team from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in November 2014, is being finalised at present. My Department is working with officials from the Health and Social Care Board to establish the estimated cost of these proposals. I intend to make an announcement about the detail of those proposals following consideration of responses from the current consultation which ends on 23 January 2015.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all legal costs accrued by his Department to date relating to the ban on gay men donating blood; and any future anticipated costs.
(AQW 40505/11-15)

Mr Wells: The legal costs incurred by this Department in relation to the policy on blood donation by men who have had sex with men, are summarised in the following table:

	£'000
Counsel Costs	29.2
Departmental Solicitors Office Legal Staff	9.4
Swear Fees /Data Dispatch/Appeal Stamp/Order Fee	0.5
	39.1

The Department has appealed the judgement in this legal case and any future costs will be in respect of the appeal. However, these costs are not yet known.

Department of Justice

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice whether he has met the Together: Building a United Community Strategy commitment to introduce an impact assessment that assesses the extent to which his departmental policies and interventions contribute to the objective of building a united, rather than divided, community.
(AQW 40225/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): A screening process aimed at promoting a shared future was in place in my Department prior to the publication of the Together: Building a United Community Strategy.

The Together: Building a United Community Strategy commits the Executive to the development of an augmented impact assessment that will assess the extent to which public authorities contribute to the delivery of the strategy's overarching good relations objectives. Once that impact assessment has been developed and communicated to my Department, I will review existing internal procedures to ensure they meet the standards required.

My Department leads on the Together: Building a United Community Strategy commitment to remove peace walls by 2023. In this, as in all of my Department's responsibilities, I will seek to make a positive contribution to building a united community.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 39494/11-15, on what date was William Sloan due to return to custody after his temporary release; and on what date was the PSNI notified of his failure to return.
(AQW 40227/11-15)

Mr Ford: Mr Sloan was due to return to custody on 21 November 2014. The PSNI was notified of his failure to return on the same day.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail on how many occasions since his incarceration Samuel McKinley has absconded or been unlawfully at large, including (i) from which prison establishment or facility; (ii) for how long; (iii) how was he detected or apprehended; (iv) what further offences were committed as well as being unlawfully at large; and (v) how each instance was adjudicated.
(AQW 40234/11-15)

Mr Ford: To release the information requested would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 39896/11-15, in view of the Prisoner Ombudsman's recommendation and given that the Northern Ireland Prison Service's Policy For The Safe Use and Custody of Hoffman Cut Down Knives was implemented in 2011, (i) why this policy was not applied at the time of Mr Singleton's death in custody on 6 May 2013; and (ii) whether the policy was in operation at the time.

(AQW 40235/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) It is my understanding that the policy was not applied at the time of Mr Singleton's death within the Care and Supervision Unit (CSU) as a result of non-compliance with the policy by both the CSU manager and staff. Maghaberry management are satisfied that this non-compliance with the policy at the time of Mr Singleton's death was neither deliberate nor intentional, but due to a lack of awareness by staff of the need to adhere to the policy. The Ombudsman's report makes no recommendation in relation to the non-compliance with the policy and the report highlights the close proximity of the Hoffman Knife in the office. The CSU is a small complex and access to emergency equipment is more readily available as a result.
- (ii) The policy, 'Standard Operating Procedure Safe Use and Custody of Hoffman Cut Down Knives' was in place at the time across all residential areas in Maghaberry Prison following its issue in February 2011.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the increase in reported domestic abuse incidents and crimes. **(AQW 40277/11-15)**

Mr Ford: Recorded incidents of domestic violence and abuse rose by 438 cases in 2013/14, which represents an increase of less than 1%. There was an increase of 1560 domestic violence and abuse crimes, which represents an increase of 14%.

However, we recognise that domestic violence is an under-reported crime, and much effort goes into ensuring that victims have the confidence to come forward and report.

The increase in recorded crimes may be due in part to an increased awareness of the support services available and increased confidence in reporting any incidence of violence and abuse to the relevant authorities and agencies.

My Department jointly leads on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse, along with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. This work is taken forward on a partnership approach across the statutory and voluntary and community sector.

The PSNI is a key partner both at the strategic and the delivery level and works closely with my officials and the other justice agencies, both on prevention work to increase reporting and ensuring a robust justice response when they do occur.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister of Justice how his Department is working with the Chief Constable to address increasing levels of domestic abuse, and to encourage victims to report crimes of this nature. **(AQW 40280/11-15)**

Mr Ford: Recorded incidents of domestic violence and abuse rose by 438 cases in 2013/14, which represents an increase of less than 1%. There was an increase of 1560 domestic violence and abuse crimes, which represents an increase of 14%.

However, we recognise that domestic violence is an under-reported crime, and much effort goes into ensuring that victims have the confidence to come forward and report.

The increase in recorded crimes may be due in part to an increased awareness of the support services available and increased confidence in reporting any incidence of violence and abuse to the relevant authorities and agencies.

My Department jointly leads on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse, along with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. This work is taken forward on a partnership approach across the statutory and voluntary and community sector.

The PSNI is a key partner both at the strategic and the delivery level and works closely with my officials and the other justice agencies, both on prevention work to increase reporting and ensuring a robust justice response when they do occur.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, since the new recruitment regime came into effect in the Prison Service, how many of the new recruits have left the service. **(AQW 40286/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The number of new recruits (those appointed from the 2012 and 2013 recruitment competitions for Custody Prison Officers and Prisoner Custody Officers) who have left the service is 73.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether he is aware of a culture of bullying of new recruits by management in the Northern Ireland Prison Service. **(AQW 40302/11-15)**

Mr Ford: I am not aware of a culture of bullying of new recruits by management in the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS). NIPS is committed to creating and sustaining an environment where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, free from

any form of inappropriate behaviour. Staff are supported in challenging any unwanted, unreasonable or offensive conduct and procedures are in place to enable them to do so. Any incident of bullying by prison staff towards other prison service employees is treated seriously and dealt with in accordance with the NICS Dignity at Work Policy.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 40013/11-15, by what specific thresholds does this matter fail to meet criteria for a serious case review.

(AQW 40308/11-15)

Mr Ford: The further offence committed, whilst a serious assault, was not a PPANI eligible offence. The offence was not sexual in motivation or a relevant violent offence committed against a child or vulnerable adult, in family or domestic circumstances or aggravated by association with a hate crime.

The PPANI Strategic Management Board has, however, asked the relevant agencies to conduct internal reviews of the handling of this case and present these to the Board which will, in the light of the findings, consider any action which may be required.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the current position on G4S palm scanners in court houses, including (i) what repairs have taken place and when; and (ii) what progress reports have been provided to the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service.

(AQW 40309/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I have previously indicated the problems experienced are not due to inherent technical problems but rather have been as a result of internet connectivity issues which will be rectified by the creation of static Internet Protocol (IP) addresses.

G4S Secure Solutions (UK) Ltd Information Technology Support Team has progressed the necessary preliminary work to establish static Internet Protocol (IP) addresses and an installation and testing schedule is being developed. NICTS discusses issues relating to time and attendance regularly through the contract management process.

Department for Regional Development

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to improve the greenway provision at the Giants Causeway.

(AQW 37936/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department currently has no remit to provide greenways and consequently would not be directly involved in any improvements to greenway provision at the Giants Causeway. Local councils have generally taken the lead in developing greenways, which by their nature are often remote from the existing road network. However, my Department has, where appropriate, liaised with both Ballymoney and Moyle Councils in relation to potential links to such provision.

I believe that, initially, there is scope to develop a 'Greenway spine' as part of the proposed Eurovelo route from Belfast to Londonderry (via North Armagh) using existing paths along the Lagan and linking to the existing Newry Canal towpath route. This would provide new routes for commuting and develop opportunities to boost the local economy, whilst also improving provision for leisure, recreation and tourism. Following this, consideration would be given to providing Greenway connections to other areas, such as North Antrim.

The Member will also be aware that my Department continues to maintain a considerable portion of the National Cycle Network, which traverses North Antrim. This is a comprehensive network of safe and attractive cycling routes developed by the charity Sustrans.

Ms Sugden asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to extend his Department's scheme of five hours parking for one pound.

(AQW 39249/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The five hours parking for one pound scheme is being extended into January 2015.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has met the Together: Building a United Community Strategy commitment to introduce an impact assessment that assesses the extent to which his departmental policies and interventions contribute to the objective of building a united, rather than divided, community.

(AQW 40226/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Two of the key commitments in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy are to establish an Equality and Good Relations Commission that will act as an independent, statutorily-based organisation to provide policy advice and a challenge to Government; and to develop an augmented impact assessment that assesses the extent to which policies and other interventions contribute to meeting the objectives of this overarching Strategy. OFMDFM is the lead department for implementing these commitments.

My Department continues to carry out equality screening on all new or revised policies under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which includes the requirement to take account of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial groups.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much funding his Department provided to Trade Unions in the last financial year.
(AQW 40242/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In 2013/14, no funding was provided directly to Trade Unions by my Department. However, the Department paid a total of £161,000 during that year in respect of Trade Union representatives and their administrative support staff.

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the rationale for the TransportNI operational policy which supports the removal of racially or religiously offensive graffiti, but does not allow for the removal of paramilitary graffiti.
(AQW 40256/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not approve or support the unauthorised use of the Department's property for any purpose.

As you can appreciate the removal of politically motivated signs and emblems is a matter that needs to be treated with sensitivity, and with due regard to the safety of those who are asked to undertake the removal. The risk of escalating the problem also needs to be taken into consideration.

Where my Department becomes aware of signs, emblems or graffiti on its property regardless of what it relates to, it will assess the situation to see if action can be taken, either directly or in support of removal by others. This often involves working with elected and local community representatives and the PSNI.

My Department gives priority to situations that are considered to present a road safety hazard, e.g. signs or painting on the face of road signs etc.

I can assure you that my Department will continue to monitor the situation and take effective action when appropriate to do so.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration has been given to piloting bike racks on buses.
(AQW 40274/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In launching my draft Bicycle Strategy I set out my commitment to address barriers to modal interchange, including the opportunities to enable the carrying of bicycles on public transport. Consultation on the draft Strategy closed on 21st November 2014 with a report due in February 2015.

Responses to the consultation make clear that the provision of bike racks on buses is an issue for some cyclists. To move matters forward my officials are engaging with Translink to ensure that the delivery plan for my Bicycle Strategy addresses this issue.

My officials are currently engaging with Translink and others to explore opportunities to facilitate, on a pilot basis initially, the carrying of bicycles on bike racks on buses, with a technical assessment underway to determine the potential impact as well as the safety implications of such a pilot in Belfast.

Folding bicycles continue to be permitted on all Translink bus services.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what initiatives his Department is pursuing to increase cycling amongst females.
(AQW 40316/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Draft Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland outlines my vision for cycling and how my Department intends to achieve this vision.

Research undertaken to develop my strategy has identified a number of barriers which prevent people, and particularly women, from cycling. A number of these barriers, such as safety, security and convenience, are addressed in the strategy.

The forthcoming Bicycle Strategy Delivery Plan will contain specific actions to reduce these barriers, the result of which should be higher levels of bicycle use, including amongst women.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the current annual depreciation costs of NI Water.
(AQW 40381/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: For the year to 31 March 2014, the depreciation charge for NI Water was £67.7 million, as disclosed in their statutory accounts.

Department for Social Development

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to list the value of the funding provided by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund since May 2011 to (i) controlled; (ii) maintained; (iii) Irish medium; and (iv) integrated schools and projects.

(AQW 40262/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): A table listing the value of funding provided by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund since May 2011 to (i) controlled; (ii) maintained; (iii) Irish medium; and (iv) integrated schools and projects is detailed below;

Classification	Expenditure from 2011 to 2015 (£)
Controlled	3,335,828.17
Maintained	3,854,355.30
Irish Medium	18,036.20
Integrated	Nil
The following details funding to schools and projects which deliver services across more than one classification of school	
Controlled & Maintained	596,999.97
Controlled, Maintained & Integrated	2,692,359.81
Maintained & Irish Medium	387,548.51
All	91,012.52

Note:

Caution should always be exercised in making comparisons across Neighbourhood Renewal areas and associated projects as a range of factors may influence expenditure. The main factors being the revenue investment in an area from lead Departments or from other initiatives; history of capital investment and or proposed capital investment in an area from other initiatives or mainstream sources; size (population) of an area; geographical location and proximity to existing services; and priority needs identified in Action Plans.

Please note that the expenditure stated above may replicate funding that has been provided in AQW40263 and AQW40264.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to list the value of funding provided by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund since May 2011 to (i) Irish language; and (ii) Ulster-Scots associated groups.

(AQW 40263/11-15)

Mr Storey: A table listing the value of funding provided by the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund since May 2011 to (i) Irish language; and (ii) Ulster-Scots associated groups is detailed below;

Associated Groups	Expenditure from 2011 to 2015 (£)
Irish Language	2,137,249.93
Ulster-Scots	Nil

Please note that the expenditure stated above may replicate funding that has been provided in AQW40262 and AQW40264.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how much Neighbourhood Renewal funding has been paid since May 2011 to organisations and events associated with (i) Gaelic games; (ii) rugby; (iii) football; (iv) golf; (v) cricket; (vi) boxing; and (vii) other sports.

(AQW 40264/11-15)

Mr Storey: A table listing the value of funding provided by the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund since May 2011 to organisations and events associated with (i) Gaelic games; (ii) rugby; (iii) football; (iv) golf; (v) cricket; (vi) boxing; and (vii) other sports is detailed below;

Type of Sport	Expenditure from 2011 to 2015 (£)
Gaelic Games	2,608,767.55
Rugby	6,000
Football	1,731,108.23
Golf	315,220.20

Type of Sport	Expenditure from 2011 to 2015 (£)
Cricket	Nil
Boxing	391,760.27
Other Sports	1,606,507.39
All Sports *	452,147.24

* various sports equipment and upgrades to facilities

NOTE: Caution should always be exercised in making comparisons across Neighbourhood Renewal areas and associated projects as a range of factors may influence expenditure. The main factors being the revenue investment in an area from lead Departments or from other initiatives/sources; history of capital investment and or proposed capital investment in an area from other initiatives or mainstream sources; size (population) of an area; geographical location and proximity to existing services; and priority needs identified in Action Plans.

Please note that the expenditure stated above may replicate funding that has been provided in AQW40262 and AQW40263.

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on his Department's reform of liquor licensing.
(AQW 40284/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Social Development Committee was briefed on the proposed content of a draft Licensing and Registration of Clubs Bill on 26 June 2014. The Executive approved the policy content and the drafting of such a Bill on 8 July 2014 and Legislative Counsel was appointed.

Work on the draft Bill is well advanced and it is intended that the Bill will be brought to the Executive for approval early this year. It is anticipated that it will complete the Assembly legislative process before the end of the current mandate in March 2016.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding his Department provided to Trade Unions in the last financial year.
(AQW 40288/11-15)

Mr Storey: DSD provided £188,846 in funding to Trade Unions in 2013-14.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the Housing Executive's assessment of the standard of insulation in its properties.
(AQO 7276/11-15)

Mr Storey: At present the Housing Executive has to comply with the Decent Homes Minimum Standard where the criteria dictates that homes should have a reasonable degree of thermal comfort with both efficient heating and effective insulation.

The majority of the Housing Executive's cavity walled dwellings, where appropriate, have already been filled with mineral wool insulation or blown polystyrene beads/granules. Where no cavity wall insulation is found, or where it is found to be defective, the Housing Executive will continue to address this issue in a responsive manner on a case by case basis, as they currently do.

It should be noted that the Housing Executive's Standard Specification includes for internal (insulated) dry lining which would generally be used on solid walled properties. This is only carried out on an optional basis where conditions demand intervention such as instances of significant areas of damp or persistent and excessive condensation.

To date limited insulation works have been carried out to non-traditional stock including multi story blocks. However the Housing Executive is undertaking a research study on seven dwellings of No Fines construction in Antrim where external insulation has been proposed. They also have completed four external wall insulating schemes to aluminium bungalows in Armagh, Fermanagh, Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus with one programmed to start on site shortly in Portadown and two further schemes in the programme.

The Housing Executive also progressively upgrade all their stock to a minimum depth of 270mm roof space insulation through ongoing maintenance and heating schemes which significantly exceeds the Decent Homes minimum standard of 50mm. This year, 2014/15, there is a proposed target to undertake replacement heating to 6,000 dwellings using oil, gas or wood pellet systems which includes for the topping up of roof space insulation.

The Housing Executive is currently working with Savills to evaluate and understand the general condition of its stock and its thermal performance and the general investment requirements within the stock. Once this activity is completed the Housing Executive will review the need for additional insulation to all their stock along with other important work stream requirements and take a decision regarding future investment priorities.

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Social Development, given the shortage of public sector social housing and increased reliance on private landlords for people receiving benefits, will the Social Fund be available for people requiring private rental deposits of two months rent.

(AQO 7284/11-15)

Mr Storey: The discretionary Social Fund, is not available for people requiring private rental deposits. However, Crisis Loans and Budgeting Loans can be considered for Rent in Advance subject to normal eligibility considerations.

I have no plans to seek an amendment to the legislation.

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the progress made to ensure pensioners are claiming all of their entitled benefits.

(AQO 7280/11-15)

Mr Storey: The Social Security Agency provides a range of services across Northern Ireland to ensure that people of all ages, including older people, are advised of their potential entitlement to benefits. These include a network of local and centralised offices offering services and support and the Department's Community Outreach service for vulnerable customers.

In addition, since 2005, the Agency has delivered Benefit Uptake Programmes to increase awareness and uptake of social security benefits. This has resulted in over £81million of additional benefit and arrears being generated, of which £62million was awarded to older people. These Programmes target a wide range of customers: older people, people with disabilities and those with caring responsibilities.

To date Benefit Uptake Programmes have adopted a number of approaches to target older people including: direct targeting letters, benefit specific mailshots, the "Make the Call" advertising campaign, community roadshows, attendance at events, visits by the Department's Community Outreach Officers, working with voluntary and community sector through the Innovation Fund, as well as working with other Government Departments, such as the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development, through its Maximising Access to services, grants and benefits in Rural Areas programme.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development how many Limavady businesses have enlisted for the revitalisation scheme since September 2014.

(AQO 7281/11-15)

Mr Storey: No businesses in Limavady have enlisted for the revitalisation scheme since September 2014. However, 23 businesses enlisted for the scheme prior to September 2014 and offers have been issued to 15 businesses to date.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the use of departmental land for the building of social housing units in Belfast city centre.

(AQO 7282/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department has identified city-centre living in Belfast as an important housing and regeneration tool.

However, the provision of social housing and general purpose affordable housing in the city centre requires careful consideration in terms of proposed housing types. Current amenities, facilities and tenure mix must be taken into account when considering social housing developments.

To support appropriate social housing development in the city centre, the Housing Executive, with support from my Department, has developed a new common landlord area for Belfast city centre. A primary aim of this is to promote shared residential development.

Housing Associations are responsible for the identification of potential development sites for inclusion in the Social Housing Development Programme and are actively looking at city centre sites, including those in public ownership, for housing schemes for allocation under the Belfast City Centre Common Landlord Area. The Housing Executive will support building where need is clearly identified.

Mr McKinney asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on those functions involving the community and voluntary sectors that have been transferred after the Review of Public Administration.

(AQO 7283/11-15)

Mr Storey: The legislation to extend my Department's powers for urban regeneration and community development, which includes support for the voluntary and community sectors at local level, was introduced to the Assembly on 8 December 2014. The commencement date for this legislation is 1 April 2016 so these powers will remain with my Department until that date.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the introduction of the Affordable Warmth Scheme.
(AQO 7285/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department introduced the Affordable Warmth Scheme on 15 September 2014. The scheme involves my Department working in partnership with the 26 existing local councils and the Housing Executive to target identified low

income households considered to be most at risk of fuel poverty. At 6 January 2015 over 700 referrals have been made by the councils to the Housing Executive to carry out technical inspections of the properties and deliver energy efficiency improvements.

I can confirm that the Affordable Warmth Scheme is now operating across all local council areas. The Warm Homes Scheme was extended to 31 March 2015 to allow for the gradual ramp up of the new Affordable Warmth Scheme.

My officials are working closely with all council clusters and are closely monitoring the scheme to ensure that those households most at risk of fuel poverty are being helped.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development if the draft 2015/16 Budget will allow the target of 2,000 new social homes to be delivered.

(AQO 7286/11-15)

Mr Storey: The draft Department for Social Development (DSD) budget for 2015/16 has allocated £98 million for the Social Housing Development Programme. My Department estimates that this is sufficient to deliver 1,500 new social housing starts as well as provide funding to housing associations to acquire land for development in future years. Until the budget is finalised I will be unable to confirm whether it will be possible to deliver 2,000 units in 2015/16.

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the effectiveness of the Fuel Poverty Strategy. **(AQO 7287/11-15)**

Mr Storey: The Department's most recent fuel poverty strategy "Warmer Healthier Homes" was launched in 2011. The strategy identified four key areas for action to tackle fuel poverty: -

- Targeting of resources;
- Improving energy efficiency;
- Achieving affordable energy; and
- Building strong partnerships.

The strategy included as a key aim the removal of energy inefficiency as a contributor to fuel poverty. The 2011 strategy contained 18 key actions and all of the actions have been taken forward. The key actions included the introduction of a Boiler Replacement Scheme, effective targeting of resources and a review of the fuel poverty definition.

The subsequent independent review of the fuel poverty definition report "Defining Fuel Poverty in Northern Ireland" included a recommendation to test a targeted area based approach to tackling fuel poverty. Since 2012 the Department has worked in partnership with local councils and the Housing Executive to develop the Affordable Warmth Scheme which targets low income households and offers energy efficiency improvements. The Affordable Warmth Scheme is being closely monitored to ensure that those households most at risk of fuel poverty are being helped.

The new fuel poverty strategy is targeting and assisting those households most affected by fuel poverty and I believe that this new approach will prove to be very effective.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the front-line services provided by the community sector.

(AQO 7288/11-15)

Mr Storey: My assessment is that many organisations within the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland provide a broad range of important and quality front-line services. My Department works in partnership with many front line service delivery organisations within the community sector as we tackle disadvantage and build sustainable communities.

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development, following the recent Social Security Agency Financial Support Services pilot scheme, to outline what other initiatives will be undertaken to support claimants with budgeting and debt management issues.

(AQO 7289/11-15)

Mr Storey: My Department is committed to improving the financial capability of benefit customers both in and out of work by exploring opportunities to undertake initiatives to improve both financial inclusion (e.g. access to financial products such as transactional bank accounts) and financial capability (e.g. budget support skills).

The Financial Support Service pilot was designed to be an integrated service, with some elements delivered by the Agency, and others by regional and local providers in the Independent Advice Sector; namely front line advice organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau and Advice NI to provide budgeting and debt support. My Department has taken forward the parts of the pilot that have had some success by introducing the benefit entitlement checks element into our existing service provision and will also continue to support our customers by providing a leaflet detailing organisations that offer advice and support.

My Department is continuing to explore further opportunities for example, obtaining learning from any pilots being undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions. Any further initiatives that will be considered will be research/evidence based.

In addition, the new Strategy for generalist advice services 'Advising, Supporting, Empowering – A strategy for the delivery of generalist advice services in Northern Ireland 2015 – 2020' recognises the need for the Advice Sector and government to work together to help people with financial budgeting and debt problems. The new strategy will build on the range of money management and debt services already provided by advice providers to people in Northern Ireland. Going forward people will have enhanced access to services which help them develop their budget and money management skills, empowering them to cope in difficult financial circumstances.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Copeland asked the Assembly Commission, pursuant to AQW 38198/11-15, to detail the number of staff employed in each of the Assembly Directorates or Offices in each of the last seven years, broken down by grade; and the salary scales and total wage bill for each grade in each year.

(AQW 40210/11-15)

Mrs Cochrane (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The response to AQW 38198/11-15 included details for the seven financial years from 2007/08 2013/14. It is not possible to provide all the detailed information requested in this Question as information on staffing costs prior to 2008/09 was not held by the Assembly Commission.

The attached Tables provide a breakdown of the information available from 2008/09 onwards for each year. These show staff numbers, the salary bands for staff and the total staff costs per grade. Staff numbers are based on the average number of staff employed over the course of the financial year. Only those staff employed by the Assembly Commission are reported. Information for single grades has been included with the information for the next most appropriate grade. Some elements of salary costs do not relate to Assembly Commission permanent employees. For example, agency workers, Non-Executive Directors and salaries for inward secondments are included. For these staff, information on grades or grade equivalents is not available. If this applies, the costs have been shown separately at the foot of each table.

There were a series of payroll initiatives over the course of the period covered by this response. These include a comprehensive pay and grading exercise and the outcome of the NICS equal pay settlement which was applied to applicable Assembly Commission staff. There are also some elements of payroll that are not readily reportable by grade of staff. These include, for example, payments to HMRC in respect of central payroll settlements. Therefore, the figures in this response (when spilt across the various categories as requested in the Question) do not tally exactly to the overall figures reported in the Assembly's Annual Reports for these years. Where there are limitations on the information provided in each table, these are identified.

Table 1 – Staff Numbers and Salary Scales for 2008/09

Assembly Grade	Average Number of Staff	Salary Band	Total Salary Costs
AG2 and above	6	£64,820 - £80,111 £100,000 - £160,000	£537,309
AG3	4	£43,600 – 62,407	£305,050
AG4	39	£37,322 - £50,796	£2,262,285
AG5	21	£28,153 - £38,893	£778,841
AG6	56	£22,621 - £30,520	£2,790,508
AG7	17	£19,592 - £26,086	£408,467
AG8	85	£16,683 - £22,718	£1,802,017
AG9	50	£14,060 - £20,109	£1,062,377
Agency staff	99		£2,431,000
Inward Secondees	0		0
Non-Executive Directors	0		0
Total	377		£12,377,855

Note: These figures do not include PAYE settlement amounts paid to HMRC for changes in policy or those arising due to pay and grading amendments or adjustments to costs for employee benefits to be recorded under statutory reporting requirements.

Table 2 – Staff Numbers and Salary Scales for 2009/10

Average Number of Staff								
Assembly Grade	Clerking & Reporting	Engagement	Facilities	Resources	Director General's Office	Total Staff nos per Grade	Salary Band	Total Salary Cost (including all on-costs)
AG2 and above	1	1	1	1	3	7	£64,820 - £80,111 £100,000 - £160,000	£738,441
AG3	3	0	0	1	2	6	£53,657 - £62,407	£473,226
AG4	21.6	7	0	4	6.4	39	£41,391 - £50,796	£2,608,231
AG5	1.9	11.5	2	6.8	1.8	24	£32,643 - £38,893	£1,331,618
AG6	38.7	10.5	5.4	19	6.4	80	£27,764 - £30,520	£3,309,249
AG7	18	7	1	8.4	1.6	36	£23,066 - £26,086	£735,705
AG8	23	12.6	7.9	15.5	4	63	£19,450 - £22,988	£2,412,858
AG9	19	9	28	16	2	74	£15,277 - £20,799	£1,841,751
Agency Staff						62		£1,818,277
Inward Secondees								£72,583
Non Executive Directors								£0
Total	126.2	58.6	45.3	71.7	27.2	391		£15,341,939

Note: These figures include an accrual for the equal pay settlement but exclude the fees for Secretariat Audit & Risk Committee (SARC) members.

Table 3 – Staff Numbers and Salary Scales for 2010/11

Average Number of Staff								
Assembly Grade	Clerking & Reporting	Engagement	Facilities	Resources	Director General's Office	Total Staff Nos Per Grade	Salary Band	Total Salary Cost (including all on-costs)
AG2 or above	1	1	1	1	3	7	£72,010 - £81,992 £115,216 - £130,519	£822,884
AG3	3	1	0	2	1.3	7.3	£57,608 - £65,259	£468,880
AG4	23	6	2	4	4	39	£46,806 - £53,056	£2,828,178
AG5	3	27.2	1.6	4.8	0	36.6	£36,485 - £41,331	£1,946,174
AG6	38.5	19	8	11.2	5	81.7	£29,543 - £33,446	£3,519,045

Assembly Grade	Average Number of Staff					Director General's Office	Total Staff Nos Per Grade	Salary Band	Total Salary Cost (including all on-costs)
	Clerking & Reporting	Engagement	Facilities	Resources					
AG7	42	25	11.5	17.7	4	100.2	£24,004 - £27,357	£807,200	
AG8	22	13.8	65.3	15.1	2	118.2	£17,521 - £22,180	£6,298,104	
Agency Staff						26		£906,163	
Inward Secondees								£220,588	
Non Executive Directors						2		£0	
Total	132.5	93	89.4	55.8	19.3	418		£17,817,216	

Note: These figures do not include PAYE settlement amounts paid to HMRC for changes in policy or those arising due to pay and grading amendments or adjustments to costs for employee benefits to be recorded under statutory reporting requirements, or SARC member's fees.

Table 4 – Staff Numbers and Salary Scales for 2011/12

Assembly Grade	Average Number of Staff						Total Staff Nos per Grade	Salary Band	Total Salary Cost (including all on-costs)
	Clerking & Reporting	Information & Outreach	Facilities	Corporate Services	Legal	Director General's Office			
AG2 or above	1	1	1	1	1	2.2	7.2	£72,010 - £81,922 £115,216 - - £130,519	£790,656
AG3	3	1	0	2	1	1.4	8.4	£57,608 - £65,259	£819,534
AG4	22.3	5.2	2	3.4	3	1.4	37.3	£46,806 - - £53,056	£2,774,158
AG5	3.8	29.4	1.5	5.4	0	0.6	40.7	£36,485 - £41,331	£2,004,616
AG6	37.5	15.8	6.5	9.6	3	2.4	74.8	£29,543 - - £33,446	£3,226,691
AG7	41.2	22.2	12.2	19	1.3	3.2	99.1	£24,004 - £27,357	£3,512,660
AG8	21.2	13	77.4	14.7	1	1.2	128.5	£17,521 - £22,180	£3,295,487
Agency Staff							7		£280,876
Inward Secondees									£119,722
Non Executive Directors							5		£32,524
Total	130	87.6	100.6	55.1	10.3	12.4	408		£16,856,924

Note: These figures do not include PAYE settlement amounts paid to HMRC for changes in policy or those arising due to pay and grading amendments or adjustments to costs for employee benefits to be recorded under statutory reporting requirements.

Table 5 – Staff Numbers and Salary Scales for 2012/13

Assembly Grade	Average Number of Staff						Total Staff Nos per Grade	Salary Band	Total Salary Cost (including all on-costs)
	Clerking & Reporting	Information & Outreach	Facilities	Corporate Services	Legal	Director General's Office			
AG2	1	1	1	1	1	2	7	£72,730- £82,741 £115,216- £130,519	£795,700
AG3	3	1	0	2	1	1	8	£58,184- £65,912	£708,056
AG4	21.8	5	2	3.6	3.9	0	36.3	£47,274- £53,587	£2,742,627
AG5	2.4	29	2	4.5	0	0	37.9	£36,850- £41,744	£2,010,558
AG6	37.9	16.3	6	8.8	4.2	1	74.2	£29,838- £33,780	£3,033,430
AG7	40.7	24.6	12	17.3	1.8	2	98.4	£24,244- £27,631	£3,541,331
AG8	19.1	12.6	73.3	13.2	1	1	120.2	£17,696- £22,402	£3,108,072
Agency Staff							8		£290,454
Inward Secondees									£75,509
Non Executive Directors							5		£42,890
Total	125.9	89.5	96.3	50.4	12.9	7	395		£16,348,628

Note: These figures do not include PAYE settlement amounts paid to HMRC for changes in policy or those arising due to pay and grading amendments or adjustments to costs for employee benefits to be recorded under statutory reporting requirements.

Table 6 – Staff Numbers and Salary Scales for 2013/14

Assembly Grade	Average Number of Staff						Total Staff Nos Per Grade	Salary Band	Total Salary Cost (including all on-costs)
	Clerking & Reporting	Information & Outreach	Facilities	Corporate Services	Legal & Governance	Director General's Office			
AG2 or above	1	1	1	1	1	2	7	£73,457- £83,568 £117,532- £133,142	£824,055
AG3	3	1	0	1	1	1.1	7.1	£58,766- £66,571	£756,906
AG4	20.9	4.8	2	3.4	4	0	35.1	£47,747- £54,123	£2,596,282

Assembly Grade	Average Number of Staff							Total Staff Nos Per Grade	Salary Band	Total Salary Cost (including all on-costs)
	Clerking & Reporting	Information & Outreach	Facilities	Corporate Services	Legal & Governance	Director General's Office				
AG5	2	28.3	2	4.5	0	0.1	36.9	£37,219-£42,161	£2,263,917	
AG6	35.8	15.6	6	8.4	3.5	1.1	70.4	£30,136-£34,118	£3,171,768	
AG7	39.8	25.4	11.1	16.1	1.9	2.2	96.5	£24,486-£27,907	£3,474,579	
AG8	17	11.6	71.4	12.6	1	1	114.6	£17,873-£22,626	£3,002,563	
Agency Staff							14		£386,944	
Inward Secondees									£108,863	
Non Executive Directors							5		£58,305	
Total	119.5	87.7	93.5	47	12.4	7.5	386.6		£16,644,181	

Note: These figures do not include PAYE settlement amounts paid to HMRC for changes in policy or those arising due to pay and grading amendments or adjustments to costs for employee benefits to be recorded under statutory reporting requirements.

Mr Copeland asked the Assembly Commission, pursuant to AQW 38198/11-15, to provide a breakdown of the secretariat administration costs in each year.
(AQW 40212/11-15)

Mrs Cochrane (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission's Secretariat administration budget covers a range of categories of expenditure.

As noted in the response to AQW 38198/11-15, the presentation of this information in the Annual Accounts follows a prescribed format however internal management accounting information is also maintained which provides a more detailed analysis of expenditure. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the Secretariat's General Administration Expenditure (GAE) for each of the past seven years and the current financial year. Where a sub-category includes a broad spectrum of expenditure classifications, a brief footnote has been added.

Table 1: Breakdown of Secretariat General Administrative Expenditure

	Actual 2007/08	Actual 2008/09	Actual 2009/10	Actual 2010/11	Actual 2011/12	Actual 2012/13	Actual 2013/14	Forecast 2014/15
Accommodation	£967,851	£1,229,460	£864,814	£785,624	£969,106	£688,796	£595,062	£612,480
Committee Expenses	£5,578	£22,035	£17,004	£10,109	£5,860	£7,653	£16,356	£6,100
Committee Members T&S	£59,369	£104,663	£112,242	£62,424	£42,910	£78,815	£117,047	£93,330
Core Services	£1,800,920	£2,094,193	£2,125,097	£2,153,764	£2,145,500	£1,979,288	£1,926,199	£1,970,648
General Business Expenditure	£366,072	£282,985	£328,781	£298,488	£203,881	£214,783	£212,357	£309,432
IT Support	£426,126	£450,160	£556,714	£462,925	£426,251	£397,703	£565,168	£597,565
Miscellaneous Expenditure	£326,351	£35,878	£43,657	£24,099	£37,355	£31,201	£58,355	£51,075
Professional Services	£209,141	£318,202	£341,357	£378,846	£137,113	£83,739	£143,255	£190,153
Publication & Information	£1,520,741	£1,761,777	£1,647,201	£1,477,297	£1,158,845	£1,007,940	£924,222	£832,234
Secretariat Staff T&S	£192,251	£236,335	£153,135	£121,116	£102,077	£77,808	£86,687	£88,104
Staff Support	£2,279	£3,176	£110,379	£117,038	£105,862	£103,063	£106,159	£104,052
Training and Development	£111,154	£112,306	£133,394	£249,186	£212,592	£159,852	£165,379	£176,060
Utilities	£1,249,273	£1,478,788	£1,324,040	£1,397,929	£1,513,246	£1,530,782	£1,524,708	£1,600,066
Secretariat GAE	£7,237,106	£8,129,958	£7,757,814	£7,538,845	£7,060,596	£6,361,424	£6,440,954	£6,631,299
Accommodation	Furniture and fittings (small purchases) repairs and maintenance, remedial works, waste disposal							
Committee Expenses	Conference fees, witness expenses, committee meetings outside PB							
Core Services	Bought in security, support services contract (including catering and cleaning) NICS security charges, contract management fees							
General Business Expenditure	H&S training costs, small purchases of sundry office equipment, hospitality, refreshments, equipment rental, secretariat insurance							
IT Support	Hardware and software maintenance and repairs (including small purchases) IT consumables and internet charges							
Miscellaneous Expenditure	Pension costs, Independent valuations for constituency office rentals, compensation costs							
Professional Services	External consultancy, special advisers for committees, bill drafting and specialist research support, staff substitution charges							
Publication & Information	Advertising, photocopying, printing, publications, stationery, Subscriptions - on-line journals etc TV& sound equipment maintenance (small purchases)							
Staff Support	Health and Wellbeing, Medical, Eye Tests, Bursary students							
Utilities	Including fuel, electricity, carbon reduction costs, rates, rent, telephone and broadband charges (including provision to members constituency offices), water and sewerage charges							

Revised Written Answers

This section contains the revised 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

Revised Written Answers

Department of Justice

In Bound Volume 80, page WA 205 please replace AQW 17146/11-15 with:

Kenneth Douglas

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16398/11-15, (i) to provide the timeline for the release and return to custody of this prisoner; (ii) whether the prisoner spent time in the Prisoner Assessment Unit or other pre-release facility; and (iii) how long he spent
(AQW 17146/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I am writing to correct an error contained in my answers of 10 December 2012 and 2 January 2013 to assembly questions which you tabled in relation to the release and return to custody of Kenneth Douglas, namely AQW 17146/11-15 and AQW 17943/11-15.

Such information is subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1988, which requires the fulfilment of at least one of the conditions in both Schedules 2 and 3 of the Act. In this instance none of the conditions in either Schedule are fulfilled and therefore the answers provided are a breach of the Act.

Please accept my apologies for this error.

I am copying this letter to the Editor of Debates and the Business Office.

In Bound Volume 80, page WA 368 please replace AQW 17943/11-15 with:

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Pre-release Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17146/11-15 to clarify where Kenneth Douglas spent Phase 2 of the Northern Ireland Prison
(AQW 17943/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I am writing to correct an error contained in my answers of 10 December 2012 and 2 January 2013 to assembly questions which you tabled in relation to the release and return to custody of Kenneth Douglas, namely AQW 17146/11-15 and AQW 17943/11-15.

Such information is subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1988, which requires the fulfilment of at least one of the conditions in both Schedules 2 and 3 of the Act. In this instance none of the conditions in either Schedule are fulfilled and therefore the answers provided are a breach of the Act.

Please accept my apologies for this error.

I am copying this letter to the Editor of Debates and the Business Office.

Department for Regional Development

In Bound Volume 99, page WA471 please replace AQW 38841/11-15 with:

Maintenance Schemes: Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the maintenance schemes planned for the Bloomfield Estate in Bangor in the next three financial years.

(AQW 38841/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The Housing Executive has advised of the following maintenance schemes in the Bloomfield estate in the next three financial years:

Year	Scheme	Number of dwellings
2015/16	External Cyclical Maintenance	85
2016/17	-	Nil
2017/18	-	Nil

The Housing Executive has also advised that:

- all of its properties in Bloomfield estate have either oil or gas heating;
- all kitchens are less than nine years old; and
- all double glazing will be completed in the current financial year.

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 1 December 2014

The Assembly met at noon, the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Paul Givan replace Mr Gordon Dunne as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety; that Mr Paul Givan replace Mr Sydney Anderson as a member for the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Mr Sydney Anderson replace Mr Alastair Ross as a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning; and that Mr Sammy Douglas replace Mr Paul Givan as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

*Mr P Weir
Lord Morrow*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion – Report on Review into Electricity Policy: Part III - Grid Connections (NIA 196/11-16)

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on its Review into Electricity Policy: Part III - Grid Connections (NIA 196/11-15); and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in conjunction with Executive colleagues, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, the System Operator for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Electricity, to implement, as applicable, the recommendations contained therein.

Chairperson, Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.2 Motion – Extension of Committee Stage: Pensions Bill (NIA Bill 42/11-16)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 26 March 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Pensions Bill (NIA Bill 42/11-16).

Chairperson, Committee for Social Development

Debate ensued

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.3 Motion – Extension of Committee Stage: Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill (NIA Bill 40/11-16)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 30 January 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill (NIA Bill 40/11-16).

Chairperson, Committee for Regional Development

Motion not moved.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Further Consideration Stage – Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill (NIA Bill 26/11-15)

The Lord Morrow, sponsor of the Bill, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill.

61 amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clauses

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

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. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

6.1 Assembly Expenses

Mrs Judith Cochrane, on behalf of the Assembly Commission, responded to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer tabled by Mr Jim Allister.

7. Assembly Business (cont'd)

7.1 Motion – Extension of Sitting on Monday 01 December 2014

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 1st of December 2014 be extended to no later than 10.00pm.

Mr P Weir

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

8.1 Further Consideration Stage – Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill (NIA Bill 26/11-15) (cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 1 to Clause 7 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 2 to Clause 7 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 3 to Clause 7 was **made** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

After debate, Amendment 4 to Clause 13 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 5 to Clause 15 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 6 to Clause 15 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 7 to Clause 15 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 8 to Clause 15 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 9 to Clause 15 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 10 to Clause 15 was **made** (Division 1).

After debate, Amendment 11 to Clause 15 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 12 to Clause 15 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 13 to Clause 19 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 14 to Clause 20 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 15 to Clause 22 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 16 to Clause 22 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendments 17 to 24 to Clause 22 were **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 25 to Clause 22 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendments 26 to 28 to Clause 22 were **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 29 to Clause 22 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 30 to Clause 23 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 31 to Clause 24 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendments 32 to 43 to Clause 24 were **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 44 to Clause 26 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 45 to Clause 29 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 46 to Clause 29 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 47 to Clause 30 was **made** without division.

Schedules

After debate, Amendment 48 to Schedule 3 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendments 49 to 55 to Schedule 3 were **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 56 to Schedule 3 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 57 to Schedule 3 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 58 to Schedule 4 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 59 to Schedule 5 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 60 to Schedule 5 was **made** without division.

Long Title

After debate, Amendment 61 to the Long Title was **made** without division.

NIA Bill 26/11-15 stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

9. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.00pm.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA

Principal Deputy Speaker

1 December 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

1 December 2014

Division

**Further Consideration Stage – Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims)
Bill (NIA Bill 26/11-15) – Amendment 10**

Proposed:

Clause 15, Page 9, Line 38

After 'sexual' insert –

‘; or

(d) B touching B in a sexual manner for the sexual gratification of A, B being physically in

A's presence.’

Lord Morrow

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 52

Noes: 35

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Maurice Devenney, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Clarke, Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Ms McGahan, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Dickson, Mr McCarthy.

The Amendment was **made**.

Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill

Annotated Marshalled List of Amendments

Further Consideration Stage

Monday, 1 December 2014

Amendments tabled up to 9.30am Thursday, 27 November 2014 and selected for debate

Amendment 1 *[Made]*

Clause 7, Page 6, Line 28

At end insert ‘and for “that paragraph” substitute “that provision”;

Minister of Justice

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 2 *[Made]*

Clause 7, Page 6, Line 41

At end insert -

‘(za) in Article 4(2) (interpretation) omit the “and” at the end of sub-paragraph (c) and after paragraph (d) add—

“(e) a sentence falls to be imposed under section 7(2) of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 if it is required by that provision and the court is not of the opinion there mentioned;”;

Minister of Justice

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 3 *[Made]*

Clause 7, Page 7, Line 7

Leave out subsection (9)

Minister of Justice

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 4 *[Made]*

Clause 13, Page 8, Line 36

At end insert -

‘(5A) The Department may by order substitute for the reference to the National Crime Agency in subsection (1) a reference to such other body or person as may be specified in the order.’

Minister of Justice

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 5 *[Made]*

Clause 15, Page 9, Line 13

At end insert -

‘(1A) In the heading to Part 5, after “PROSTITUTION” insert “AND PAYING FOR SEXUAL SERVICES OF A PERSON”.’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Minister of Justice

Amendment 6 *[Made]*

Clause 15, Page 9, Line 23

At end insert ‘and A knows or believes that the payment is made or promised by a third party.’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Minister of Justice

Amendment 7 *[Made]*

Clause 15, Page 9, Line 26

Leave out ‘level 3 on the standard scale’ and insert ‘the statutory maximum’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Minister of Justice

Amendment 8 *[Made]*

Clause 15, Page 9, Line 29

Leave out ‘not exceeding the statutory maximum’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Minister of Justice

Amendment 9 *[Made]*

Clause 15, Page 9, Line 33

After ‘services’ insert ‘(other than sexual services)’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

*Minister of Justice***Amendment 10** [*Made on division*]**Clause 15**, Page 9, Line 38

After 'sexual' insert -

'; or

- (d) B touching B in a sexual manner for the sexual gratification of A, B being physically in A's presence.'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 11** [*Made*]**Clause 15**, Page 9, Line 39

Leave out paragraph (5) and insert -

'(5) B does not commit an offence by doing anything which (apart from this paragraph) would amount to—

- (a) aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring the commission of an offence under this Article by A;
- (b) conspiring with A to commit an offence under this Article; or
- (c) an offence under Part 2 of the Serious Crime Act 2007 (encouraging or assisting offences) in relation to the commission of an offence under this Article by A."

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley**Minister of Justice***Amendment 12** [*Made*]**Clause 15**, Page 10

Leave out lines 1 to 17 and insert -

'(5) The Department must before the coming into operation of subsection (4) raise public awareness of the change in the law to be effected by that subsection.

(6) The Department must, at the end of the period of 3 years beginning with the coming into operation of subsection (4), review the operation of Article 64A of the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 and lay before the Assembly a report on that review; that report must in particular include—

- (a) information as to the number of arrests and convictions during that period in respect of offences under Article 64A;
- (b) the Department's assessment of the impact of Article 64A on the safety and well-being of persons providing for payment sexual services of the kind to which that Article applies;
- (c) information as to the number of arrests and convictions in the period covered by the report in respect of—
- (i) offences under section 2 committed with a view to exploitation that consists of or includes behaviour within section 3(3) (sexual exploitation);
- (ii) offences under section 4 committed with the intention of committing an offence mentioned in sub-paragraph (i); and
- (d) the Department's assessment of the extent to which Article 64A has operated to reduce human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley**Minister of Justice***Amendment 13** [*Made*]**Clause 19**, Page 13

Leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert -

'(1) The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety must, in conjunction with the other Northern Ireland departments, prepare and publish a strategy in relation to actions to be taken by Northern Ireland departments in the exercise of their respective functions to ensure that a programme of assistance and support is made available to persons who wish to leave prostitution.

(2) The strategy must—

- (a) be published no later than 10 months after the coming into operation of this section; and
- (b) provide for a programme of support and assistance to be made available in accordance with the strategy no later than 1 April 2016.

(2A) The strategy must ensure that assistance and support provided to a person—

- (a) is not conditional on the person acting as a witness in any criminal proceedings;
- (b) is provided only with the agreement of that person; and
- (c) is provided in a manner which takes due account of the needs of that person as regards safety and protection from harm.

(2B) The strategy must ensure that assistance and support is offered from a person who is of the same gender as the person receiving it.

(2C) The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety must, in conjunction with the other Northern Ireland departments—

- (a) review the strategy (or revised strategy) for the time being published under this section at intervals of not more than 3 years; and
- (b) if appropriate, revise the strategy and publish the revised strategy.'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 14** [*Made*]**Clause 20**, Page 13

Leave out clause 20

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 15** [*Made*]**Clause 22**, Page 13, Line 31

Leave out 'Independent Legal Guardian' and insert 'independent guardian'

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 16 *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 14, Line 2

Leave out from 'or' to end of line 4 and insert -

'(2A) This section also applies to a child who appears to the Regional Health and Social Care Board to be a separated child.'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 17** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 14, Line 8

Leave out 'Independent Legal Guardian' and insert 'independent guardian'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 18** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 14, Line 15

Leave out 'Independent Legal Guardian' and insert 'independent guardian'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 19** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 14, Line 22

Leave out 'Independent Legal Guardian' and insert 'independent guardian'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 20** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 14, Line 27

Leave out 'Independent Legal Guardian' and insert 'independent guardian'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 21** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 14, Line 34

Leave out 'Independent Legal Guardian' and insert 'independent guardian'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 22** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 14, Line 35

Leave out 'Independent Legal Guardian' and insert 'independent guardian'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 23** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 14, Line 37

Leave out 'Independent Legal Guardian' and insert 'independent guardian'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 24** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 14, Line 39

Leave out 'Independent Legal Guardian' and insert 'independent guardian'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 25** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 14, Line 41

After 'ascertaining' insert 'and communicating'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 26** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 15, Line 18

Leave out 'Independent Legal Guardian' and insert 'independent guardian'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 27** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 15, Line 24

Leave out 'Independent Legal Guardians' and insert 'independent guardians'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 28** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 15, Line 25

Leave out 'Independent Legal Guardian' and insert 'independent guardian'

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 29** *[Made]***Clause 22**, Page 15, Line 36

Leave out from 'who' to end of line 41 and insert -

'who—

(a) is not ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland;

(b) is separated from all persons who—

(i) have parental responsibility for the child; or

(ii) before the child's arrival in Northern Ireland, were responsible for the child whether by law or custom; and

(c) because of that separation, may be at risk of harm.

(11) A reference in any other statutory provision to the guardian of a child does not include a reference to an independent guardian appointed under this section.'

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 30 *[Made]***Clause 23**, Page 16, Line 37

Leave out from ‘any of the following offences’ to end of line 1 on page 17 and insert -

‘—

- (a) an offence under—
 - (i) section 4(2) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 committed in respect of a Class B or Class C drug;
 - (ii) section 5(2) of that Act committed in respect of a Class B drug;
 - (iii) section 6(2) of that Act;
- (b) an offence under section 26A(3)(a), (b), (d), (e), (f) or (g) of the Immigration Act 1971;
- (c) an offence under section 1, 2, 3 or 4 of the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981;
- (d) an offence under section 106 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999;
- (e) an offence under section 4 of the Identity Documents Act 2010.’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley
Minister of Justice

Amendment 31 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 5

Leave out ‘victim’ and insert ‘complainant’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 32 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 8

Leave out ‘victim’ and insert ‘complainant’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 33 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 11

Leave out ‘victim’ and insert ‘complainant’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 34 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 13

Leave out ‘victim’s’ and insert ‘complainant’s’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 35 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 14

Leave out ‘victim’ and insert ‘complainant’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 36 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 15

Leave out ‘victim’ and insert ‘complainant’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 37 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 17

Leave out ‘victim’ and insert ‘complainant’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 38 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 19

Leave out ‘victim’ and insert ‘complainant’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 39 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 22

Leave out ‘victim’ and insert ‘complainant’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 40 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 23

Leave out ‘victim’ and insert ‘complainant’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 41 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 26

Leave out ‘victim’ and insert ‘complainant’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 42 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 26

Leave out ‘victim’s’ and insert ‘complainant’s’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 43 *[Made]***Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 28

At end insert -

‘(2) In this section—

“the accused” means a person who is alleged to have committed, or has committed, an offence under section 1 or 2;

“complainant” means a person against or in relation to whom an offence under section 1 or 2 is alleged to have been committed, or has been committed.’

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 44** *[Made]***Clause 26**, Page 18

Leave out clause 26

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley
Minister of Justice***Amendment 45** *[Made]***Clause 29**, Page 20, Line 3

At end insert -

‘(za) an order under section 13(5A) (power to amend body to be notified about suspected victims);’

*Minister of Justice
The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 46** *[Made]***Clause 29**, Page 20, Line 15

Leave out from ‘child’ to ‘order’ on line 16 and insert ‘independent guardians) shall not be made unless a draft of the regulations’

*The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 47** *[Made]***Clause 30**, Page 20, Line 24

Leave out subsection (2) and insert -

‘(2) Except as provided by the following subsections, this Act comes into operation on the day after Royal Assent.

(3) The following provisions come into operation on such day or days as the Department may by order appoint—

(a) section 11 (with Schedule 3);

(b) section 13.

(4) Sections 12 and 21 come into operation one month after Royal Assent.

(5) Section 15(1) to (4) and (6) comes into operation on 1 June 2015.

(6) Section 22(1) to (3) and (5) to (11) comes into operation 10 months after Royal Assent.’

*Minister of Justice
Chair, Committee for Justice***Amendment 48** *[Made]***Schedule 3**, Page 38, Line 22

Leave out head (c)

*Minister of Justice
The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 49** *[Made]***Schedule 3**, Page 38, Line 23

Leave out ‘, the Secretary of State or the Commissioners’ and insert ‘or the Secretary of State’

*Minister of Justice
The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 50** *[Made]***Schedule 3**, Page 38, Line 30

Leave out ‘, the Secretary of State or the Commissioners’ and insert ‘or the Secretary of State’

*Minister of Justice
The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 51** *[Made]***Schedule 3**, Page 38, Line 31

Leave out ‘, the Secretary of State or the Commissioners’ and insert ‘or the Secretary of State’

*Minister of Justice
The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 52** *[Made]***Schedule 3**, Page 39

Leave out lines 4 and 5

*Minister of Justice
The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 53** *[Made]***Schedule 3**, Page 39

Leave out line 21

*Minister of Justice
The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley*

Amendment 54 *[Made]***Schedule 3**, Page 39, Line 28

Leave out ‘(c) the Commissioners,’

Minister of Justice
The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 55 *[Made]***Schedule 3**, Page 39, Line 31

Leave out ‘, the Secretary of State or the Commissioners’ and insert ‘or the Secretary of State’

Minister of Justice
The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 56 *[Made]***Schedule 3**, Page 39, Line 37

After ‘may’ insert ‘, subject to paragraph (3A),’

Minister of Justice
The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 57 *[Made]***Schedule 3**, Page 39, Line 42

At end insert -

‘(3A) The information must be destroyed no later than the date on which the offender ceases to be subject to notification requirements.’

Minister of Justice
The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 58 *[Made]***Schedule 4**, Page 44, Line 12

At end insert -

‘The Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 (NI 2)

7A.—(1) In Article 22(2)(b) (meeting child following sexual grooming, etc.) for paragraph (ii) substitute—

“(ii) an offence under section 2 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (human trafficking) committed with a view to exploitation that consists of or includes behaviour within section 3(3) of that Act (sexual exploitation), or”.

(2) In Article 58(7) for “Articles 59 to 60” substitute “Article 60”.’

Minister of Justice
The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley

Amendment 59 *[Made]***Schedule 5**, Page 47, Line 4, Column 2

At beginning insert -

‘

Article 59.

,’

*Minister of Justice**The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 60** *[Made]***Schedule 5**, Page 47, Line 11

At end insert -

‘

The Policing and Crime Act 2009 (c. 26)

Section 15.

,’

*Minister of Justice**The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley***Amendment 61** *[Made]***Long Title**

Leave out from ‘offences’ to end and insert ‘, slavery and other forms of exploitation, including measures to prevent and combat such exploitation and to provide support for victims of such exploitation; and for connected purposes.’

The Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley
Minister of Justice

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 26 November – 1 December 2014

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
 - Registrar General Northern Ireland Annual Report 2013 (DFP).
 - Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute 2013/2014 Annual Report and Statement of Accounts (DARD).
 - Legislative Consent Memorandum Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill (DFP).
 - Legislative Consent Memorandum The Pension Schemes Bill (Public Service Defined Benefit Schemes) (DFP).
 - Commissioner for Children and Young People Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2014 (OFMDFM).
 - Northern Ireland Audit Office Primary Care Prescribing Report by Comptroller and Auditor General 27 November 2014 (DFP).
5. Assembly Reports
 - Report on the Investigation into Allegations made in the BBC Spotlight Programme broadcast on 7 January 2010 (Committee on Standards and Privileges).
6. Statutory Rules
 - S.R. 2014/290 The Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DFP).
 - For information only:**
 - S.R. 2014/289 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Belfast) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
 - Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Draft Budget 2015/16 Consultation (DHSSPS).
 - Long Term Options for Department of Finance and Personnel Domestic Rate Rebate Scheme (DFP).
 - Consultation Paper – Defamation Law in Northern Ireland (DFP).
 - Department of Finance and Personnel Budget 2015-16 Consultation (DFP).
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 2 December 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – British Irish Council meeting in Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-used Languages sector

The junior Minister, Ms Jennifer McCann, made a statement regarding the British Irish Council meeting in Indigenous, Minority and Lesser-used Languages sector, following which she replied to questions.

2.2 Statement – British Irish Council Summit

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton, made a statement regarding the British Irish Council Summit, following which he replied to questions.

2.3 Final Stage – Work and Families Bill (NIA Bill 34/11-15)

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, moved that the Final Stage of the Work and Families Bill (NIA Bill 34/11-15) do now pass.

Debate ensued.

The Work and Families Bill (NIA Bill 34/11-15) passed Final Stage.

2.4 Legislative Consent Motion – Deregulation Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Deregulation Bill, as amended following Committee Stage in the House of Commons, dealing with: Auditors ceasing to hold office as contained in clause 19 and Schedule 5; Appointment of proxies under company law in clause 20 and part 8 Schedule 6; Abolition of Office of the Chief Executive of Skills Funding in clause 49 and Schedule 13; legislation no longer of practical use in clause 82 and Schedule 20; and to extend to other workplaces, the current Northern Ireland exemption of Sikhs from requirements to wear safety helmets on construction sites in clause 7; and agrees that the UK Parliament should consider amendments to the Bill to the repeal of those provisions of the Sea Fisheries Act 1868; the Fisheries Act 1891; and the British Fishing Boats Act 1983, which are redundant.

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.5 Motion – The Jobseeker's Allowance (Homeless Claimants) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Proposed:

That the Jobseeker's Allowance (Homeless Claimants) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion – The A6

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises that the A6, which passes through Dungiven, is the main arterial route between the City of Derry and Belfast and is instrumental in terms of infrastructure to support regional development and economic growth in the North West; and further recognises that Dungiven is one of the most polluted towns in Western Europe and has been waiting for a bypass for over 40 years; and believes that this section of the A6 scheme should be advanced without delay, as per the Executive's Investment Strategy 2011-21.

*Mr C Ó hOisín
Mr S Lynch
Mr D McAleer
Mr R McCartney*

3.2 Amendment

Proposed:

At end insert:

'and recognises that, in addition to the bypass at Dungiven, there are other sections of the A6 that must be dualled and upgraded without further delay, including the section at Moneynick.'

*Mr J Dallat
Mr C Eastwood
Mr P Ramsey*

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Mark H Durkan.

4.2 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton.

5. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

5.1 Motion – The A6 (cont'd)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Mrs Pam Cameron spoke to her topic regarding the proposed Arc21 Incinerator, Mallusk.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.09pm

**Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Principal Deputy Speaker**

2 December 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 2 December 2014

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

S.R. 2014/291 The Common Agricultural Policy Direct Payments and Support Schemes (Cross Compliance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) (DARD).
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications

The Work Capability Assessment – An Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment – year five (DSD).
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 3 December 2014

2011-2016 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13	09.10.13	3.12.13	10.02.14	18.02.14	25.03.14
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13	26.11.13	28.01.14	25.02.14	10.03.14	28.04.14
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13	11.12.13	11.02.14	24.02.14	04.03.14	28.04.14
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13	27.11.13	14.01.14	27.01.14	04.02.14	11.03.14
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13	05.12.13	04.03.14	25.03.14	07.04.14	12.05.14

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	11.12.13	04.12.13	20.01.14	28.01.14	11.02.14	11.04.14
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13	20.02.14	20.02.14	18.03.14 & 19.03.14	01.04.14	08.04.14	12.05.14
Road Races (Amendment) Bill 29/11-15	18.11.13	26.11.13	/	/	2.12.13	9.12.13	10.12.13	17.01.14
Reservoirs Bill 31/11-15	20.01.14	04.02.14	04.07.14	24.06.14				
Budget Bill 32/11-15	10.02.14	11.02.14	/	/	17.02.14	18.02.14	24.02.14	19.03.14
Legal Aid and Coroners' Courts Bill 33/11-15	31.03.14	08.04.14	20.06.14	18.06.14	16.09.14	30.09.14	13.10.14	17.11.14
Work and Families Bill 34/11-15	28.04.14	12.05.14	30.11.14	08.10.14	11.11.14	24.11.14	02.12.14	
Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 35/11-15	12.05.14	27.05.14	27.03.15					
Budget (No.2) Bill 36/11-15	09.06.14	10.06.14	/	/	16.06.14	17.06.14	30.06.14	16.07.14
Justice Bill 37/11-15	16.06.14	24.06.14	27.03.15					
Education Bill 38/11-16	06.10.14	14.10.14	/	/	21.10.14	11.11.14	17.11.14	
Insolvency (Amendment) Bill 39/11-16	07.10.14	10.11.14	12.01.15					
Off Street Parking Bill 40/11-16	13.10.14	21.10.14	09.12.14					
Food Hygiene (Ratings) Bill 41/11-16	03.11.14	11.11.14	13.01.15					
Pensions Bill 42/11-16	10.11.14	18.11.14	26.03.15					

**2011-2016 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
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13 Bill fell. Re- introduced as Bill 30/11- 15 (see below)							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	11.04.14	11.04.14	20.10.14	01.12.14		
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 30/11-15	09.12.13							

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 8 December 2014

The Assembly met at noon, the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Alastair Ross replace Mr Sammy Douglas as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee; that Mr Sammy Douglas replace Mr Ian McCrea as a Member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges; and that Mr Sammy Douglas replace Ms Paula Bradley as a Member of the Committee on Procedures.

*Mr P Weir
Lord Morrow*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.2 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Seán Rogers replace Mr Colum Eastwood as a member of the Committee for Education.

Mr P Ramsey

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement – North South Ministerial Council meeting held in Environment Sectoral format

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Mark H Durkan, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting held in Environment Sectoral format on Thursday 13 November 2014, following which he replied to questions.

3.2 First Stage – Regeneration Bill (NIA Bill 43/11-16)

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Mervyn Storey, introduced a Bill to confer functions on district councils in relation to regeneration; to amend the Social Need (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and Part 7 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 in relation to the functions of the Department for Social Development; and for connected purposes.

The Regeneration Bill (NIA Bill 43/11-16) passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

3.3 Legislative Consent Motion – Serious Crime Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Serious Crime Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 6 November, dealing with: the Proceeds of Crime as contained in Chapters 3 and 4 of Part 1 of the Bill; proposed changes to the Serious Crime Act 2007 as contained in clauses 45-49; the possession of a paedophile manual in clause 66; and female genital mutilation in clauses 67-70; and agrees that the Westminster Parliament should consider amendments to the Bill to make explicit in statute common law safeguards (*R v Waya* [2012] UKSC 51) in relation to the exercise of confiscation order powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

Minister of Justice

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.4 Legislative Consent Motion – Modern Slavery Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Modern Slavery Bill, as brought from the Commons to the House of Lords on 5 November 2014, dealing with enforcement powers in relation to ships, as contained in clauses 37, 38 and 39 of Part 3 of the Bill and Part 3 of Schedule 2 to the Bill; the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, in Part 4 of the Bill; and transparency in supply chains, in Part 6 of the Bill.

Minister of Justice

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.5 Motion – The draft Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Proposed:

That the draft Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Committee Business

4.1 Motion – Extension of Committee Stage: Food Hygiene Rating Bill (NIA Bill 41/11-16)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 8 May 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Food Hygiene Rating Bill (NIA Bill 41/11-16).

Chairperson, Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister Mr Martin McGuinness. The junior Minister, Ms Jennifer McCann, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Jim Wells.

6. Committee Business (cont'd)

6.1 Motion – Extension of Committee Stage: Insolvency (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 39/11-16)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 13 March 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill (NIA 39/11-16).

Chairperson, Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Private Members' Business

7.1 First Stage – Children's Services Co-operation Bill (NIA Bill 44/11-16)

Mr Steven Agnew introduced a Bill to require Northern Ireland departments to discharge their functions and co-operate with one another in order to contribute to the achievement of certain specified outcomes relating to the well-being of children and young people, and to amend the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

The Children's Services Co-operation Bill (NIA Bill 44/11-16) passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

7.2 Motion – The Cost of Division

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the financial and economic impact of continued division in Northern Ireland; calls on the Executive to conduct formal audits of its budgets and publish its assessment of the impact of societal division; and further calls on all Departments to actively encourage de-segregation and promote cohesion, sharing and integration within their policies and spending plans.

*Mr C Lyttle
Mrs J Cochrane
Mr S Dickson*

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.49pm.

**Mr John Dallat MLA
Deputy Speaker**

8 December 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 3 - 8 December 2014

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Regeneration Bill.

Children's Services Co-operation Bill.

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Report by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council on Ocular Melanoma (DSD).

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships: A review of governance, delivery and outcomes. December 2014 (DOJ).

Northern Ireland Tourist Board Annual Report for the Year Ended 2013/2014 (DETI).

Social Security Agency Annual Report & Accounts for Year Ended 2013-2014 (DSD).

Safefood 2013 Annual Report Incorporating Financial Statements for 2013 (DHSSPS).

Northern Ireland Audit Office Financial Auditing and Reporting: General Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland 9 December 2014 (NIAO).

Disposal of Records Schedule for 2013 World Police and Fire Games (WPFGLTD) (DCAL).

5. Assembly Reports

Report on the Legislative Consent Motion: The Modern Slavery Bill (NIA 212/11-16) (Committee for Justice).

Report on the Legislative Consent Motion: Home Office Serious Crime Bill [HL] 2014/15 (NIA 213/11-16) (Committee for Justice).

Report on the Off-Street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill (Committee for Regional Development).

6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 2014/292 Local Government (Disqualification) (Prescribed Offices and Employments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOE).

S.R. 2014/293 The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (Membership, Procedure, Functions and Committee) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DHSSPS).

S.R. 2014/295 The Seeds (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DARD).

S.R. 2014/298 The Occupational Pensions (Revaluation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DSD).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Consultation on the Zoonoses (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DARD).

9. Departmental Publications

Rating Policy Division Small Business Rate Relief Evaluation, 1 December 2014 (DFP).

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 9 December 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Deputy Speaker Mr Dallat in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – North South Ministerial Council Plenary meeting

The deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council Plenary meeting held in Armagh on 05 December 2014, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Statement – Inter-Governmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters

The Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, made a statement regarding the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters, following which he replied to questions.

2.3 Motion – The draft Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Proposed:

That the draft Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Minister of the Environment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.4 Legislative Consent Motion – Pension Schemes Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of clause 45 of, and Schedule 5 to, the Pension Schemes Bill, as amended in Committee in the House of Commons dealing with a pension scheme for fee-paid judges.

Minister for Employment and Learning

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion – Report on the Review of Topical Questions

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee on Procedures on its Review of Topical Questions (NIA 209/11-16).

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Final Stage – Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill (NIA Bill 26/11-15)

Lord Morrow moved that the Final Stage of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill (NIA Bill 26/11-15) do now pass.

The sitting was suspended at 12.36pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

5.2 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

6. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

6.1 Final Stage – Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill (NIA Bill 26/11-15) (cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Bill.

The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill (NIA Bill 26/11-15) passed Final Stage.

7. Adjournment

Mr Barry McElduff spoke to his topic regarding cuts proposed by the Western Health and Social Care Trust and the impact on service provision in the Omagh area.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Principal Deputy Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.46pm.

Mr John Dallat MLA
Deputy Speaker

9 December 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 9 December 2014

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

S.R. 2014/294 The Smoke Control Areas (Exempted Fireplaces) (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOE).

S.R. 2014/299 The Foyle Area (Complimentary Angling Permit) (River Finn and River Foyle) Regulations 2014 (DARD).

S.R. 2015/XXX The Police Pension (Transitional and Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOJ).

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
Electoral Law – A Joint Consultation (Northern Ireland Law Commission).
9. Departmental Publications
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 10 December 2014

2011-2016 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13	09.10.13	3.12.13	10.02.14	18.02.14	25.03.14
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13	26.11.13	28.01.14	25.02.14	10.03.14	28.04.14
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13	11.12.13	11.02.14	24.02.14	04.03.14	28.04.14
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13	27.11.13	14.01.14	27.01.14	04.02.14	11.03.14
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13	05.12.13	04.03.14	25.03.14	07.04.14	12.05.14

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	11.12.13	04.12.13	20.01.14	28.01.14	11.02.14	11.04.14
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13	20.02.14	20.02.14	18.03.14 & 19.03.14	01.04.14	08.04.14	12.05.14
Road Races (Amendment) Bill 29/11-15	18.11.13	26.11.13	/	/	2.12.13	9.12.13	10.12.13	17.01.14
Reservoirs Bill 31/11-15	20.01.14	04.02.14	04.07.14	24.06.14				
Budget Bill 32/11-15	10.02.14	11.02.14	/	/	17.02.14	18.02.14	24.02.14	19.03.14
Legal Aid and Coroners' Courts Bill 33/11-15	31.03.14	08.04.14	20.06.14	18.06.14	16.09.14	30.09.14	13.10.14	17.11.14
Work and Families Bill 34/11-15	28.04.14	12.05.14	30.11.14	08.10.14	11.11.14	24.11.14	02.12.14	
Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 35/11-15	12.05.14	27.05.14	27.03.15					
Budget (No.2) Bill 36/11-15	09.06.14	10.06.14	/	/	16.06.14	17.06.14	30.06.14	16.07.14
Justice Bill 37/11-15	16.06.14	24.06.14	27.03.15					
Education Bill 38/11-16	06.10.14	14.10.14	/	/	21.10.14	11.11.14	17.11.14	
Insolvency (Amendment) Bill 39/11-16	07.10.14	10.11.14	13.03.15					
Off Street Parking Bill 40/11-16	13.10.14	21.10.14	09.12.14	08.12.14				
Food Hygiene (Ratings) Bill 41/11-16	03.11.14	11.11.14	08.05.15					
Pensions Bill 42/11-16	10.11.14	18.11.14	26.03.15					
Regeneration Bill 43/11-16	08.12.14							

**2011-2016 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
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13 Bill fell. Re-introduced as Bill 30/11-15 (see below)							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	11.04.14	11.04.14	20.10.14	01.12.14	09.12.14	
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 30/11-15	09.12.13							
Children's Services Co-operation Bill 44/11-15	08.12.14							

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 12 January 2015

The Assembly met at noon, the Principal Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 Royal Assent

The Principal Deputy Speaker informed Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 11 December 2014 to the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

2.2 Royal Assent

The Principal Deputy Speaker informed Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 08 January 2015 to the Work and Families (Northern Ireland) Act 2015.

2.3 Committee Chairperson Nominations

The Principal Deputy Speaker informed Members that the following resignations took effect from 10 December 2014: Mr Alastair Ross as Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges and Mr Paul Givan as Chairperson of the Committee for Justice. The Principal Deputy Speaker also informed Members that, with effect from 10 December 2014, Mr Alastair Ross had been nominated as Chairperson of the Committee for Justice and Mr Jimmy Spratt had been nominated as Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges and confirmed the appointments.

3. Matters of the Day

3.1 Terror Attacks in Paris

Mr Danny Kinahan made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the terror attacks in Paris. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

4. Assembly Business

4.1 Motion – Suspension of Standing Order 20(1)

Proposed:

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 12 January 2015.

*Mr P Weir
Ms C Ruane*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

4.2 Election of 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 Mitchel McLaughlin as a candidate for the Office of Speaker of the Assembly and Ms Caitríona Ruane seconded the nomination. Mr McLaughlin indicated his agreement to accept the nomination. Dr Alasdair McDonnell nominated Mr John Dallat as a candidate for the Office of Speaker of the Assembly and Mrs Dolores Kelly seconded the nomination. Mr Dallat indicated his agreement to accept the nomination. Mr Mike Nesbitt

nominated Mr Roy Beggs as a candidate for the Office of Speaker of the Assembly and Mr Robin Swann seconded the nomination. Mr Beggs indicated his agreement to accept the nomination.

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, that Mr Mitchel McLaughlin be Speaker of the Assembly, the Motion was **carried** on a cross-community vote (Division 1).

The Speaker took the Chair.

5. Committee Business

5.1 Motion – Draft Budget 2015-16

Proposed:

That this Assembly takes note of the Draft Budget 2015-16 announced on Monday 3 November 2014 by the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Chairperson, Committee for Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

6. Question Time

6.1 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Mervyn Storey.

6.2 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

7. Committee Business

7.1 Motion – Draft Budget 2015-16

Debate resumed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Speaker took the Chair

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 6.50pm.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
The Speaker

12 January 2015

Northern Ireland Assembly

12 January 2015
Division 1

Election of Speaker

Proposed:

That Mr Mitchel McLaughlin be Speaker of this Assembly

Mr M McGuinness

Ms C Ruane

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 72

Noes: 12

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, 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 McCartney and Ms Ruane.

NOES

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mrs Overend.

Total votes	84	Total Ayes	72	[85.7%]
Nationalist Vote	28	Nationalist Ayes	28	[100%]
Unionist Votes	48	Unionist Ayes	36	[75.0%]
Other Votes	8	Other Ayes	8	[100%]

The Motion was **carried** on a cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 10 December 2014 – 12 January 2015

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

Funds in Court in Northern Ireland – Statement of Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2014 (DOJ).

North Eastern Education and Library Board Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2014 (DE).

Belfast Metropolitan College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2014 (DEL).

Northern Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2014 (DEL).

North West Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2014 (DEL).

South Eastern Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2014 (DEL).

Southern Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2014 (DEL).

South West Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2014 (DEL).

Human Rights Guidance for the Youth Justice Agency in Relation to Conditions of Detention, by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland (DOJ).

Human Rights Guidance for the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland (DOJ).

Charitable Donations and Bequests Annual Report to 31 March 2014 (DSD).

Social Fund Annual Report 2013/2014 (DSD).

The Office of Social Fund Commissioner for Northern Ireland Annual Report 2013/2014 (DSD).

Memorandum of Understanding between the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (DETI).

Northern Ireland Tourist Board Annual Report 2013/2014 (DETI).

Special EU Programmes Body Annual Report 2013 (DFP).

National Museums Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2013-2014 (DCAL).

Assembly Consent Memorandum, the Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015 (DARD).

Libraries NI Annual Report and Accounts 2013-2014 (DCAL).

Legislative Consent Memorandum Health and Social Care (Safety and Quality) Bill (DHSSPS).

South Eastern Education and Library Board Annual Report and Accounts 2013/14 (DE).

Northern Ireland Law Commission Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2014 (DOJ).

Insolvency Service Annual Report and Account for the year ended 31 March 2014 (DETI).

Victims and Survivors Service Annual Report and Accounts 2013/2014 (OFMDFM).

Annual Report and Accounts of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation for the Year Ended 31 March 2014 (OFMDFM).

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2014 (OFMDFM).

Retention and Disposal Schedule (Further Education College Sector) (DCAL).

Legislative Consent Memorandum – Westminster Pension Schemes Bill (DSD).

The Southern Education and Library Board Annual Report and Accounts 2013/14 (DE).

Northern Ireland Medical & Dental Training Agency Annual Report 2013/14 (DHSSPS).

Draft code of Practice No. 14 Governance and Administration of Public Service Pension Schemes (DSD).

Western Education and Library Board Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2014 (DFP).

Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2014 (DARD).

Agricultural Marketing Schemes: 2013/2014 British Wool Marketing Board Report (DARD).

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Petroleum Production Account for the year ended 31 March 2014 (DETI)

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Mineral Development Account for the year ended 31 March 2014 (DETI)

5. Assembly Reports

Report on the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Trust Statement for the year ended 31 March 2013 NIA 215/11-16 (Public Accounts Committee).

Report on the Legislative Consent Motion: Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill (Public Sector Exit Payments) NIA 216/11-16 (Committee for Finance and Personnel).

Report on the Executive's Draft Budget 2015-16 NIA 219/11-16 (Committee for Finance and Personnel).

Report on the Legislative Consent Motion: Pension Schemes Bill (Public Service Defined Benefit Schemes) NIA 218/11-16 (Committee for Finance and Personnel).

Committee for Enterprise Trade and Investment – Report on its Consideration of the Legislative Consent Memorandum Concerning the Extension to Northern Ireland of Certain Provisions in the Small Business, Enterprise & Employment Bill (NIA 220/11-16) (Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment).

6. Statutory Rules

S.R. 2014/296 The Marriage (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DFP).

S.R. 2014/297 The Civil Partnership (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DFP).

S.R. 2014/302 The Taxi Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOE).

S.R. 2014/307 The Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOE).

S.R. 2014/308 The Phosphorus (Use in Agriculture) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOE).

S.R. 2014/309 The Education (Student Support) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DHSSPS).

S.R. 2014/310 The Teachers' Pension Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DE).

S.R. 2014/311 The A29 Armagh Road, Moy (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).

S.R. 2014/312 The Broadway, Larne (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).

S.R. 2014/314 The Templemore Avenue, Belfast (Footpath) (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).

S.R. 2014/318 The Health and Social Care Bodies (Membership) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DHSSPS).

- S.R. 2014/319 The General Dental Services (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DHSSPS).
- S.R. 2014/320 The Criminal Justice (European Protection Order) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2014 (DOJ).
- S.R. 2014/321 The Public Service Pensions (Record Keeping and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DSD).
- S.R. 2015/XXX The Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015 (DARD).
- S.R. 2015/XXX The Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse (Amendment of Terms of Reference) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (OFMDFM).
- S.R. 2015/XXX The Police Pensions (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOJ).
- S.R. 2015/XXX The Planning (2011 Act) (Commencement No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DOE).
- S.R. 2015/1 The Gas and Electricity Licence Modification and Appeals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DETI).

For Information Only

- S.R. 2014/300 (C.16) The Taxis (2008 Act) (Commencement No.4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOE).
- S.R. 2014/303 The Taxis Operators Licensing (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOE).
- S.R. 2014/313 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Armagh) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).
- S.R. 2014/315 The Parking Places (Disabled Person's Vehicles) (Amendment No. 6) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).
- S.R. 2014/316 The Roads (Speed Limit) (No. 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).
- S.R. 2014/317 The Waiting Restrictions (Carrickfergus) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD).
- S.R. 2014/305 The Financial Provisions (2014 Act) (Commencement No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DFP).
- S.R. 2014/306 The Rates (Amendment) (2009) (Commencement No. 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DFP).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) Consultation on Proposals to Introduce Deferral of Compulsory School Starting Age in Exceptional Circumstances (DE).

Consultation on Proposed Measures to Implement Elements of EU Regulation 1257/2013 on Ship Recycling Relating to the Authorisation of UK Ship Recycling Facilities (DOE).

Consultation on Proposals on Extending the Validity Period of Medically Restricted Driving Licences (DOE).

Consultation on Draft Flood Risk Management Plans (DARD).

UK-wide Consultation on Amendments to UK Law to Ensure Compliance with the Third European Commission (EC) Driving Licence Directive – 2006/126/EC (DOE).

9. Departmental Publications

The Report of The Independent Review of Home to School Transport August 2014 (DE).

Memorandum on the Twenty Fourth Report from the Public Accounts Committee Session 2011-2016 (DFP).

Annual Progress Report 2014 - Rural White Paper Action Plan (DARD).

Addressing Bullying in Schools Consultation (DE).

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Community Relations Council Annual Report & Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2014 (OFMDFM).

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 13 January 2015

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

Petition to refer a ministerial decision to the Executive

The Speaker informed Members that he received a valid petition to refer a ministerial decision to the Executive Committee under section 28B of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 regarding a decision by the Minister of Education to approve changes to post-primary education in Fermanagh. The Speaker informed Members that, having consulted with the parties in accordance with Standing Order 29, he has certified that the Minister's decision does not relate to a matter of public importance and that he will not refer the decision to the Executive Committee for consideration.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement – North South Ministerial Council meeting in Health and Food Safety Sectoral Format

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Jim Wells, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting held in Health and Food Safety Sectoral format, following which he replied to questions.

3.2 Statement – North South Ministerial Council Aquaculture and Marine Sectoral Meeting

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council Aquaculture and Marine Sectoral meeting, following which she replied to questions.

3.3 Consideration Stage – Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill (NIA Bill 40/11-16)

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, moved the Consideration Stage of the Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clause

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 1 stand part of the Bill.

Schedule

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedule 1 stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that the Long Title stand part of the Bill.

Bill NIA 40/11-16 stood referred to the Speaker.

3.4 Legislative Consent Motion – Pension Schemes Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Pension Schemes Bill dealing with restrictions on transfers out of public service defined benefits schemes and reduction of cash equivalents in relation to funded public service defined benefits schemes, as contained in clauses 69, 70 and 71 of the Bill as brought from the House of Commons to the Lords.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.5 Legislative Consent Motion – Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions dealing with public sector exit payments contained in clauses 149 to 151 of the Small Businesses, Enterprise and Employment Bill, as brought from the House of Commons to the Lords on 20 November 2014.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion: Education Funding

Proposed:

That this Assembly acknowledges the challenging financial environment in which education will operate in 2015-16 and the widespread concern amongst schools regarding the implications for the classroom of the Department of Education's draft budget; recognises that from 1 April 2015 there will be a single Education Authority in place of the five Education and Library Boards to oversee the allocation of the majority of the education budget; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that protecting the classroom is his first priority, that he uses the new administrative arrangements to achieve greater efficiencies within support services and, in so doing, devolves the maximum amount of the available budget to school level.

Miss M McIlveen

Mr J Craig

Mr R Newton

Mr N McCausland

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.28pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

5.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

6. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

6.1 Motion: Education Funding (cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

6.2 Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'operate' and insert:

'from 1 April 2015 and the widespread concern amongst schools regarding the implications for the classroom of the Department of Education's draft budget; recognises that from 1 April 2015 there will be a single Education Authority in place of the five Education and Library Boards to oversee the allocation of the majority of the education budget; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that protecting classroom practice is his first priority and to use the new administrative arrangements to devolve maximum budget autonomy to schools that have demonstrated sound financial management skills in order to achieve the best possible educational outcomes whilst ensuring value for money.'

Mr S Rogers

Mr D Bradley

6.3 Amendment 2

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'schools' and insert:

', youth services, early years providers and the broader community regarding the implications for education if the Department of Education's draft budget does not receive a significant uplift in the final budget settlement; recognises that from 1 April 2015 there will be a single Education Authority in place of the five Education and Library Boards to oversee the allocation of the majority of the education budget; and therefore calls on the Executive to ensure that protecting education is a priority; and further calls on the Minister of Education to use the new administrative arrangements to achieve greater efficiencies within administration and, in so doing, devolves the maximum amount of the available budget to frontline education services.'

Mr P Sheehan

Ms M McLaughlin

Mr C Hazzard

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, Amendment No. 1 was **carried** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Mr Danny Kinahan spoke to his topic regarding post-16 education in Antrim.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.27pm.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin

The Speaker

13 January 2015

Northern Ireland Assembly

**Papers Presented to the Assembly on
13 January 2015**

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 Housing Benefit (Executive Determinations) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (DSD).
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
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 14 January 2015

2011-2016 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13	09.10.13	3.12.13	10.02.14	18.02.14	25.03.14
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13	26.11.13	28.01.14	25.02.14	10.03.14	28.04.14
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13	11.12.13	11.02.14	24.02.14	04.03.14	28.04.14
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13	27.11.13	14.01.14	27.01.14	04.02.14	11.03.14
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13	05.12.13	04.03.14	25.03.14	07.04.14	12.05.14

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	11.12.13	04.12.13	20.01.14	28.01.14	11.02.14	11.04.14
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13	20.02.14	20.02.14	18.03.14 & 19.03.14	01.04.14	08.04.14	12.05.14
Road Races (Amendment) Bill 29/11-15	18.11.13	26.11.13	/	/	2.12.13	9.12.13	10.12.13	17.01.14
Reservoirs Bill 31/11-15	20.01.14	04.02.14	04.07.14	24.06.14				
Budget Bill 32/11-15	10.02.14	11.02.14	/	/	17.02.14	18.02.14	24.02.14	19.03.14
Legal Aid and Coroners' Courts Bill 33/11-15	31.03.14	08.04.14	20.06.14	18.06.14	16.09.14	30.09.14	13.10.14	17.11.14
Work and Families Bill 34/11-15	28.04.14	12.05.14	30.11.14	08.10.14	11.11.14	24.11.14	02.12.14	08.01.15
Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 35/11-15	12.05.14	27.05.14	27.03.15					
Budget (No.2) Bill 36/11-15	09.06.14	10.06.14	/	/	16.06.14	17.06.14	30.06.14	16.07.14
Justice Bill 37/11-15	16.06.14	24.06.14	27.03.15					
Education Bill 38/11-16	06.10.14	14.10.14	/	/	21.10.14	11.11.14	17.11.14	11.12.14
Insolvency (Amendment) Bill 39/11-16	07.10.14	10.11.14	13.03.15					
Off Street Parking Bill 40/11-16	13.10.14	21.10.14	09.12.14	08.12.14	13.01.15			
Food Hygiene (Ratings) Bill 41/11-16	03.11.14	11.11.14	08.05.15					
Pensions Bill 42/11-16	10.11.14	18.11.14	26.03.15					
Regeneration Bill 43/11-16	08.12.14							

**2011-2016 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
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13 Bill fell. Re-introduced as Bill 30/11-15 (see below)							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	11.04.14	11.04.14	20.10.14	01.12.14	09.12.14	13.01.15
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 30/11-15	09.12.13							
Children's Services Co-operation Bill 44/11-15	08.12.14							

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

